

## The Gongolly

By

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Christmas was near, and of all the holidays Michael hated most, it was most certainly Christmas. Halloween, Easter, even his Birthday, it didn't matter, Michael loathed them all. But the one he despised the most was Christmas, and it was just three days away. Now, it wasn't the actual holiday that caused him to feel this way, it was the involvement of his twin sisters, Marie and Malix and how on each holiday they received way more gifts Michael ever did.

just last year, the twins (just at the age of five minds you) received three Tablets, seven science kits, plushies, stuffies, and far too many life sizes dolls. And that wasn't all, their Wishlist unraveled to the floor and on it, they received every single one. So did Michael's Wishlist, but he seemed to lack attention. In all honesty, the gifts that they received weren't Michaels issue, well everything except the dolls. but It was what he received that troubled him --Socks, chapstick's, deodorants, and gift cards, only seemed to be kind gestures, but kindness isn't what he wanted either. Without a doubt, his sisters would get more than he would while he'd only receive less than little. And as this truth stung his tongue with a nasty flavor, it forced him to want to have more than Marie and Malix could ever have.

"Can we please play in the snow?" asked Marie and Malix at the same time.

"No, there's a snowstorm, and I'm busy," said Michael with eyes glued to the computer. His finger clicked the mouse rapidly while sounds of explosions left small speakers mounted to the wall before him. The twins disappeared only to return as quickly as they left.

"Dad said the storm stopped..." said Marie

...and to take us outside," finished Malix.

In a low growl of disturbance, he said "Fine!"

The twins left together and slowly managed to dress themselves up until they needed their snowsuits. Michael, like any twelve-year-old, dressed appropriately, *I hope it's so cold they wish to never want to go outside again*, he thought while zipping his jacket. But when he opened the door it was if summer and winter came together in peace. Warm light from the sun illuminated all that was white nearly blinding Michael for a moment. The thick, untouched snow covered the back yard like the blue which cover the sky. It was more than perfect for the twins.

Michael stood by the entrance as his sister rushed past him out into the field with tiny, squeals of laughter. It wasn't till shortly after they grew bored of each and turned to irritable Michael who clung to the cement steps like a watchdog.

"Mikey, can you help us build a snowman?" asked Marie.

"Nope," he replied.

"can we have a snowball fight?" asked Malix

"Nope," he repeated,

"can you make snow angels with us?" asked Marie

"I'm not lying in the snow," said Michael with a face made of stone.

" Oh, I know, can you play Hide-and-seek with us?" asked Malix.

Michael was prepared to say no until the twins grew exhausted however, Hide- and -seek couldn't have been a better game to pass the time he desperately wanted to pass much quicker.

"Fine," he said after giving it thought. He turned his back, cover his face, and started counting to ten. By six, he peeked to see if they were gone, and they were. so, he stopped counting.

" ready or not here I come," he shouted. Instead of leaving the steps, he sat right where he stood knowing without a doubt they hid behind the shed in the corner of the backyard. "Suckers" he snickered to himself.

It wasn't until Michael's father poked his head out the back door before he had to retrieve his sisters, "Time for dinner, grab your sisters and come on in," he said.

"YES!" Cheered Michael. With a smile, he followed Marie and Malix's tiny footsteps leading to the back of the shed, but when he arrived, they weren't there.

Instead of the twins, Michael came across a cave-like igloo mad of firm iced snow doming over a set of snow made stairs descending into a deep shadow.

"Marie, Malix" shouted Michael down the case of stairs. His voice echoed back as his face curled in confusion.

*Did dad build this thing?* He wondered. The answer wouldn't matter as much as finding his siblings. If he returned without his sisters, he'd be so grounded, he'd think the sky was made of dirt. So, without any other choice and after one last call for his sisters, he followed the steps into the darkness till he finally saw before him, light outlining a door, seeping through the little unhinged opening.

