



# Queen OF THE SANDS

HOOR ALTENEIJI

*Queen*

OF THE

SANDS

Hoor Alteneiji

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# Chapter 1



Once upon time, in a land with freezing winters and baking hot summers, there lived a family. But this was not just a normal family like yours or mine. It was a royal family, with a king and a queen and two princesses. The princesses, Maitha and Alia, had all the luxury that two young girls could wish for, but they often became bored in the big palace and had to find ways to entertain themselves.

“Do you want to play?” asked Maitha one cold winter’s morning.

“No, thank you, it’s only nine o’clock. I’m not even fully awake yet,” replied Alia, as she yawned. Princesses don’t have to get up very early, and usually have breakfast in bed. So, Alia was never in the mood to play until at least eleven o’clock.

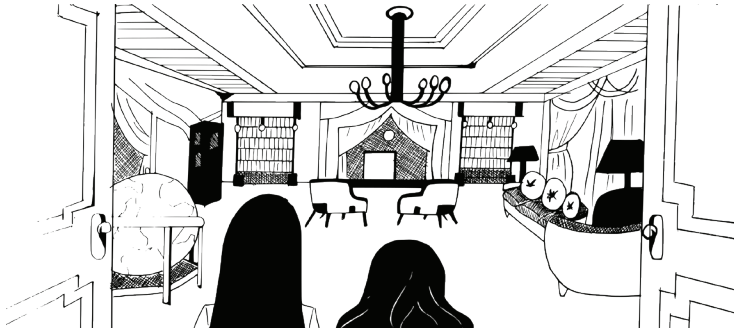
“Oh, please,” Maitha whined, pouting. “I’m so bored, and I have a great idea for a new game.”

Alia thought for a moment. She liked new games, so perhaps she wasn’t too tired after all.

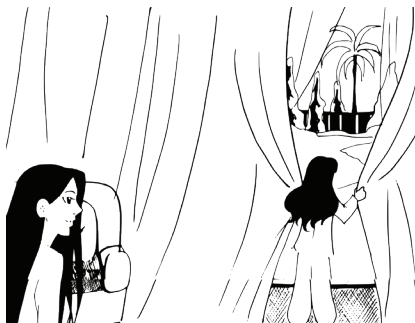
“What kind of game?” she asked.

“I thought we could build a desert,” Maitha said. “It’ll be fun to pretend we’re somewhere hot while it’s so cold outside.”

“Okay!” said Alia, leaping out of her chair with a huge smile. She didn’t like the freezing winters one bit and thought a nice warm desert sounded like a wonderful idea.



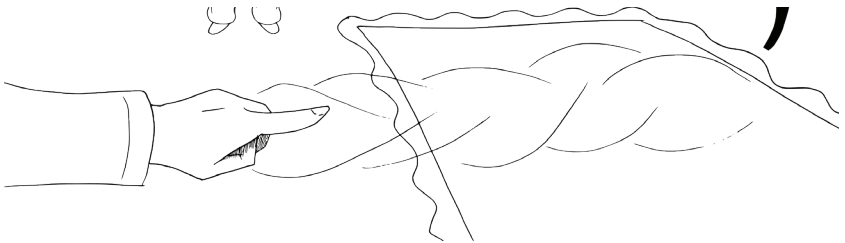
The pair raced to the living room, and found it quiet. Completely quiet. Alia paused at the doorway and wondered why the room felt creepy. But her sister ran excitedly towards the windows and shut the curtains to keep out the crisp white of the snow.



“How do we make a desert?” Maitha asked as she spun from the heavy curtains and turned to Alia again.

“Watch,” Alia said, shaking off her doubts and wandering into the room. “You mustn’t tell Mother and Father.” With a serious face, she looked at her sister. “But watch what I can do...” As her brown eyes sparkled with anticipation, Alia lifted her hand and pointed to the carpet directly in front of her.

Before either of the princesses could blink, a strange orange spark shot out from Alia’s finger. Maitha gasped and leaped back, while a strange gritty mound began to appear on the floor near her feet. It grew and grew and grew. Once it was as high as her middle, it began to swirl and change shape. Rather than a sandy lump, it started to grow taller and thinner. It started to become plumper in the middle. And then, a circle formed on top.



“It...looks like a head,” Maitha murmured nervously.

