

Kartchner Caverns Story

‘Star of The Caverns’

By Kaylan Deering

Sage didn't like Tuesdays, something bad ALWAYS happened on Tuesdays. Sage also didn't like Asher, he ALWAYS got her into trouble. She was dreading today, because Asher was coming over--ON A TUESDAY--since his parents had another business trip that he wasn't allowed on. It was like double bad luck. WHY was this happening to her?

“Honey, when you finish that, could you go out and feed the animals?” Mom asked.

“Of course!” Sage replied happily, scarfing down her pancakes and bacon. She took her empty plate to the sink, washed it off, placed it in the dishwasher, and ran out the back door.

The Arizona summer was REALLY hot, but today there was a nice breeze, and it helped. Sage smiled, pulled her brown hair back into a ponytail, and tucked in her red plaid shirt into her beat-up jeans. She always loved being out with her family's farm animals; they had a cow and twelve chickens, but Sage's personal favorite was their six goats.

Quickly giving the cow hay, and filling the chickens feed bucket, she skipped over to the goat's feeder. Dumping her bucket of pellets, the herd bounded over, maaing and screaming happily. The littlest of them, a white kid with black feet and ears named Star, was Sage's most favorite pet in the whole world.

“Hi, Star,” Sage cooed, petting the little goat on the head. Star maaed, and started eating Sage's shirt. Sage giggled.

The sound of a car door closing made Sage look up, and she frowned.

“Wonderful, Asher's here,” Sage mumbled sarcastically.

A boy a year older than Sage--who was twelve—with dark hair ran over in Sage's direction, hopping up onto the paddock fence, beaming.

“Hi Sage! Awww! You have a little baby goat!” Asher said.

“Yes, this is Star” Sage replied, unhappily.

“Can I pet her?” Asher asked, already trying to climb over the fence.

Sage was about to say ‘no’, when her mother looked over at them.

“Hey, Asher, please don't climb the fence,” Mom yelled.

“Yes, Mrs. Emerly,” Asher called back, disappointed. He watched as his parents

got back in the car and drove off.

Sage begrudgingly let Asher in the pen, and he tried picking up Star, who bleated and cried for help, flailing in the boy's arms.

"Don't! You're hurting her, you can't hold her like that!" Sage shouted, taking Star from him.

"Sorry," Asher apologized, though he didn't look very sorry.

Sage huffed, and took the empty bucket for feed out and put it away. She had only been gone a minute or so, when she heard the crash of a gate and Asher yelling. Sage ran out to see what had happened, and found the gate to the goat pen open, all the goats out and eating the garden, and Asher yelling at them, trying to shove one back in.

"WHAT DID YOU DO!?" Sage screamed at him, running over to help.

"I-I I'm so sorry... I didn't mean for-" Asher stuttered.

"I don't care if you didn't MEAN it, you did THIS!" Sage yelled.

Asher tried to shrink. Sage grabbed some treats and led the goats back in the pen, shutting the gate behind her. She counted them, one, two... five... wait! Star was missing! Sage whirled around, her face red in anger.

"WHERE is Star?" Sage demanded.

"I don't know, she-she just took off, I didn't think she was that fast, I'm sorry," Asher said.

"Took OFF!? Where?" Sage demanded.

Asher pointed out across the yard towards the hills where there was no fencing.

"No," Sage whispered. Star could get lost out there. Or hurt, or... Sage swallowed, she could get eaten.

"We have to go find her. NOW," Sage ordered.

"W-we...?" Asher asked.

"YES! You're the one that did this, you have to come with me, and if we find her, MAYBE I won't tell my mom about this," Sage said.

Asher hurried to follow her. They trekked across the desert, shrubs, bushes, small trees, and LOTS of cacti made up the flora. Within minutes, Sage wished she had grabbed some water. The sun blazed down without mercy, and who knows how far Star had gone.