*These kids are so dumb, why would they put me through this,* Michael thought to himself further opening the door. When the other side revealed itself, it took Michael's breath away. He couldn't believe it. Candy Canes rose from the grass like pillars, and the clouds were pink and looked as if they tasted like strawberry milk. Michael Smacked himself hoping to have woken from a dream, but the unusual world did not change. He looked around to get a good study of this new place. *Where are the houses, does anyone even live here?* He thought again, and just as he did, Gingerbread houses made of all sorts of cookies and different color frosting appeared all around him. Before he knew it, a silent village displayed itself before him. *I know where to start?* he thought once more. And as soon as he did, parting the rainbow shimmering grass, a path made of yellow candy corn unraveled in one direction past the silent homes till it narrowed into the horizon.

"Whoa, this is either a fantasy or a nightmare," said Michael beneath his breath.

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It must have been a mile till Michael came across the only person who seemed to exist. The man back was turned and was just further ahead from where he stood and so he dashed towards him shouting, "Excuse, I need some help!"

Michael arrived much closer to the person. When he did he appeared as odd as the world around them. His body was broad but from the many layers of ragged knitted cloaks of deep purples, blacks, and burgundy, drooping, and dragging against the floor. He walked slowly as if he were an old man waddling side to side, while elf-like bells rung jingled as he motioned. As Michael grew closer to him the smell of burning wood from a bonfire perfumed the man. He turned around when Michael finally got his attention, and when he did, a face made of knitted wool with no eye's ears or a mouth all to consider it to be one, revealed itself.

With a moment of pause, Michael shortly after remembered his question. But before could ask, the man spoke.

"Michael is that you?" he asked. His raspy voice wheezed sandy like in texture.

Michael froze in confusion. "Ye--"

Why, yes, it is you! Oh, how wonderful, you finally chose to pay a visit, this is exciting."

"uh, who are you?" asked Michael.

"Forgive me, I'm The Gongolly. I live here, alone with no one to share my excitement with. visits tend to, to...give me life again. An Awkward pause sent a slight chill down Michaels back.

" Well, that's nice and all Mr. Gongolly, but I'm looking for my sisters and need to get them back for dinner. Have you seen them?"

“oh, you mean the two visitors who look just alike. *You mean, Marie and Malix,*” he said.

“Yes, where’d they go?”

“ ah, well let me see. It is true, yes, I know where they are,” said The Gongolly, then a shriveled old dried hand with pointed long nails curled around Michael,“ but first, come with me, something for you, I have. Oddly, without there being a face on the canvas of the man’s head, Michael could feel the Gongolly Smiling. When the man faced Michael where he wanted him too, with a widened face of surprise, the boy suddenly forgot how to blink. What was once homes made of cookies, and rainbow hills beyond were now nothing but wrapped gifts of all sizes from near and far.

“Th-this is impossible, this is a dream,” said Michael with a smirk he couldn’t hold back.

The man with his horrid hand picked up a box and handed it to the boy, and with his voice made of sand, he said, “ Here in Everworld, nothing is impossible. Here in Everworld, everything is yours from a single thought. When Michael slowly reached for the gift, The Gongolly pulled it back just before he could touch it.

“Ah-ah-ah,” he sang. The Gongolly pulls out his other shriveled hand and held it open for a shake. “ First you must give me what I want then you could have all you can think of,”

“W-well it depends, what do you want?” asked Michael.

“ I want to keep you nothing,”

“ Nothing? Sure, sounds like you want nothing at all, go ahead,” said Michael as he shook the cold lifeless hand.

“...You’ve always wanted more than Marie and Malix, isn’t it? Well, here you are, more than they could ever have.”