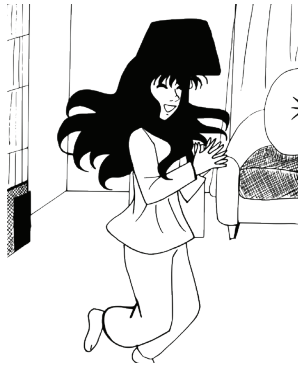
“It’s a sandman,” Alia replied while she ran around him and stood next to her sister. “It’s like a snowman, but made of sand. Look,” she added. Stretching out her arm to the corner of the room, she pointed. Another spark sprang from her finger and another small mound of sand grew slowly larger before forming the shape of a person.



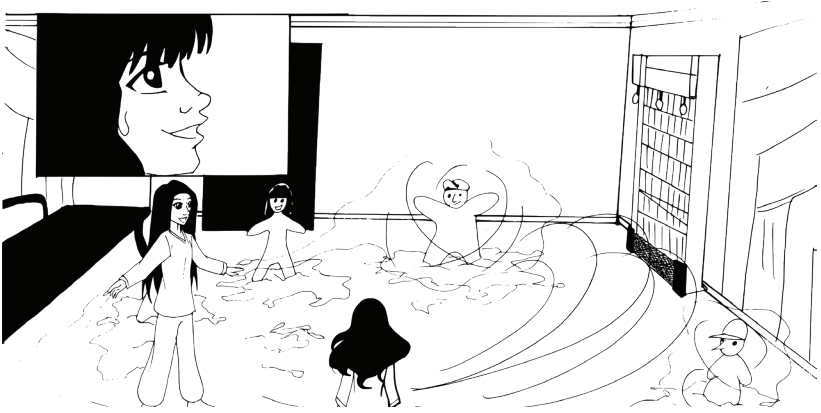


Maitha was wide-eyed with excitement. She'd seen plenty of snowmen, because the long winters meant they were everywhere in the colder months! But she'd never seen a sandman before.

“Make another,” she cried, clapping as she jumped in the air. “Make another.”



Alia laughed. She was pleased that her little trick had made her sister so happy. Soon, her arms were moving quickly around the room, putting sandmen everywhere. One was even standing on the couch. The carpet was covered in a fine mist of sand, too.



Soon, the living room had become a desert, filled with sandmen of every kind.

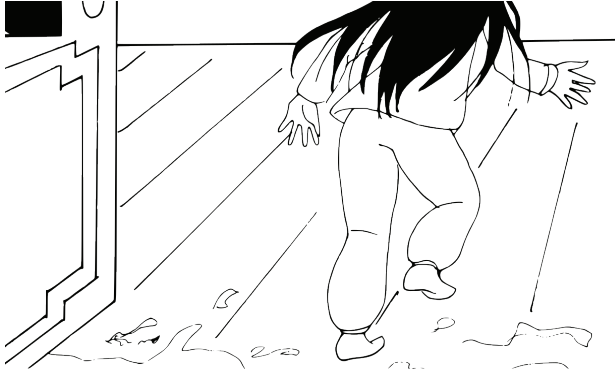


But Maitha wasn't jumping or clapping anymore. The room had gotten hot. At first, it was nice, like sitting snuggled by an open fire. Within a few minutes, though, it was baking. Maitha took off her cardigan and rubbed her hand across her brow.

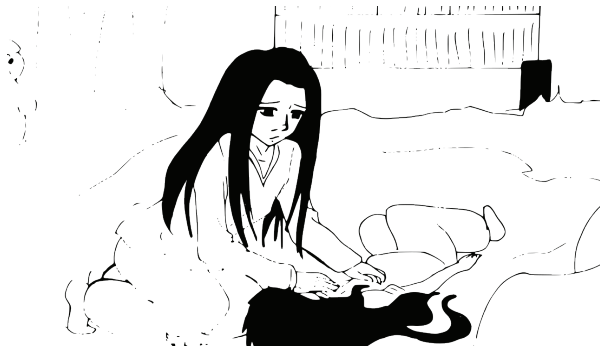


Alia didn't notice her sister, she was too busy making more sandmen.

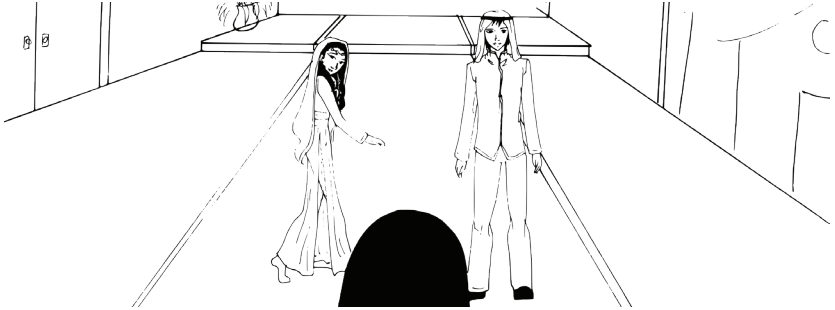
Maitha could feel her cheeks burning. She turned to the window, hoping to let some cool air into the room.



