

# The Enchantress of the Sands

*A Story from Botswana*

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On the far side of the Singing Sands, where the sound of one step upon the shining white grains can be heard a hundred miles away, lived an evil **enchantress** who liked to steal children.

It was because of this enchantress that a desert **herdsman** decided to build a tree house for his three young motherless sons.

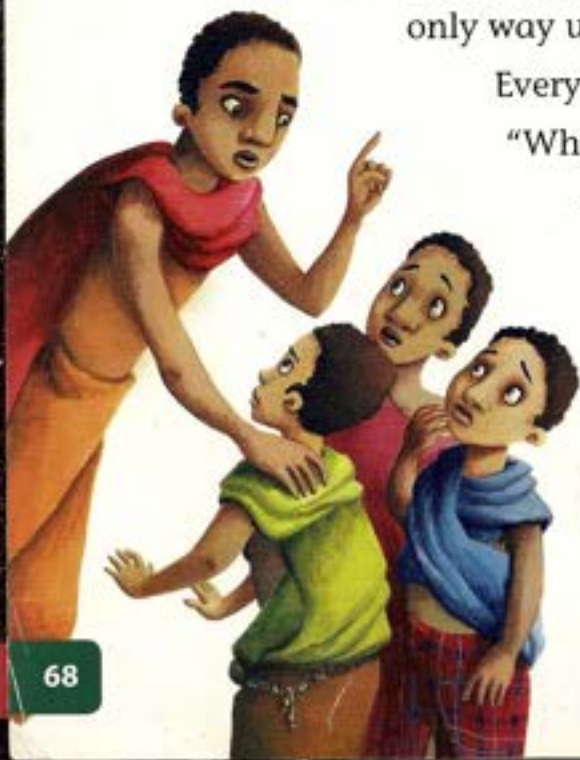
He built it high in the branches of an acacia tree, and the only way up or down was by a rope ladder.

Every day, the herdsman warned his sons,

“While I’m away, don’t let down the ladder to anyone except me. You will know when I come, for I will whistle three times.”

The boys promised. So every day, when their father herded his cattle into the desert to graze, the boys would scamper about among the branches, happy as can be.

And every evening, they let down





the rope ladder when they heard their father whistle.

But one day the evil enchantress came and sat in the deep shade of the acacia tree. She knew that above her head, three pairs of eyes gazed down at her.

"Little boys," she croaked, "let down the ladder so I can come up and see your wonderful tree house." But because they did not hear the whistle, the boys did not let down the ladder.

The wicked enchantress hid. The next evening when the father came home she heard him whistle three times, and down tumbled the ladder.



"Aha!" the enchantress gloated. "That's what I'll do!"

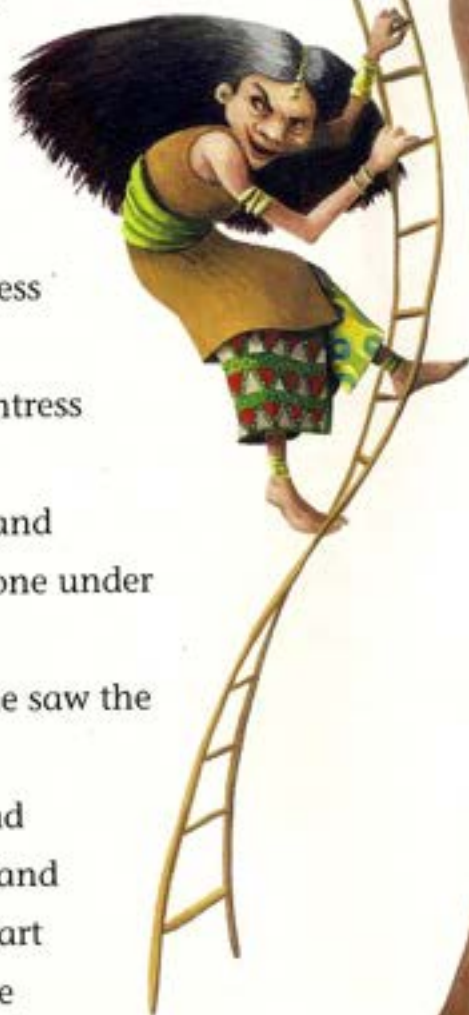
The boys told their father about the old woman. "Beware," he said. "It could have been the wicked enchantress of the Singing Sands."