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Days, months, maybe even a year could have gone by since the moment the field of gifts distracted Michael. It may have been his thousandth present he had opened, none of which were a clock or a calendar, so in his case, time didn't exist. He didn't want it to, not while he had so much fun having so many things all at once. Each gift he opened, no matter how many he did, what The Gongolly said was true, and amazed him each time. Once Michael picked up a gift, whatever he thought of, was what the gift became. Now with a crown on his head, he unwrapped sports cars, Tablets, smartphones, smartwatches, game councils, and hundreds of games to play on it. He unwrapped a treasure chest filled with pearls and gold coins burying a smaller chest made of gold filled with diamonds inside it. He thought of a treehouse that could hold a mansion with a pool filled with Jell-O, and from a box he unwrapped, it grew just that. Michael unwrapped and thought of things until his imagination began to repeat itself. But when the Jell-O made his stomach sick, and he'd beat all the games, when the diamonds and treasure became pointless, all the candy, chips, and soda ached all of his teeth and when he grew frustrated with the exotic cars unable to drive them properly, he took one look around and suddenly felt hollow. *My sisters, he thought. We need to get back home.* He tried thinking of them the way he did each gift, but only life-size dolls appeared mimicking how he last saw them.

"I need to find The Gongolly!" said Michael. And as he turned around, there he was.

"Michael, I see you have enjoyed many of your gifts, are you satisfied?" he asked.

"I want to go home with my sisters, I had enough...of everything,"

"How unfortunate..."

"Please you said you know where they are, bring them to me so we can leave," said Michael.

"I don't have to bring you anything. They are here with us."

He reached deep into his cloaks and shuffled his hand around. Bells jingle and things clanked against each other the way a pocket full of coins would. He finally pulled out an hourglass filled with sand. From it, a faint sound of children's laughter came.

"Here they are,"

The sand dropped from the top to the bottom a little at a time. Michael couldn't breathe as he watched, his throat refused the air while he failed to believe it.

"You turned my sisters into sand?"

"No, of course not. You did." He points his witch-like finger to the sky of shifting purples. An opening formed showing Michael the world he called home. He saw his father, and mother, the pictures on the wall, the carpet, the couches, the floor, the windows, the flat screen T.V, everything, shoe clothes, all faded into the debris of sand. Michael's mouth nearly touched the floor as he watched the same sand that once was his parents and everything, he owned trail like wiry smoke through the opening of the sky directly into the opening of the hourglass The Gongolly held in his hand.

"for everything you ever wanted here in Everworld, it took from what you already had. Now, while you have everything you wished for, you also have nothing," said the Gongolly.

Michael could feel his hidden smile as if he enjoyed all that has happened.

"Give them back," said Michael lounging towards the hourglass.

"No!" replied the Gongolly childlike, "you gave them to me. You gave me all of you anything!"

The sand still poured from the sky into the hourglass no matter which way it moved, becoming one of the same.

"Unless..."

"Unless what!"

"Unless you bring me the three crowns of Everland."

The Gongolly pointed towards the horizon where now, instead of a land of gifts, were a land of soft hills. And on top of the Horizon, three-Pointed hills made of, what seemed to be sand, peaked towards the sky.

“ Each Sand Castle is ruled by a Queen, bring me each of their crowns and I will turn your nothing, back to something. But bear in mind, you can wish nothing at all.” his voice screeched like a curse.

With his head down and filled with regrets, Michael dragged himself towards the mounts of sand each ruled by a Queen.

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Michael was close to the first castle. During his journey, he saw bazaar things and creatures, and creature-like things. He was just one town away when he bumped into a tree who couldn't fetch himself water to shower his roots. It grunted and grunted and reached with its longest limbs to grab the massive drum of water, but he failed each time. Just as Michael came close, “ Excuse me young man...” it said with a last attempt to grab hold of the drum.

“ That drum, right there, I need the water in it. Oh, I'm so thirsty, I feel I'm going to die, and my buds, my poor buds are useless and are the only friends I have. Since we are connected, they too suffer and cannot help the way they do. Please help me, bring me water, bring me water please,”

The tree begged on the verge of tears, and Michael felt for its whimper. So, he went to the drum of water and tried to bring it closer, but it was nearly impossible to move. Michael wasn't strong enough.