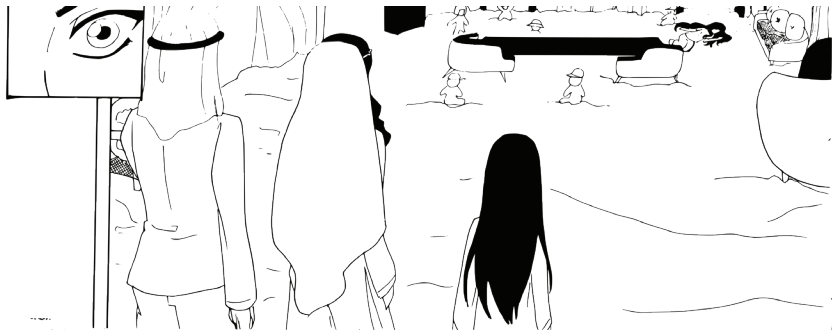
However, as she took a step, she found it was difficult to move. Her body was too weary. And as she gulped in a much-needed breath, she realized she couldn't fill her lungs. The air around her was too hot. It was so hot that Maitha fell to the ground in an exhausted heap.



“Maitha!” Alia shouted as she heard the thump of her sister landing on the floor. Terrified she might have killed Maitha, Alia ran to fetch her mother and father.



Fortunately, the King, upon seeing the desert in his living room, knew what to do.



He rushed to the curtains, pulled them back, and threw open the windows. Cold winter air swept inside and cooled the flush of Maitha’s cheeks.



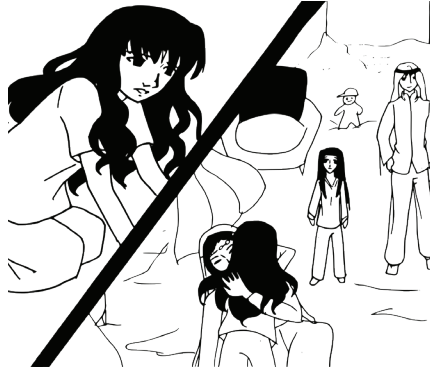
Soon, she was once again able to draw in deep breaths. And, within a few minutes, she managed to sit up.



The Queen stood near the door with a worried frown on her forehead. Once she was sure Maitha would be okay, her gaze moved to Alia.

“What happened?” she asked.

“Um...” Alia replied, her feet scuffing the carpet. “I...I don’t know.”



With her hands planted firmly on her hips, the Queen asked again, “What happened?”

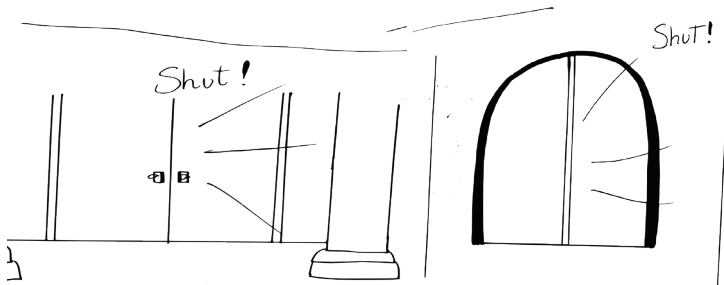


“Well...” Alia began before finally trying to explain how the royal living room came to look like a sandstorm had passed through it. Once she had finished her story, the frown remained on the Queen’s face.



The King and Queen were concerned by Alia's new-found gift. They weren't sure how she came by it or what it might mean for the family. Perhaps Maitha was in danger around her older sister. So, they went to a wizard, who was known to be the cleverest and most powerful wizard in the whole world.

The wise wizard explained to the King and Queen that Alia had magical powers. These were incredibly strong powers and, if she didn't learn to control them, she could destroy everything in a single touch! Maitha, meanwhile, needed to stay away from sand and heat, it was dangerous and could easily kill her if she came near it again.



So the royal family went home to their castle and closed all the windows and doors. The summer would be back soon enough, and the effects of its heat on poor Maitha could be

fatal. As for Alia, the King and Queen made her wear gloves, so the magic in her fingertips could not easily find a way into the world.



The King was satisfied that both girls were safe, as long as Alia didn't play with her powers and the summer sun was kept firmly out of the palace. And he was right...for a while, at least.