Following the little hoofprints Star left behind, they tracked the little goat across the hills. Asher was being annoyingly dramatic, breathing hard, and continually asking why they had to do this now.

"Because Star might get hurt, and if she does, I hope you know I will never forgive you," Sage explained.

"Look, I'm sorry, I really am," Asher said. He looked regretful. She rolled her eyes.

"Sorry won't cut it," Sage muttered.

After probably over an hour of searching, they came to a small hole, exactly

where Star's tracks disappeared. Sage gasped.

"I think she fell in there," she told Asher, who had clearly come to the same conclusion.

"You're gonna go IN there?" He asked, disgusted.

"No. WE are gonna go in there," Sage corrected.

"What!? No. No way," Asher backed up, shaking his head.

"Yup, you first," Sage said, and pushed him into the hole.

He shrieked, and his screams quickly disappeared. It suddenly occurred to Sage that she may have just killed Asher.

"I HATE you," Asher screamed up the hole.

Sage was relieved, and jumped into the hole. She wasn't prepared for the feeling of her stomach flipping and heart hammering. She screamed, and then yelped when she hit the ground. Sitting up, she found Asher glaring at her, but also a hint of fear in his eyes.

It was dark down here, and smelled of minerals. As her eyes adjusted, Sage noticed it was some kind of cave, and it had stalactites hung from the ceiling and stalagmites growing from the ground like a giant shark's teeth.

"Oh! This must be Kartchner Caverns, Mom said we lived near it," Sage pointed out.

"Great, now look what YOU did. We're stuck underground in a cavern, with no light, no water, and no goat," Asher grumbled.

"Well... that's only partly true, I have a light," Sage said, pulling out a small flashlight from her jean pocket, "I carry it with me for doing chores at night, also, Star IS down here, you'll see."

"Hmph. But no water, I'm going to DIE here of thirst," Asher complained.

"Oh, stop it, it's only been an hour or so, I've heard that humans can go about three days without water," Sage said.

"THREE DAYS!? I MIGHT make it ONE!" Asher groaned.

"Oh, stop complaining, we have to find Star," Sage got up and turned on her flashlight. "Woah!" The cavern they were in was pretty big, and water dripped off of soda straws and stalactites onto the cave floor. The sound echoed off the walls.

"ECHO!" Asher shouted, startling Sage. His shout reverberated off the walls and slowly disappeared. He grinned at her.

"Don't do that again," Sage said, and looked around, aiming her flashlight on the floor, looking for any sign that Star had been through here.

"There," Asher pointed at a small stalagmite with a tuft of white fur on it. Sage picked it up, and looked for hoofprints. She found a chew mark on the wall, probably where Star had decided to taste the limestone.

They found more evidence of a little goat, such as hoofprints where the floor was soft, and rub marks where Star had most likely scratched her head.

"Ooh, look at this cave within a cave," Asher said, standing in front of a dark

opening. Sage pointed her flashlight in there, and was greeted by hundreds of glowing eyes hanging from the ceiling. A second later, a swarm of bats flew at her, and she screamed, covering her head, and dropping her light as she ducked.

Then everything was silent except for the dripping sounds, and a hand rested on her shoulder. She looked up into Asher's face.

"It's okay, they didn't hurt you," He comforted, handing her flashlight back.

Sage took it back. "Are they gone?" She asked.

"Yes," Asher grinned, "they gave you quite the scare."

Sage smacked his shoulder. "Ow," he said.

Sage stood up, Asher following suit. Looking around for any more bats, and finding none, she continued on the trail for Star.

Slowly, a quiet animal sound came to Sage's ears. "Come on, I hear her," Sage said, hopeful.

"How can you be sure? There could be many goats that fall into holes and appear in a giant cave," Asher said.

Sage rolled her eyes at him.

Running as fast as she could without tripping over stalagmites or slipping on the damp ground, Sage came to a huge open cavern, with a giant column reaching the ceiling high above her head. Sage gasped.

