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## The Two Brothers

Early one morning two brothers left their African village for a hunting trip. They tramped through the hot, parched countryside along dusty paths until suddenly and quite unexpectedly...

"What's this? Who can have left this circle of pots standing upside down like this?" said the younger brother.

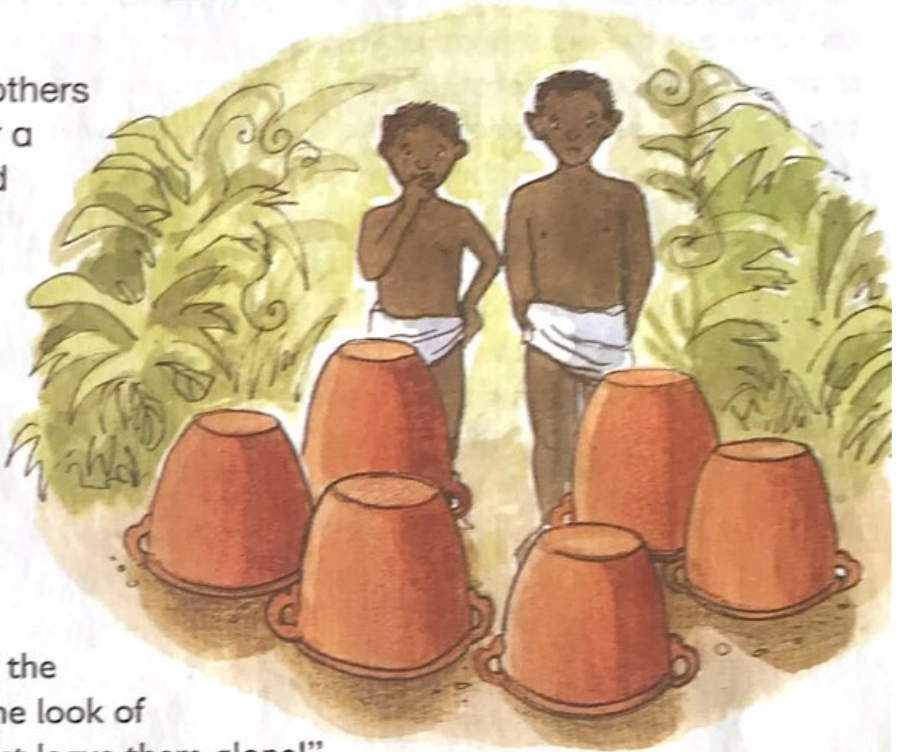
"Don't touch them," begged the older brother, "I don't like the look of them. I get a bad feeling – just leave them alone!"

"I'm going to take a look," said the younger, braver brother, as he turned over the first pot. Then he did the same to each pot in the line, until, as he turned over the last pot he gave a shout of surprise as out popped a little old woman.

"Don't stand shivering there like a couple of terrified gazelles. I won't hurt you. Follow me, both of you, and I'll show you something really interesting. But the older brother was rigid with fear, unable to move an inch!

"Coward!" she exclaimed in her tiny, high-pitched voice. But the younger brother, always ready for adventure, followed her, along the tracks and paths until they came to a huge tree.

"Cut this tree down for me," she commanded, but at the first stroke of the axe, to the boy's utter astonishment, out stepped a bullock from a hollow in the side of the tree trunk. Each time the boy chopped at the tree a cow, a bullock, a goat or a sheep came out. Eventually he was surrounded by flocks and herds. "These are for you," the little old woman explained, "for releasing me from that prison."



Thanking the woman, though still almost too stunned to speak, the boy struggled to drive the animals back to where he had left his brother, still rooted to the spot - too scared to move. "Just look what the little old woman gave me! This will make our parents rich, and save our village."

As they drove the animals along the dusty tracks, the boys became increasingly thirsty - and the older brother was quietly wondering how he would cover his shame at his younger brother having been so much braver than he. Then suddenly the older boy saw a stream at the bottom of a ravine. "Look, water! Lower me down with this rope so that I can drink," he said. The younger brother dutifully did as he was asked. When the older brother was back at the top he told the younger brother that now it was his turn to be lowered down. But once at the bottom, the wicked and cowardly older brother saw his opportunity. He tossed down the end of the rope, knowing that he could now take back the animals and be given all the praise from his parents and all the villagers.



Sure enough, when he returned with the herds and flocks to the village, everyone gathered round, singing his praises, fascinated to hear the incredible story of how he came to have been given the animals.

"But where is my younger son?" asked his mother.

"Oh, he went off - alone - he's sure to be back in a few days," lied the older son.

Early the next morning, while the women of the village were collecting water from the well, they heard a honey-bird. Now there were many honey-birds in that part of Africa and people had learnt that if they followed the birds they would often lead them to bees' nests where the men could collect supplies of honey. When the women told their menfolk about the honey-bird, several, including the boys' father, followed the bird. Along rough paths, through increasingly dense undergrowth, on and on they ran, pausing only when occasionally the bird settled on a branch or rock for a brief rest. The men became more and more surprised at the distance it was flying.

"That's far enough," said one eventually, "I'm going back."

"Just a little further," said the others. "There could be something very special where the bird is leading us - it seems so determined."

So on they all went, until they came to a precipice, from where, way down below, they could just detect the distant sound of a young boy's voice calling desperately for help. The bird flew straight down into the ravine, landing at the boy's feet. Straining his eyes and ears, the boy's father exclaimed, "My son! That's my son!" The men collected creepers from nearby trees and quickly fashioned a rope, lowering down the father who, having hugged his dear lost son, listened in disbelief at the story his distraught younger son had to tell.

"Alas," wept the father, "that I should have a son so wicked as your older brother. You would have died had not the honey-bird led us to this spot."

But news of the young boy's rescue must have reached home before the men returned to the village, because by the time they did the older boy had left, and was never again seen in the village. But the younger boy prospered and his parents never wanted for anything in their old age.

But to this day no one has ever found the amazing tree or seen the little old woman, though there is one special honey-bird the younger brother feeds everyday with seeds and water.



**Do you remember?**

1. Read these sentences about the story. Write in your book 'true', 'false', or 'can't tell' for each one.
  - a) The story is about two brothers.
  - b) The story is set in America.
  - c) The older brother is braver than the younger.
  - d) They found a tiny old lady in the trunk of a tree.
  - e) She was over 100 years old.
  - f) It was hot, and the boys became thirsty.
  - g) There was a stream at the bottom of the ravine.
  - h) The younger brother trapped his older brother in the ravine.
  - i) A honey-bird led the boys' father to the spot.
  - j) In the end, the two brothers lived together happily.
2. Copy these sentences. Choose the correct word.
  - a) The two brothers went \_\_\_\_\_. (hunting or swimming)
  - b) They found a circle of \_\_\_\_\_. (pots or stools)
  - c) The old lady led the younger brother to a \_\_\_\_\_. (well or tree)
  - d) Inside the trunk were many \_\_\_\_\_. (birds or animals)
  - e) The brothers started to drive the animals back to the \_\_\_\_\_. (village or town)