## Chapter 2



**F**or two years, everything in the palace was peaceful. Alia never dared use her sandy magic, and Maitha stayed away from the summers' heat and dust. But, one day, the King and Queen had to attend a meeting with all the other kings and queens from their neighboring countries. It was summertime, when the heat was at its highest. Assuring Maitha and Alia that they would be back soon, the King and Queen set off on camels with a small party of followers. However, the weather was not very nice and a sandstorm soon swirled towards them.



Back at the palace, poor Maitha and Alia received news that their parents were lost in the sandstorm and must surely have died. The girls wept and wept, knowing they would never see the King and Queen again. Life, however, had to go on. There was, after all, a kingdom to run.

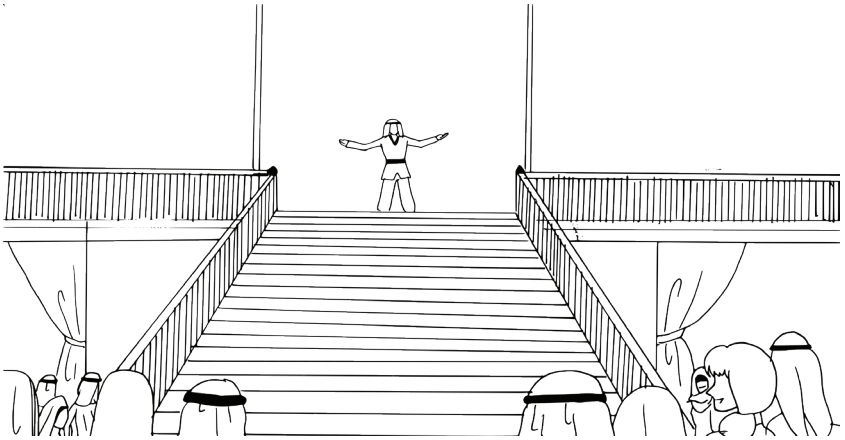


# Chapter 3

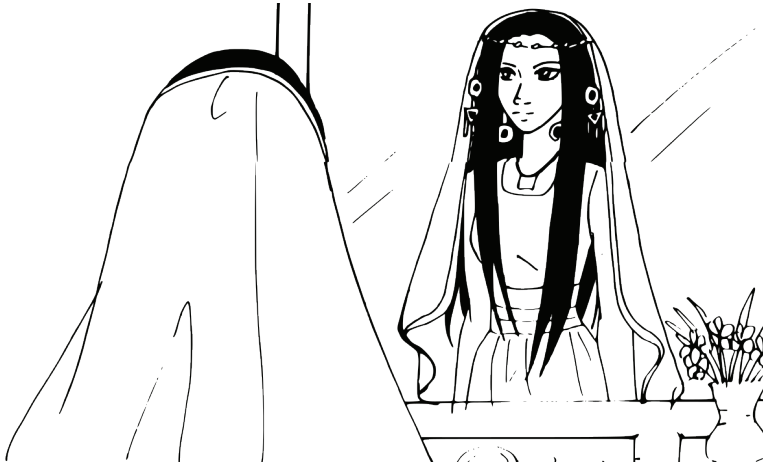


Three Years Later

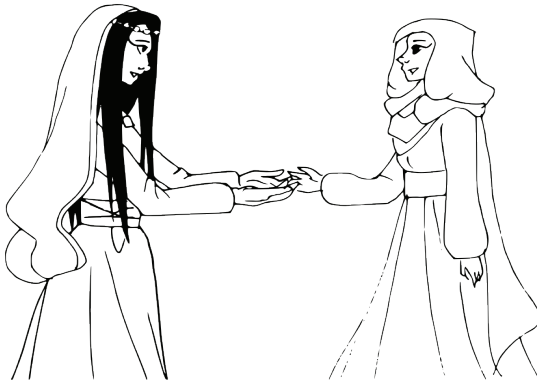
**W**e present Alia, Queen of Sandy Locks,” announced the judges. Although she was still young, Alia, as the eldest daughter, was chosen to take her parents’ place on the throne.



She blinked at herself in the mirror as the judges’ voices droned from the great ballroom. Dressed in a long gown, she looked every inch the princess. Shaking her head, she reminded herself that she wasn’t just a princess anymore – she was a queen. Smiling at her reflection, she silently promised to make her much-missed parents proud.



“Wear these golden gloves, Your Majesty!” said the maid as she rushed to Alia’s side with the dazzling gloves on a velvet cushion.



“Thank you,” Alia replied as she took off the white gloves she always wore to keep her magical powers at bay. She quickly picked up the golden ones and slipped them onto her fingers. “They look very pretty,” she added, admiring them. Now, she really did look like a queen.