Asher came running up behind her, breathing hard. "Maybe... don't leave me... without light..." He panted, then looked up at the massive column. "Wow! It's huge! It looks like a throne," Asher pointed out.

It did, but Sage had spotted something else.

Star!

The little goat had climbed up on the throne-like column, and was now stuck on a ledge far too small to hold her for long, and she was up too high to jump down.

"Hold this," Sage thrust the flashlight into Asher's hands, and he fumbled to catch it.

"What... are you doing? Oh..." He spotted Star, "Sage, that's too high and too dangerous for you to climb," He called, but she had already started.

"Oh yeah? Well, my goat is stuck up there, and the whole reason we're down here is because YOU let her out, so, technically, YOU should be the one climbing this to get her, but I will do it instead," She slipped, and shrieked, but caught herself.

Star kept maaing and calling for help.

"Uh... light please," Sage reprimanded, and Asher lit up her hand and footholds. The column was slippery, but Sage was determined. Star looked down at Sage, and cried out.

"Sage... be careful," Asher said, worried.

"I am," Sage shot back, but it broke her concentration, and her foot slipped.

Sage screamed, and fell backwards. Asher screamed and ran to catch her, but was too late. Sage hit the ground hard, and cried out in pain when her ankle twisted the wrong way.

Star kept maaing and screaming. Asher kneeled down by Sage.

“Are you okay?” Asher asked, face pale in worry.

“I think so, it just REALLY hurts. I think... I think I twisted it,” She explained. Asher made a sympathetic face, and Sage removed her boot, which hurt. Her ankle looked mostly normal, but was beginning to turn purple, and when she moved it or touched it, knives of pain shot up her leg.

“OW!” Sage shrieked when Asher tried to help her sit up against a stalagmite, and accidently bumped her ankle.

“Sorry,” he apologized, “sit here, hold this, I’LL get your goat,” Asher handed her the flashlight, and stood up.

Sage didn’t like this idea, but since she couldn’t move her ankle, she relented.

“Her name is Star,” Sage reminded him.

“Yes, Star,” He nodded, and began climbing up the column, more carefully than Sage.

Sage watched as he got higher than she had, using different handholds. She was a little offended that he could do better, but focused on lighting his path. Star had gone quiet after Sage’s accident, and watched Asher’s attempt to rescue her with curiosity and content.

Asher slipped, and Sage was afraid he would fall, but he righted himself, and climbed higher, finally reaching Star’s ledge.

“Uh... how am I supposed to get her down?” Asher asked, clinging to the ledge.

“I... don’t know,” Sage admitted. She had been so worried about rescuing Star that she hadn’t really thought out HOW to get Star down.

“Well, that’s reassuring,” Asher mumbled, “Here, Star, come here,” he called to the goat in a gentle tone.

Star sniffed his hand, and scooted closer. Asher reached out and grabbed Star, who grunted in protest, but relented. Holding Star under one arm, he slowly and carefully made his way back down the column, Star limp under his arm. Near the bottom, Asher lost his footing and fell, but landing fine, and set Star down. The little goat was frozen a moment, but quickly snapped out of it and did a few bunny hops before trotting over to Sage’s side.

“Hi, Star, you gave me quite the scare,” Sage said, petting Star.

Asher came over and sat down in front of them.

“NOW we just have to find the way back out,” Asher said.

That thought scared Sage. She couldn’t walk, much less climb back out of the caverns, but they couldn’t stay here. Well rather, SHE couldn’t stay here.

Looking into Asher face, she was about to make the hardest decision she had ever made.

“Asher,” Sage swallowed her fear, “You take Star back to my house, get my

parents, and come back here. Take the flashlight with you, you'll need it more than me."

Asher looked horrified. "No!" He exclaimed, "I would NEVER leave you alone in a place like this!"

This touched Sage deeply, but if he stayed with her, they may never get out. "Thank you, Asher, but it's the only way," Sage explained, trying to hide the fear in her voice.