"I can't bring the water," said Michael out of breath, "I'm not strong enough."

"Oh, you can, you can. You don't need strength. My buds are not strong they are very smart when healthy, but they are in deep sleep without water. Be smart, please, like my buds be smart," said the tree.

Michael thought for a moment till it dawned upon him.

"I got an idea, but this may take a while," said Michael.

Michael began digging a small trench with wet hands from the drum to each of the tree's thick roots.

"Good idea, Good idea!" said the tree.

When Michael was done, he managed to tip the drum over, and as he did, the water streamed through the channel he made with his bare hands reaching each root.

"That feels good. That feels refreshing!"

Large pink flower buds formed on his stems and fell the surface. They crawled about like critters with peddles as legs getting straight to work, fetching it water, washing the tree down, and so on.

"You saved my life, young man, here please take one of my buds, they are very clever and can solve almost any problem."

"Thank you," said Michael, and off he continued to the first castle.

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Michael demanded to speak to the Queen when he arrived at the entrance of the castle guarded by two ants towering six feet tall.

“ She will not be receiving visitors at this time, she is very sick and needs to rest,”

“Please it is important,”

“ Sorry Childling, but the answer is no,” said one of the guards.

A frown fell onto Michael's face up until his bud crawled up to his ear and whispered with a micro-tiny voice.

“ I have a gift for her from the Sade tree.”

“ The Sade trees? Show me.”

“Michael showed him the bud who rest on his shoulder,”

“Open the doors!” shouted the Ant guard to someone beyond it.

Michael was escorted through the windy hallways of the Queendom, till they made it to the top where he came to a sick Queen who while sitting stood much larger and taller than her guards.

“ This better not be a lie, but I hear you have a gift for me from the Greediest tree in all of Everland,” her voice ran thin while she coughed in between words, snot poured from her eyes and fell like slime to the floor.

“ Yes, I have a Bud, from the Sade tree, here,” said Michael. The Queen ordered a guard to grab the bud, but instead of jumping into his hands, it crawled up onto the Queen's lap, plucked one of its peddles, and gave it to her.

She took it, tossed it into her mouth, and chewed with all her hunger's fulfillment.

“ Bitter,” she said as she swallowed.

More importantly, her eyes cleared up and her coughing stopped. She stood up and the guards rushed to help her.

“ sit down you fools, I have never felt better in all of my life,” she said.

Please, you must of went through great lengths to receive such a gift from such a stingy creature. Allow me to repay you.” She said, “ what can I give you worth your troubles.

“Please, I need your Crown, to get my family back.”

A solid pause filled the space, then the Queen spoke, “ that’s it, child, my crown, are you working deals with The Gongolly. That no-good fool, this is precisely one of many reasons why he is banished from the mainlands. Here take it. Let this be lesson Childling. A crown is not my strength, it is simply nothing at all, here. The Queen tosses the crown to Michael which he stumbled to catch. Shortly after he made it out of the castle and arrived at the next.

At the front entrance, two guards stood before it, both smaller than four feet, and were the closes thing to a human since Michael arrived at this odd world. When he spoke, his voice was just as small as his height.

“ What do you want,” he snapped.

“I-I need to speak with your Queen,” said Michael.

“No, she’s far too busy for a Childling, now run along.”

“ please it’s urgent,” said Michael.

“ There is nothing more urgent than the queens work, now go.” Said the little guard.

When yet another frown settled on Michael's face, the Bud crawled up his shoulder and whispered in his ear.

“ I brought help for the Queen,” said Michael, A bud from the Sade Tree.”

“ Impossible!” said the guard, then he squinted closer. “ Why didn’t you say so in the first place? Open the entrance,” he shouted to whoever beyond it.