Nodding to herself, she smiled as she strolled through to the ballroom. All her subjects applauded, bowed and curtsied to her as she passed. After the years of missing and mourning the King and Queen, everyone seemed happy again. There was hope in the air.

And so, they danced and played music and sang until after midnight. Then, the people went back to their houses, and slept in their cozy, soft beds.





# Chapter 4



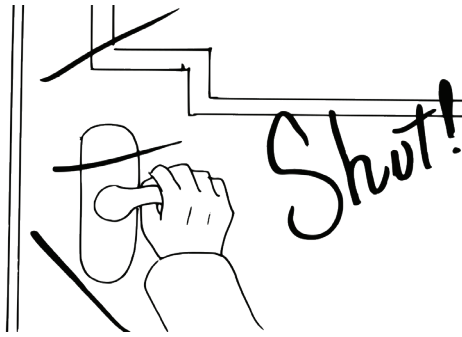
**A**lia slept well that night, too. But in the morning, she was woken early by a sound.

Ding-dong! The doorbell rang and Alia hurried downstairs to open it. It wasn't really very royal of the Queen to open the front door herself, but Alia didn't often stick to the rules.





As she pulled the door open, her eyebrows pinched together.



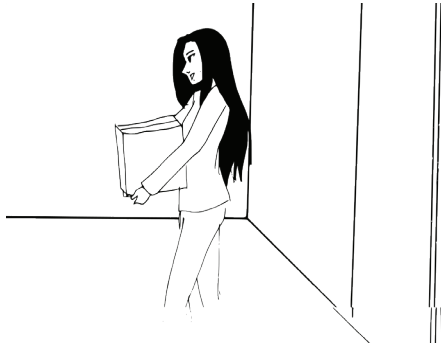
She looked left, she looked right, but no one was there. Certain someone must be pulling a prank, Alia closed the door. She took a couple of steps to go back upstairs, but the bell rang again.



Sighing, she flung the door open. Again, she looked to her left and right, and still she could see nothing. But, this time, she also glanced down. And there, she saw a large brown box on the white ground.



“What on Earth could it be?” she asked herself as she brought it in. It was the heaviest thing she’d ever lifted!



What was it? She tried to guess, but she couldn’t begin to imagine what might be inside the box. She hadn’t been expecting anything, but perhaps it was a gift to congratulate her on becoming Queen. Curious about the present she might find inside, her excitement was almost killing her, so she quickly yanked the brown box open.

It wasn’t a gift from one of her loyal subjects, though. It was something she could never in a million years have expected...

A baby!



It was a young girl, whose chubby fingers were gripping the edge of the box. Alia guessed the baby must be only a few months old, but she hadn't been around a lot of babies, so couldn't be sure. Not quite sure what to do with the little one, she peered closer into the box and spotted a letter, which read:



Alia scratched her head and turned the piece of paper over, searching for a signature. There was none. Who could have sent the letter? Her mind was racing with lots of other questions, too.

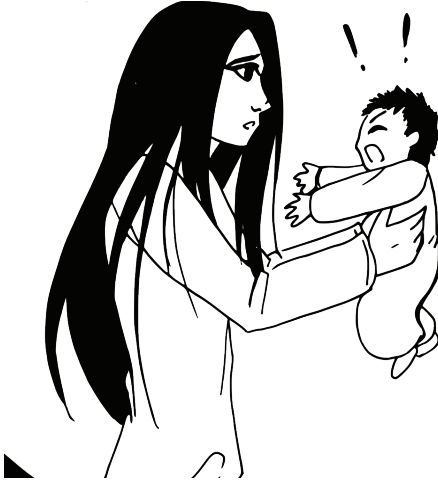
Who would give their baby to the Queen of Sandy Locks?

And who could be so disrespectful as to send a baby in a cardboard box?!

There was no time to dwell on those questions or the dozen others she had, though. The baby was crying and wanted to be picked up.



“Shh. Shh,” Alia cooed as she bent to scoop the baby up and cradle her in her arms. She placed the girl’s head on her shoulder and tried to wrap her arm underneath her bottom to support her weight, but she wasn’t used to holding babies.



The baby continued to cry loudly, and Alia hoped whoever wrote that letter would be back to take their daughter sooner rather than later!



Maitha!” Alia called, wondering if her little sister knew more about taking care of children. She hoped she did.





# Chapter 5



Three Years Later

**M**aitha didn't know that much more about babies, but she was a natural in caring for them. After three years of taking care of the child, the Princess went into the little girl's room to wake her one morning.





