

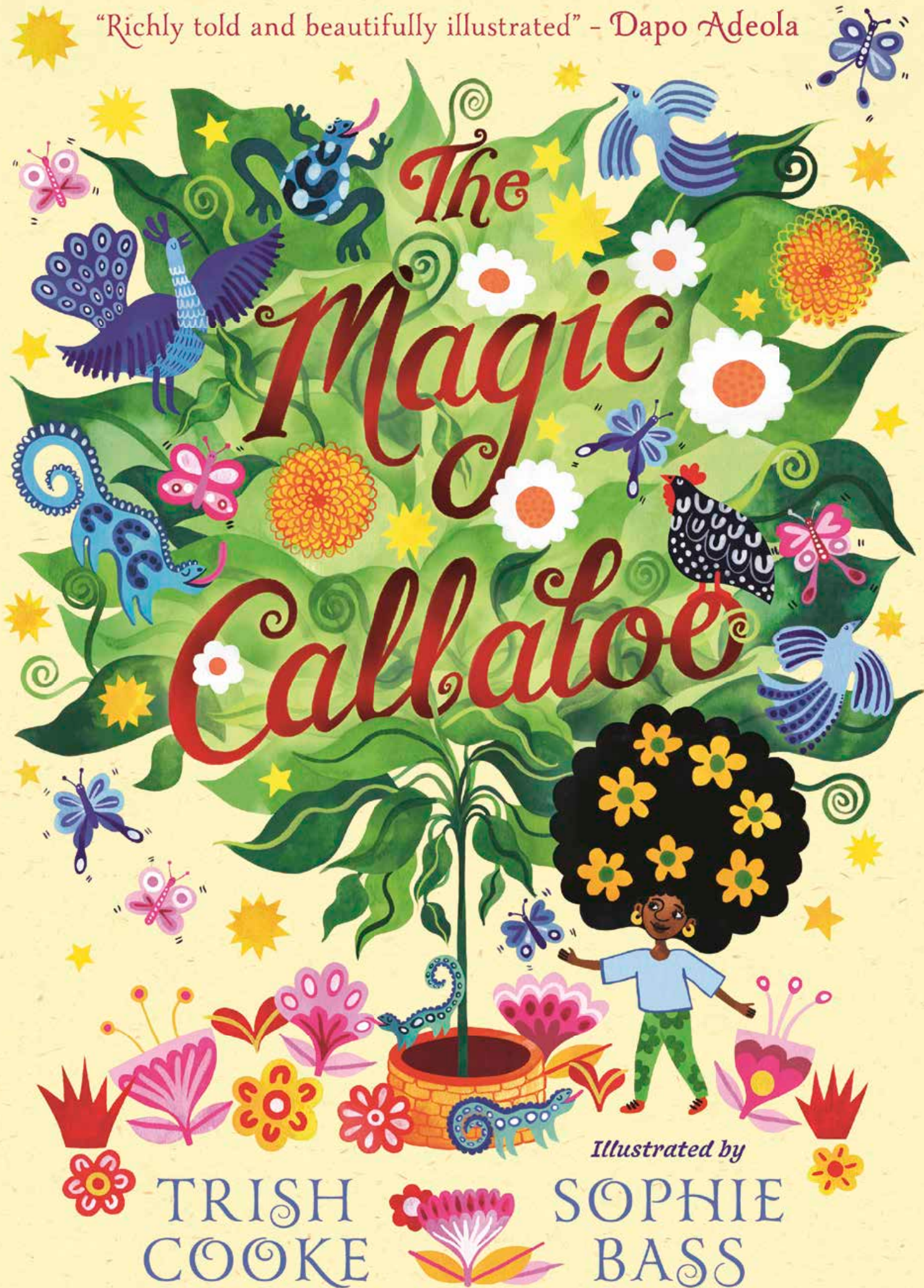
"Richly told and beautifully illustrated" - Dapo Adeola


The Magic Callaloo

Illustrated by

TRISH
COOKE

SOPHIE
BASS





Note from the Author

I have always loved the fairy tale “Rapunzel”, about a girl who is taken from her parents and locked in a tower, then uses her hair in her quest to escape. My idea for a story of captivity and freedom stretches far beyond fairy tales to my own African ancestors, whose forced relocation is very real for me. *The Magic Callaloo* was inspired by the stories I have heard of Africans who made patterns in their cornrowed hair and used them as maps to escape from their enslavers. I have been told that some hairstyles recorded the obstacles they would encounter en route, with cornrows representing the roads they should follow. The number of plaits indicated how many roads they needed to walk, or the exact place to meet someone who would help them on their journey. Sometimes gold or seeds were hidden in the cornrows to help them survive after they escaped. My tale, *The Magic Callaloo*, pays homage to my ancestors and the roads they walked for freedom.