The next day, when their father had gone into the desert, the enchantress came back. She whistled three times. Down came the ladder and the enchantress climbed up.

"Now I've got you!" she screamed, and tucking two boys under one arm and one under the other, she made off.

When the herdsman came home, he saw the dangling ladder.

He knew that something terrible had happened. The tree house was empty and his little boys gone. He thought his heart would break. He ran, howling, into the desert. "Has anyone seen my boys?"



The father ran to the door of a wise man and fell at his feet. "Help me, help me! My three sons have disappeared. I fear they may have been stolen by the wicked enchantress of the Singing Sands. What shall I do?"

"There is only one way to get them back, and that is to kill the enchantress. The only way to kill her is to break her magic stick in which all her powers lie. There is only one way to cross the Singing Sands without her hearing you, and that is to take my golden drum and beat it with this stick," the wise man said.

The herdsman rubbed ash in his hair to make it grey, and hid the golden drum under a cloak. Disguised as an old man, he set off towards the Singing Sands.

When he got to that shining white place, before he put one foot upon the sands, he began to beat the magic drum. As soft as a heartbeat, he crossed the Singing Sands.

On the other side he saw the enchantress's hut. He hobbled up to her door. "Oh! My aching stomach! Would a kind person have a crumb of food for a starving old man?"



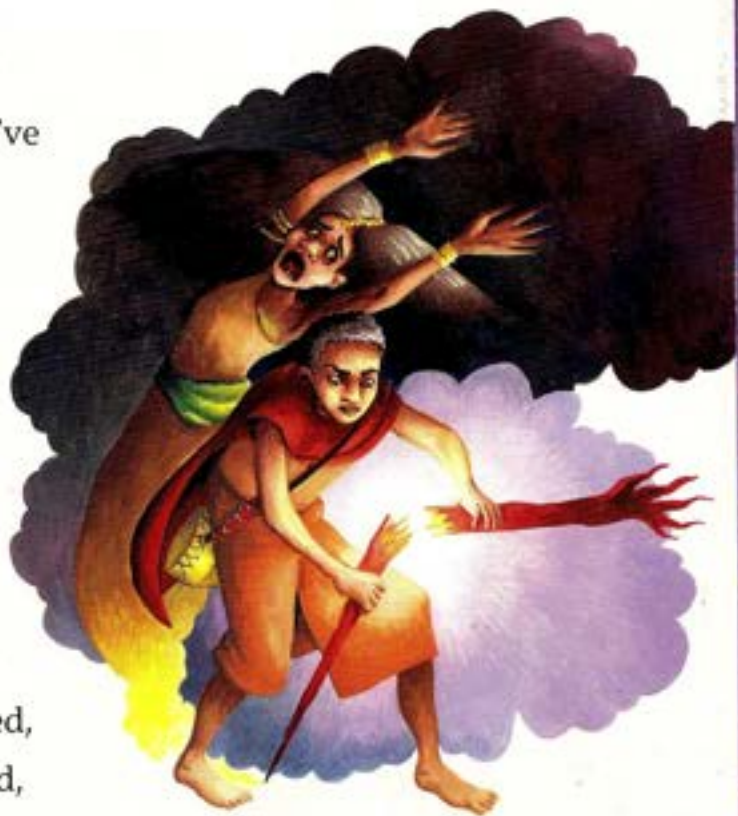
"I didn't hear you coming," screamed the enchantress.  
"**Begone!**" But then she caught a glimpse of the golden drum  
beneath his cloak. She wanted it. "On second thoughts..."  
She gave a crocodile smile. "I may have a morsel left over.  
Come on in."



There was a cauldron bubbling, and the enchantress  
stirred it with her magic stick. Glowing in a dark corner were  
three pairs of frightened eyes, and the herdsman knew he  
had found his boys.

"Mmm! That smells good," he said, putting his nose into  
the steam.

"You can taste some when I've mixed in this powder," said the enchantress, thinking she could poison the old man and steal his drum. For a moment, she set down her magic stick to sprinkle in the poison. In that instant, the herdsman snatched up the stick and snapped it across his knee. The enchantress screamed, but before she could say a word, she crumbled into a pile of dust.



The herdsman joyfully hugged his sons and led them back across the shining white Singing Sands. He didn't bother to beat the golden drum. Everyone heard them coming and **rejoiced**.