“Rise and shine, sleepy head,” Maitha said, walking towards the bed. But the bed was empty. The baby, who wasn’t a baby anymore, but a small child had gone. Maitha, who had come to look on the girl as her own, began to cry.

“Where can she have gone?”



Alia heard her sister’s sobs and rushed to her side. Trying to calm Maitha, Alia thought the girl must be under the bed or hiding in a closet, but she couldn’t find her.



“She must still be in the palace somewhere,” she insisted, and soon all the servants were looking for the girl.

Still, she was nowhere to be found.

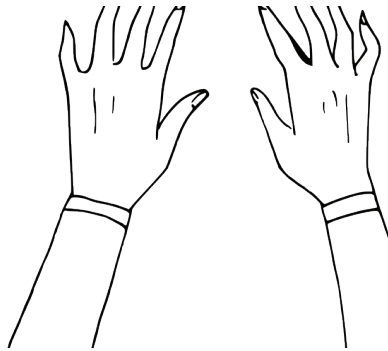
“We’ll send a message outside the palace walls,” Alia said. “We’ll get everyone in Sandy Locks to search for her.”

Sure enough, within minutes of Alia’s command, the whole country was looking for the missing child.

Alia would not sit on her throne and wait, though. She raced out into the country to search the hills and mountains.



It wasn’t until she’d gotten several miles away from the palace that she realized she’d left in such a hurry that she’d completely forgotten her gloves.



With nothing to stop her magical powers leaking from her fingertips, everything around her turned into brown, dusty sand.



From the hill to the mountain, and even the seas and rivers were full of sand. It had been so long since Alia had made sand that she'd forgotten she could. After a while, though, she looked behind her and saw that everything was sand! Frightened about what she had done to her country, she cried her eyes full of tears. Her people's ocean, meanwhile, was full of sand.

“What have I done?” she wept. Consumed with guilt over the ruin she'd made of her land, she ran away and vowed never to be seen again!

# Chapter 6



**O**n the other side of Sandy Locks, Maitha was searching high and low for her child.



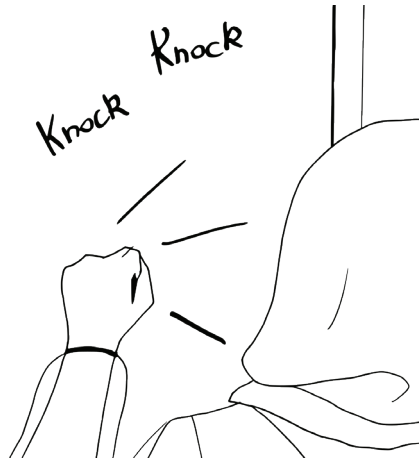
She spotted a Souq, so she went in and bought dates, sweet potato, grilled corn, and cotton candy. She knew that, when she eventually found the girl, she would be hungry. And she was sure she would find her, even if she had to search for months or years, she'd never give up.



On her way out of the Soug, she saw a light that seemed to come from the other side of the desert. She'd been so busy with her hunt, she hadn't realized night was drawing in and she knew she would need shelter soon. So, she went toward the light, hoping there might be someone who could help her.



As she walked closer, she discovered the light was coming from a little house.



She knocked and, when there was no answer, she went inside. There beside a small table was a little girl with a funny looking baby camel.



The girl's back was turned toward Maitha, but something looked familiar about her. The small girl must have sensed Maitha's presence, because she twisted. With her eyes wide and her mouth upturned in bright smile, she yelled, "Mom!"



She ran to Maitha. They both cried happy tears, and even the camel joined in.



Pleased to have found each other, but too exhausted to head for home in the dark, they slept on a large, lumpy stack of hay.



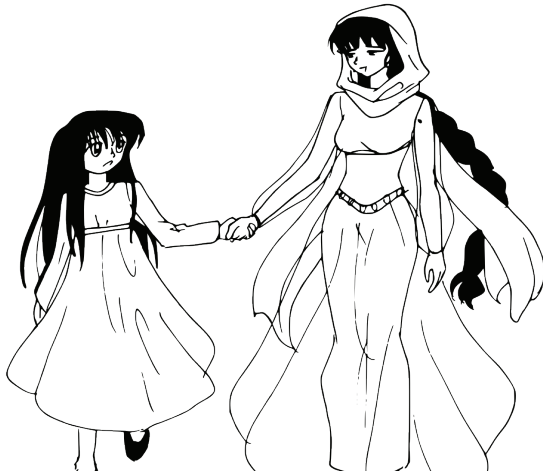




# Chapter 7



The next day, they went looking for Queen Alia. Maitha saw all the sand around her and noticed the lakes were dry, and she guessed what must have happened.