"No, it isn't. I'm staying with you until we figure something else out," Asher argued.

"But-" Sage started.

"And that's FINAL. I am the oldest one here, and I got us into this mess, therefore, I say I'm staying," Asher decided in a commanding tone.

Sage smiled despite herself. She just now realized that he had always been a much better friend to her than she had to him, even if he did make mistakes.

"Alright," Sage relented, "But JUST until we figure something else out."

Asher smiled, part in triumph, part in comfort, and sat down next to her. Star laid down in between them.

For a while, silence reigned. They looked around at the cavern and the column shaped like a throne, thinking about how to get out together.

"I could help you stand, and that way we can get out together," Asher suggested.

"Okay, let's try," Sage replied, hopeful.

Sage placed one of her arms over his shoulders, and Asher helped her stand. However, this lasted two seconds, as Sage cried out again and dropped to the ground, clutching her ankle.

"No. No," Sage shook her head sadly, "I can't, it won't work."

"Okay," Asher was clearly sad, and maybe scared, "but I'm not changing my mind."

Star made a mournful sound as the two kids sat back down, thirsty, hungry, tired, and scared.

They sat like this for a long time, and eventually the flashlight dimmed, flashed, and went out completely. Now in complete darkness, Sage felt her hope go out.

But all of a sudden, a dim light shone from far ahead, and was slowly joined by more. They became brighter and brighter, until voices could be heard. Sage heard Asher stand up beside her.

"Hey! Is anyone there? We need help!" He called.

"Hello? Where are you?" came a voice.

"Over here!" Asher replied, and suddenly a light shone upon them, Asher was waving his arms.

Several people gasped, and whispered to each other, but one woman with beautiful dark skin and raven hair pulled back into a braid came over to them.

“Are you guys okay? How did you get down here? Oh, my goodness, you have a goat!” The woman asked in a gentle, worried voice.

Asher spoke first. “I’m Asher, this is Sage, and Star,” He pointed to both of them in turn, “Sage is hurt, we think she twisted her ankle. She needs help,” He explained.

“Oh my, darling, it’s gonna be alright, we’ll get you out. My name is Zoey by the way,” The woman said.

Zoey had shared some of her water with the kids, gave them granola bars, and called a friend over.

Within minutes, a man had gently picked up Sage, and Zoey led a small group out of the caverns. Asher led Star, who followed curiously. Sage was slightly embarrassed, but was silent about it. On the way back, Asher explained the whole story of how he had let the goats out, they had gone looking for Star, fallen in hole--on purpose--and tracked her through the caves to the giant column, and how Sage had tried climbing it, fallen, twisted her ankle, and he had gotten Star down.

“Ah, yes, Kubla Khan, the king of Kartchner Caverns,” Zoey said, “I’m surprised you climbed up that high, you are both quite brave.”

After what seemed hours, they broke into open air, and headed to the visitor center. Zoey pulled out a first aid kit and wrapped Sage’s ankle with bandage. She also asked about their parents. Sage told Zoey her parents phone numbers, and Asher told his parents’.

“Okay, I called them, your parents are on the way. It’s gonna be okay,” Zoey assured after a while.

Soon, Sage spotted her parents coming, and sat up with relief. Her parents spotted her, and ran over to embrace her.

“Oh, Sage! What happened? Are you okay? Where’s Asher?” Her mother asked, crying.

Sage pointed over to Asher, who was getting similar questions from his parents.

“Oh, honey, it’s okay now, we’ll get you taken care of,” Mom assured.

“We love you Sage, we were so worried,” Dad smiled through tears.

“We found Star too,” Sage said, and the little goat came up, shoving her face into the hug, maaing softly.

The family laughed, thanked Zoey and Asher after getting the whole story, and took Sage and Star back home. Before leaving, Sage thanked Asher and hugged him.

“Bye, Asher,” Sage said.

“Bye, Sage. See you next week,” Asher smiled.

And for the first time, this news excited her, and Sage smiled back.