The little guard escorted him to the queen as they walked past hundreds of dwarfs working on the walls of the inside of their castle plastering sand up against it.

When they arrived, the small Queen moved around anxiously.

“ What could you possibly want at a time like this, my Queendom is falling apart!” she said.

“ He brings help, my Queen,” said the Guard, “ look, a Bud from the Sade tree. All our troubles have been solved.”

“ Oh, sweet child,” said the queen. “She ran up to Michael and hug his legs, please share with me your gift.”

“The bud crawled down from Michael's shoulder into the queen’s hand and from its center she plucked a seed. Hurry! Bring me water, she demanded.

The guards brought her a pitcher of water and huddle around the seed just after the Queen dropped it on the floor. As soon as the water soaked the seed, the room slowly began to fill with tiny buds. Too many to keep track of sprouted from the seed and scattered around looking for work to be done.

“Oh, thank you Childling, the greatest gift from that awful selfish tree, I don’t know how you’ve done it. I’m sure you went through the worst. Please allow me to return the favor. Ask of me anything, go ahead don’t be shy.”

“Please, I’m super sorry to ask but, I kind ‘a need your Crown,”

“ My wh-oh this thing,” she said I’ve been moving about the castle so much worried at work I forgot all about it. Here, it never fitted just right and caused my forehead to sweat far too much.”

The Queen handed Michael the Crown and was escorted out of the castle while all the buds went to work building faster than the dwarfs themselves.

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It wasn't long before the Queen of Dwarfs, Michael made it to the entrance of the next Queendom. Before it, stood two Honey Bees Just around Michael's height, guarding the door.

They didn't say anything to Michael as he approached, they simply looked past him.

"Excuse me, ma'am, I don't mean to be a bother...but I need to speak with your queen, it's an emergency," said Michael.

"It's all over," said the guard.

"We are doomed, said the other.

Michael hesitated to speak up again as they seemed to be well wrapped in thought.

"...Please, I'm sorry if this is the wrong time but-

"It most certainly is, this is the ugliest of times," said the guard, so please leave, the queen will be seeing no one today.

"Well, what's the problem maybe I can help," said Michael.

"You a Childling? Please. It'll only get worse, besides, what could you possibly have to offer at such a dreadful time of need?"

"I don't know what the issue is, but I do know I have a Bud from the Sade tree..." Michael waited for their response while he held it out. The two guards looked at each other then back at Michael.

"This thing won't help us, look at it. It's all withered. Don't waste our time, be on your way please while we mourn," said the Guards.

Michael's face dropped in despair until the bud spoke while Michael held it to his ear.

"The center of the Bud is what she requested, go and ask her," said Michael.

"Relentless child, at a time like this I could lose my head if the Queen is bothered," said the guard.

“This very plant saved the Ant Queen’s, Queendom when they needed it, a-and it saved the Queen of Dwarfs too, which means there *is a chance* where you the same could happen for your Queen, with the plants help...”

The Guarded scowled at Michael for a brief moment and after a long pause, “Open the entrance,” she shouted, to whoever on the other side.

The Guard bee escorted Michael with a final warning, “ If the Queen takes my head, I promise will hunt yours down.”

Sorrow flooded the castle as Michael walked to the Queen's chambers. Honey bees mopped around depressingly while some laid on the floor lost without hope.

When they arrived at the Queen's Chamber the room appeared empty and so did the throne.

“ My Queen, you have a visitor, a Childling barring gifts from the Sade tree,” said the Guard

“ go away, not even the greediest of trees could save us. We’ve run out. We used up all the pollen Everworld has to offer. Please let us die in peace Childling, there is nothing you can do.”

“ Michael slid the whither peddle less flower into the center of the floor and waited. While nothing happened, the queen grew impatient.

“ Leave now child...Guards!” she said.

Two guards grabbed each side of Michael and began to pull him away.

“ Wait, look,” said Michael, causing the Guards to halt.