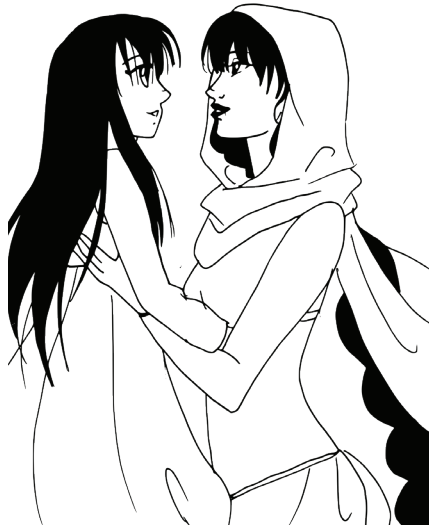
“We have to find her,” she told the girl, although it the heat was beginning to make it difficult for her to breathe.

“Are you okay, Mom?” the girl asked.

“Yes,” Maitha said, nodding. “We just need to find Alia.” As she took a step, the small hand on her arm stopped her. As she peered down at the young child who’d become a daughter to her, she tilted her head. “What’s wrong?”

“Why didn’t you ever give me a name?” the girl asked as tears welled in her large, brown eyes.

“Well...” Maitha turned and crouched so her face was level with the girl’s. “You’re not mine. Not really. I always knew your real parents could come back for you at any time, so giving you a name seemed wrong.”



“But you’re the only mother I’ve ever known.”

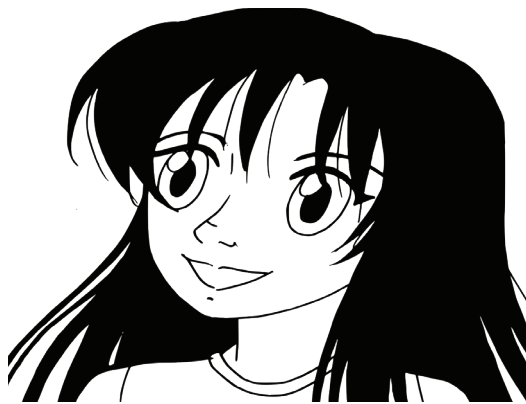


Maitha smiled and gave her adopted daughter a hug. “You’re right. I should have named you. I always knew what I wanted to call you,” she added.

“What?”

“I wanted to call you Afra.”

The small girl began to smile so broadly, it looked as though her face might hurt. “I love it,” she said. “Thank you!”



“I’m glad,” Maitha replied. “But why did you run away from us? I thought you might have gone in search for your real parents, because you weren’t happy having me as a mother.”



## Chapter 8



**N**o,” Afra insisted with a firm shake of her little head. “I love you. I just wanted to go see Jabel Jees.”

“Okay,” Maitha said, as she straightened to her full height again. She wanted to look for Alia, and knew that they had to find her. But she didn’t know where to start, and the trek to Jabel Jees would give them plenty of time to hunt for Queen Alia at the same time. Besides, she didn’t want to run the risk of Afra running away again. So, if she wanted to see the mountain, that’s what they would do.

“Let’s go,” she added, taking Afra’s hand. As the pair of them walked, the baby camel Afra had befriended quickly followed at their heels.

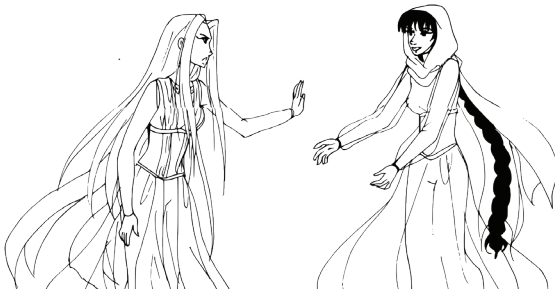
They climbed trees, wandered up mountains, and walked through one empty riverbed to another empty riverbed. At last, they arrived at Jabel Jees and a large house that stood upon it. It was a massive castle made of sand. Maitha and Afra stood near the entrance, wondering who could live in such a grand palace. But the baby camel scampered inside and they quickly followed him.

Inside the castle, they saw lots of huge, thick yellow sand everywhere. And for a while, there was nothing else. There weren't any people or any proper furniture, everything was made of sand. They looked around at the sand palace in wonder and, after a while, a lady with yellow hair was suddenly in front of them. To their surprise, it was Alia!



