



# The Calabash Children

## An African Fable

In a village in Africa near the foot of a high mountain lived a poor and lonely old woman. Her husband had died and she had no children. Day after day she worked hard—she swept and cleaned her hut, fetched the water, weeded and hoed her garden, grew a few vegetables, milked her old cow and goat and deeply wished she had a family to help her.

In this part of Africa people believed that a powerful spirit lived on the top of the mountain, so one day the lonely old woman went to the mountain to ask for help. When she got home, she found some seeds on the table. She wasn't very impressed, so she threw them out of the window, and in the night the seeds grew like magic into huge calabash plants (like pumpkins). The next morning they exploded and out jumped lots of children. They immediately set to work on all the chores that needed to be done.

At dusk, when their chores were finished, they danced and sang together outside. At the end of the day, they shrank back into gourds and the old woman stored them carefully on the shelf. She was delighted when the next morning the same thing happened again—the gourds grew huge and exploded into children. They worked and danced and sang each day, and in the evening they became gourds again. The woman cared for the children, and as the weeks and months passed, she became rich and successful. Her home was spotless and her garden and livestock flourished.

One day the old woman was stirring soup for the children and one of them accidentally knocked into her, spilling the soup all over the floor. Before she could think about what she was saying, these words flew out of her mouth: "You children are nothing but trouble! After all, you are only calabashes." The children froze in the middle of their chores and became gourds again. They never appeared again, and the woman returned to living alone and working hard all by herself.