They all stood at the flower. Even the Queen hiding behind her throne. It began to spray sparkling powered into the air until it filled the air. The floor layered over and over with yellow mist as it coated the floor like snow till it covers Michael's ankles and poured out the door. The Queen rose in excitement. Pollen showered off her body as she jumped for joy.

“ This can’t be, this can’t be,” she cheered. Pollen for another lifetime, oh dear how you saved us.” Please like all great Queens of Everworld, I must repay you with anything you want, go on what shall it be?”

The Pollen still rained a thick mist in the air, the Guards played in it the way he remembered Marie and Malix did in the snow in their back yard.

“For me to save my sisters, I need to bring your crown to The Gongolly,” said Michael.

“ Oh, that blistering knitted cold soar, he’s no good. Luring innocence into his sticky fingers. Here! The crown holds no purpose when those who love you already know who you are, take it, it is nothing more than a name tag.

Michael took the third crown, thanked the queen with a hundred bows ( he never bowed to anyone before), and was seen to the front of the castle.

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With the Gongolly being band from the main lands, it wasn’t until Michael made it as far as possible from the three Queendoms till, he appeared with his jingling bells, his dragging cloth and the hour glass still receiving a flow of sand from the sky.

“ I have what you want,” said Michael holding three Crowns in his hands.

“Delicious desires of mine are fulfilled,” he snickered with a sinister whisper.

“ Now undo my...nothing, turn it back to the way it was, and send me back home with my Marie And Malix,” Michael made sure to be clear with his words.

“Of course, of course, you did well,” he said rubbing his hands as if he struck gold.

“...Well, how do I get out of this place?” asked Michael.

“Look Behind you...” he replied.

A staircase descending into the earth appeared without anyone to witness it.

“Now the crowns, please,” hissed The Gongolly.

“How do I know when I give’em up, you won’t try anything funny?” asked Michael. The stairs, they should lead up instead of down.”

“Up or down in Everworld, they are all the same, as long as you know, where exactly where you wish to be,” said The Gongolly with another snickering hiss.

Michael dropped the crowns and walked over to the stairs made of earth and began disappearing lower into it one step at a time till Everworld could no longer see him. As he moved forward, he could feel the chill increasing from the snow he left. It brought a smile to him, the thought of his family and sister, for them to all surround him and he does the same. He came to a door left slightly open; wind pushed snow off the edge into the hall. He knew he was home. he looked back once more before he exited through the door and witness the unusual change of direction in the staircase. Instead of looking up at where he came from, he stared down in the way he first arrived at Everworld.

Arriving behind the shed just as he left it, with gloves boots and all that warmed him, he still couldn’t find his sisters, he shouted out their names as the feeling of disseat pricked his chest, believing The Gongolly pulled yet another trick on him. But a great wave of relief came over the child when his father stuck his head out the door.

“Michael, what are you doing, everyone’s waitin’ for you, get inside,” he said as Michael approaches the back door.

“what’s wrong you look like you just woke up? You alright?”

Without words, he fell into his father’s arms with a hug. “Dad, can you do me a favor?”

“It depends?” he said skeptic like.

“All whatever gifts you plan on getting me for Christmas...”

“let me guess, your sisters getting unfair treatment and get too much, well listen, son, they--”

Michael nipped his father’s words before his rant could continue.

“...Donate ...Whatever you or anyone has to give me, donate, said Michael.” Michael continued into the entrance which leads to the kitchen and the living room. His father, still speechless followed after his son, closing the door. At the table sat his mother, and Marie, Maxil. Food filled the table while a sautéed crisped scent filled the air. Before he joined the family at the table with a smile he continued “... You guys are the only gift I could ever wish for. The family smiled back and welcomed him into his seat. When he sat down and pulled it in, the chair slipped oddly and felt un-sturdy. When he went in for a closer look, he refused to believe what he saw. His chair began shedding sand.