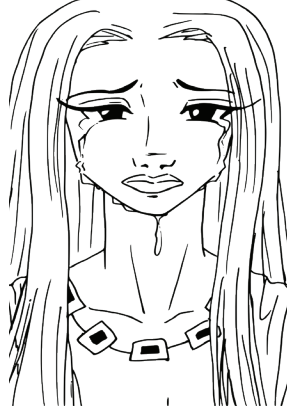
As Mathia ran to hug her sister, Alia stepped back.

“Don't touch me,” she begged, holding her hands up. “I might hurt you again. I've done awful things to the country. I've ruined it and I can't come back.”



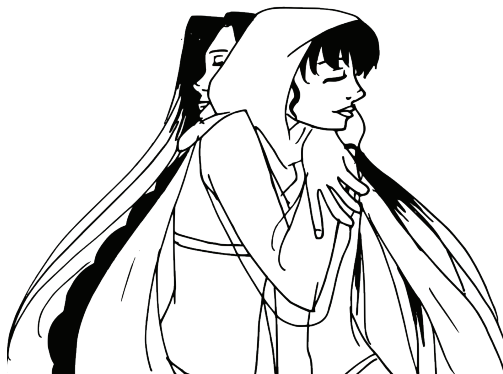
“People will forgive you,” Mathia replied. “They’ll know you didn’t do it on purpose.”

With sandy tears streaming down her face, Alia shook her head.



“Please, Alia,” Mathia said. “I need you. We’re sisters, we do everything together. Please come back.” Maitha began to cry too as she walked closer.

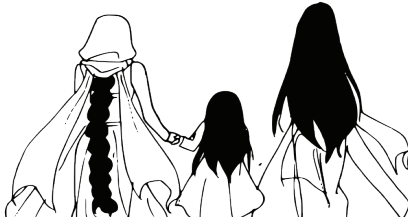
This time, Alia didn’t try to stop her. And Maitha wrapped her arms tightly around her elder sister.





“It’ll be okay,” she whispered. “Please come home.”

“Okay,” Alia murmured, managing a soft smile. Then, they traveled all the way back to Sandy Locks castle together in a happy mood.



# Chapter 9



**T**here was a surprise waiting for them at home...  
It was the King and Queen!

“Mom, Dad!” Alia cried. “Didn’t you die in the storm?”



“No, I was pregnant. We weren’t going to a meeting with other kings and queens, we were going to the hospital. But we fell in a deep hole. Luckily, somebody came and he was a doctor, so he called the ambulance. We went to the hospital and I had the baby.” The Queen paused to take a small breath before continuing her story. “After a few days, your grandfather called and said he needed to see me and your father urgently. So we had to go, but we were worried about taking the dangerous trip with a young baby. The doctor said he’d take care of her until she was a few months old. And then, if we still hadn’t returned, he’d send her on to you.”



“When we got to your grandfather’s,” The King added, taking up the story. “He was gravely ill and we couldn’t leave him. It was several months until he was well. And then, when we wanted to leave war had broken out in his kingdom and it wasn’t safe for us to travel.”

“So...is Afra our little sister?” asked Maitha

“I think she must be,” said Alia

“Who’s Afra?” asked the King

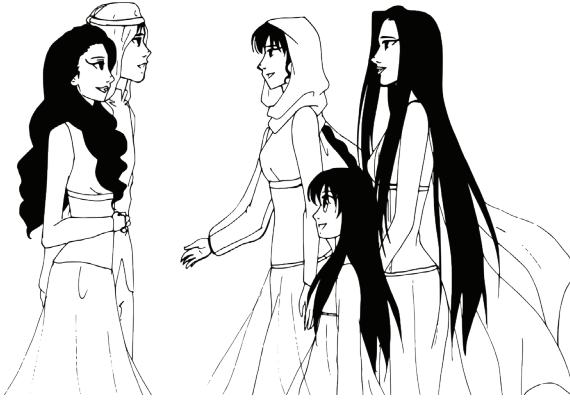
“This little girl near me, she was sent to us in a box and we’ve been taking care of her for three years,” said Maitha

“Yes,” the Queen said. “She’s your sister.”

“Yay!” Maitha and Afra shouted.

With the King and Queen back, they visited the wizard who was able to restore the country’s lakes and rivers and oceans. He also offered to teach Alia how to control her powers.

Every member of the royal family of Sandy Locks was back in their rightful place and they had a new princess in their midst. Of course, Alia, Maitha and Afra had lots of games and adventures to come. But those are another story...



The End





## About the Author



My name is Hoor Altenziji  
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*Queen*  
OF THE  
SANDS

HOOR ALTENEIJI