



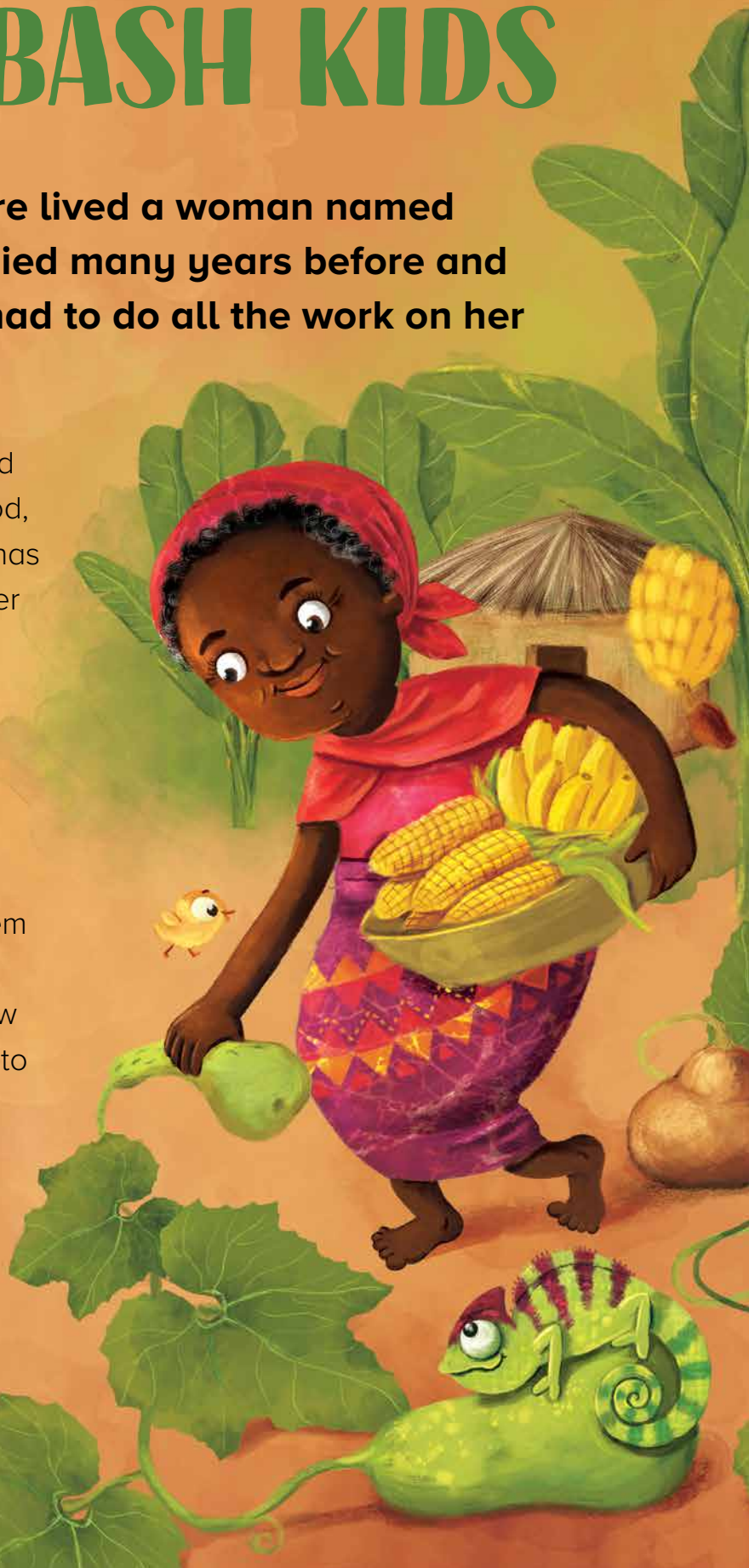
THE CALABASH KIDS

In the land of Tanzania, there lived a woman named Shindo. Her husband had died many years before and she had no children, so she had to do all the work on her small farm by herself.

Every day from dawn to dusk, she would clean the house and yard, chop firewood, weed the garden and tend to her bananas and maize and millet, before cooking her evening meal and eating alone.

One night, she prayed, “My life is so hard and lonely, please send someone to help me!”

The next day, she found some strange seeds outside. Puzzled, she planted them in a patch of earth behind her hut and tended them carefully. Over the next few weeks, shoots sprang up, which grew into lush vines that sprouted a crop of fine calabashes. When they were ready, Shindo carefully harvested the calabashes, cut off their tops, scooped out the pulp inside, and then carefully put them on the roof of her hut to dry in the sun.





She planned to sell them at the market, as calabash gourds were very useful for holding grain or water.

However, the biggest and finest calabash she kept for herself and took into her hut to dry in front of the fire.

Shindo then went down to the river to get water. As soon as she left, the calabashes began to sprout heads and arms and legs and fingers and toes and turned into happy and healthy little calabash-kids!

The kids on the roof all began calling out, "Kitete! Kitete! Our favourite brother! Help us climb down so we can work for our mother!"

Kitete was the boy who had grown out of the big calabash that had been left to dry in front of the fire. He came out of the house and helped his brothers and sisters down from the roof.

The calabash kids then began running around the yard, weeding the maize and hanging out the laundry and even feeding the surprised chickens! They also swept out the hut and cooked up a tasty stew for dinner. They were all very busy, except for Kitete. Being dried out in front of the fire had made him slow, so he just stayed sitting outside the house, watching what was going on with a big smile on his face. ➡





When all the work was done, Kitete helped his brothers and sisters back onto the roof, and they all turned back into calabashes.

Shindo returned with the water and was shocked by how neat and tidy the house and garden were, and had no idea who had made the stew that was bubbling over the fire. When the other women in the village called out to her, saying, “Shindo! Who were those children working in your yard?”, she thought they were making fun of her.

The next day, Shindo pretended to go down to the river for water again, but sneaked back to see what would happen in the yard. Sure enough, the calabashes turned into children again and cried out, “Kitete! Kitete! Our favourite brother! Help us climb down so we can work for our mother!”

Kitete helped his brothers and sisters down, and they happily worked in the house and garden – scrubbing the dishes and folding the laundry and milking the goat and hoeing the vegetable patch, while Kitete watched with a big smile on his face.



When Shindo suddenly showed herself, the calabash kids were surprised and were about to run away when Shindo cried out, “Don’t go! Thank you so much for helping me, please stay and live with me as my own children!” The calabash children were overjoyed and danced around her, singing.

Shindo and the calabash kids were very happy together. The children loved playing games and helping their



new mother. They planted many new fields of crops and fruit trees so they all had plenty to eat, and Shindo had lots left over to sell at the market. Kitete was not the best worker, but he was happy all the time, and he was secretly Shindo's favourite.



However one day, Shindo was carrying a big pot of vegetables into the house when it was very bright outside. When she went into the dark house she couldn't see Kitete sitting right in the doorway and tripped over him, breaking the pot and spilling vegetables all over the floor. She got angry and shouted at him: "Why do you sit there, just smiling and getting in the way? You aren't a real child at all, you are just a stupid calabash!" Kitete stared up at her with a miserable

look on his face and changed back into a calabash.

"What have I done?" cried Shindo. "I didn't mean it! Please come back, my dear son!"

The rest of the calabash kids gathered around the gourd that had been Kitete, joined hands with each other, and began to chant, "Kitete! Kitete! Our favourite brother! Come back to us and your loving mother!"

With that, the gourd changed back into Kitete, who had a big beautiful smile on his face again.

Shindo and the calabash kids lived happily ever after together, and she never called Kitete names ever again. ★