Trish Cooke

*Thank you to my grandmothers, Patience Ba Ba (Emelia)
and Lagwa (Roselia), for being ever present... – T.C.*

*For my parents, who raised me reading folktales
from all around the world. – S.B.*



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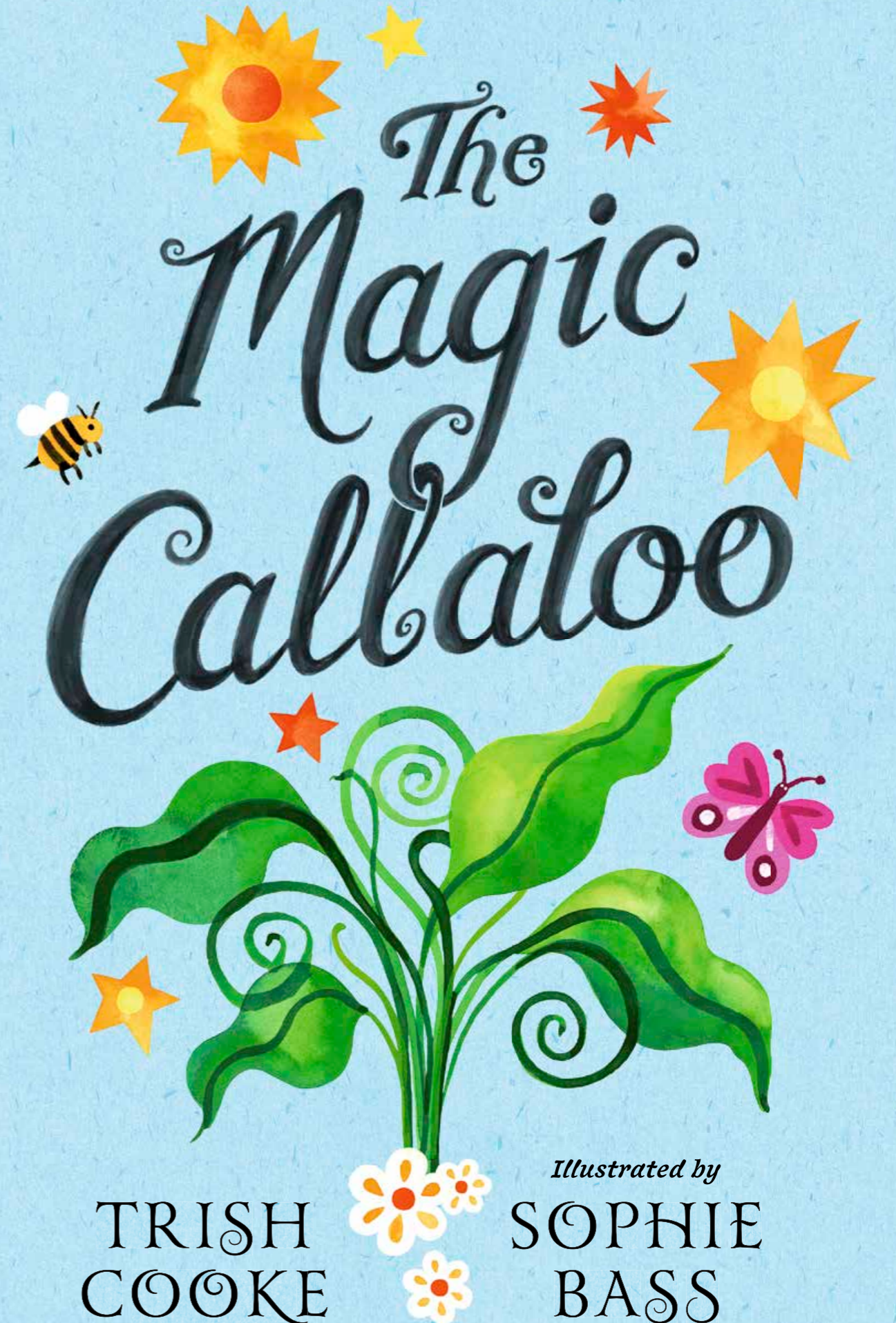
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Long, long ago, Somewhere, far, far away,
a large callaloo plant grew in the centre of a small village square. Its leaves were big and lush and green, and they spread out, wide and tall, like huge fingers reaching up to the sun. No one knew how the plant had got there; it just had always been. The villagers watered and nurtured the callaloo plant and as they did so, more leaves grew. The more they loved and looked after the plant, the more it flourished. For this was no ordinary callaloo plant – *this* plant was magical. When a villager ate one of its leaves and made a wish, their wish came true.

The villagers had everything they needed and everything they wanted.



However, living in the village was a greedy, selfish man and he wanted more than *everything*.

He wanted **ALL**.

And he wanted ALL for himself.

One day the greedy man decided to steal the plant so he could have all the wishes. He waited for night-time, then, when all the villagers were asleep, he crept into the village square and uprooted the plant. He plucked a leaf from the stalk, ate it immediately and made a wish.

“I wish to have this plant all to myself!” he said, clutching the callaloo tightly. And suddenly the wicked man found himself between Somewhere and Nowhere.

Alone.

Then, stuffing more leaves in his mouth, he said:

“I wish for the biggest house with fancy ornaments!

“I wish for a huge farm on acres of land!

“I wish for lots of farm animals – so many! THE MOST!!!

“I wish for a barbed-wire fence to surround my land.

“And I wish for dragons and snakes to guard my magic callaloo!”

And as he greedily ate more and more callaloo leaves, he wished for more and more things...





And all his wishes were granted.

He had the biggest house with fancy ornaments, a huge farm on acres of land, lots of farm animals – so many! THE MOST!!!

And a barbed-wire fence surrounding his land with dragons and snakes guarding the callaloo and much, much more...

The wicked man ate and wished and ate and wished until

he had so many things, he could hardly move. He grew lazier and lazier and spent more and more days lying in his hammock, eating and drinking all the food and drink he wished for. So lazy was he that he didn't water or nurture the callaloo.

And the plant got smaller and smaller as fewer and fewer leaves grew on it; soon, there was only one leaf left.