



WHERE
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THE SAND

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Where the Sky Meets the Sand

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*To Nick, for showing me the path to get to Africa.
And to Val, for journeying on the path with me.*

PROLOGUE

THUNK.

A stick hit the boy on the side of his head. *Thunk*. It hit him again. He knew it was his brother, so he was slow to turn around. When he finally did—*thunk*—a blow landed on the other side of his head.

Without a word, his brother, younger by a few years, pointed into the distance where a she-goat with her kid nibbled on red oat grass. The boy rose from his perch on a termite mound, grabbed his own stick, and trudged off.

Up until around his twelfth year, this happened frequently in the boy's otherwise uneventful life. Each day, he and his brother took their herd of goats out into the wide bare plain, where the animals would eat what sparse grass and shrubs they could find. The boy would stare off to the edge of the horizon, not paying much attention to the nothingness that was in between, and not paying much attention to the herd or his brother. He would look to where the pale-blue sky met the dull-tan sand and not think at all.

His brother would finally urge him, often with a stick to the head, to help lead the goats to the wide muddy river, where the animals would drink their fill of murky water.

Sometimes the boys waited on the hillside for great herds of cattle to finish. Sometimes the mommas washed their clothes among the rocks, singing their songs and acting as if they had all day, as the brothers waited. In the evening, they returned to their home within a thorn bush fence, where the family and their livestock slept in relative safety.

The family included not only the boy, his brother, and his mother, but many other people. His real father had died years before, when the boy was very young. His momma married a new husband, an older man who already had three wives with seven children between them. Because his momma never gave any children to her new husband, she and her two sons were sometimes overlooked by the established family.

The boy knew he wasn't as smart as his real brother or his other brothers and sisters. When he stared off into the distance and let his mind go blank, he knew he was doing something wrong but couldn't make himself stop. He tried, but he couldn't help himself. The goats would wander off and his brother would call him, but he would stand there, watching clouds pass.

Or someone from his household would ask him to run an errand. He would set off in the right direction, but suddenly find himself some place altogether different and have no idea how he got there.

Then one day, when the other boys were considering their journey to manhood, a stranger came into the enclosure, a man not from the area. All of the tribesmen that the boy knew were tall and thin, but this one was a head shorter than most and round around his middle. He wore many beaded adornments about his neck and on his arms, more even than the women of the tribe.

The man talked to the boy's stepfather, who nodded and then turned away. Outside of their hut made of mud and dung, the boy's momma stood silent. She also walked away without a word.

The man told the boy that it was time to begin the journey towards becoming a man.

The boy understood what that meant under normal circumstances, but he sensed that these circumstances were not normal.

"You must pay attention to what I am going to do." The man placed a hand on the boy's shoulder. "Remember, I am here to help you. I am here to help your family."

The man then took the boy into the hut.

Alone.

CHAPTER 1

AUGUST 1982

OUTSIDE THE WIDE WINDOW, THE sun beat down from a clear azure sky. Jenny watched a flock of starlings fly past, their wings beating in unison, turning to the right as if on cue. How did these simple-minded birds know what to do, yet she had no clue?

Groaning, she rolled over in the narrow bed. The cramping in her abdomen had lessened, but it didn't mean she was pain-free. *Thank God for air conditioning.*

"You're awake," a voice announced from the chair in the corner.

"Kind of," Jenny whimpered. "How long was I asleep?"

"Oh, a couple hours." Her mother rose and came to her bedside, taking a limp hand into her warm, weathered one. "Want something to eat?"

The younger woman shook her head against the rough pillow.

"You need to get your strength back."

Jenny turned to look out the window again. *What strength, physical or emotional?*

"Sweetheart, everything is going to be fine. Classes start in a few weeks. You'll be back in your element at college. You'll graduate in

another year, get your dream job. Your whole life is an open book, just waiting for you.”

Jenny sighed. The words fell without offering her any comfort. She knew how often her mother had to bite her tongue, her body language saying it all. Over the years, whenever Jenny tried to confide in her or seek her counsel, her mother would fold her arms across her chest and draw her lips into a straight line, her jaw set. No matter what the older woman said at that point, every mistake Jenny had ever made would surface in the younger woman’s mind.

At those times, Jenny would look across the room into her father’s blue eyes. He would remain silent but one side of his mouth would lift into his signature half grin. Though he never shared the words out loud, her father would always support her.

Now, the older woman stroked her daughter’s blonde hair, smoothing it back from her face.

“Think I can take a shower?” Jenny asked, imagining that her mom’s hand must be sticky from the unwashed head.

“Wait here, I’ll go check.” Her mother left the room, her flats tap, tap, tapping across the tile floor.

Glad she was gone, Jenny let a tear roll down her cheek. *Don’t cry. Once you start, you will never stop.* Yet another tear slipped from her eye, followed by another and another.

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and

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An American businesswoman with a secret past. An African boy without a home. Two missionaries with more than one mission to accomplish. Will all of their wishes come true where the sky meets the sand on the African plain?

Where the Sky Meets the Sand tells the story of Jenny Neumeyer and Ole, a homeless boy she befriends while she and her husband are on vacation in Kenya. This encounter leads her to confront a secret she has kept buried for fourteen years. As she comes to terms with her past, two missionaries to Africa discover Ole and are determined to lead him home. Along the way, they realize that the boy is not the only one who is lost.

Jenny, her husband, and the missionaries all discover that their faith in God is what will see them through.



Chris Loehmer Kincaid has worked fulltime in the medical field for nearly 30 years. She also mentors a local Kinship kid, mentors her church's college students, sponsors a Compassion child in Kenya, and remains active in the state society for her career in medical assisting. She and her daughter recently founded a nonprofit organization, Tumaini Volunteers, to provide sustainability to poverty-stricken communities. She lives in northern Wisconsin with her husband, four cats, and one dog.