

Hector Helps Out

by Lisa Amstutz
Art by Sara Palacios

One day in early spring, Calliope turned to admire her freshly laid, white egg. “What lovely eggs I have,” she told Hector. “I would like to keep one someday.”

“Yes, dear,” said Hector, preening his shiny tail feathers.

The next morning when Farmer Bean came to collect the eggs, Calliope sat down, *ker-PLOP*, on top of her egg to hide it.

Farmer Bean wasn't fooled. He patted her head fondly before reaching under her to collect the egg.

“Hmmpf,” said Calliope. “He found it!”



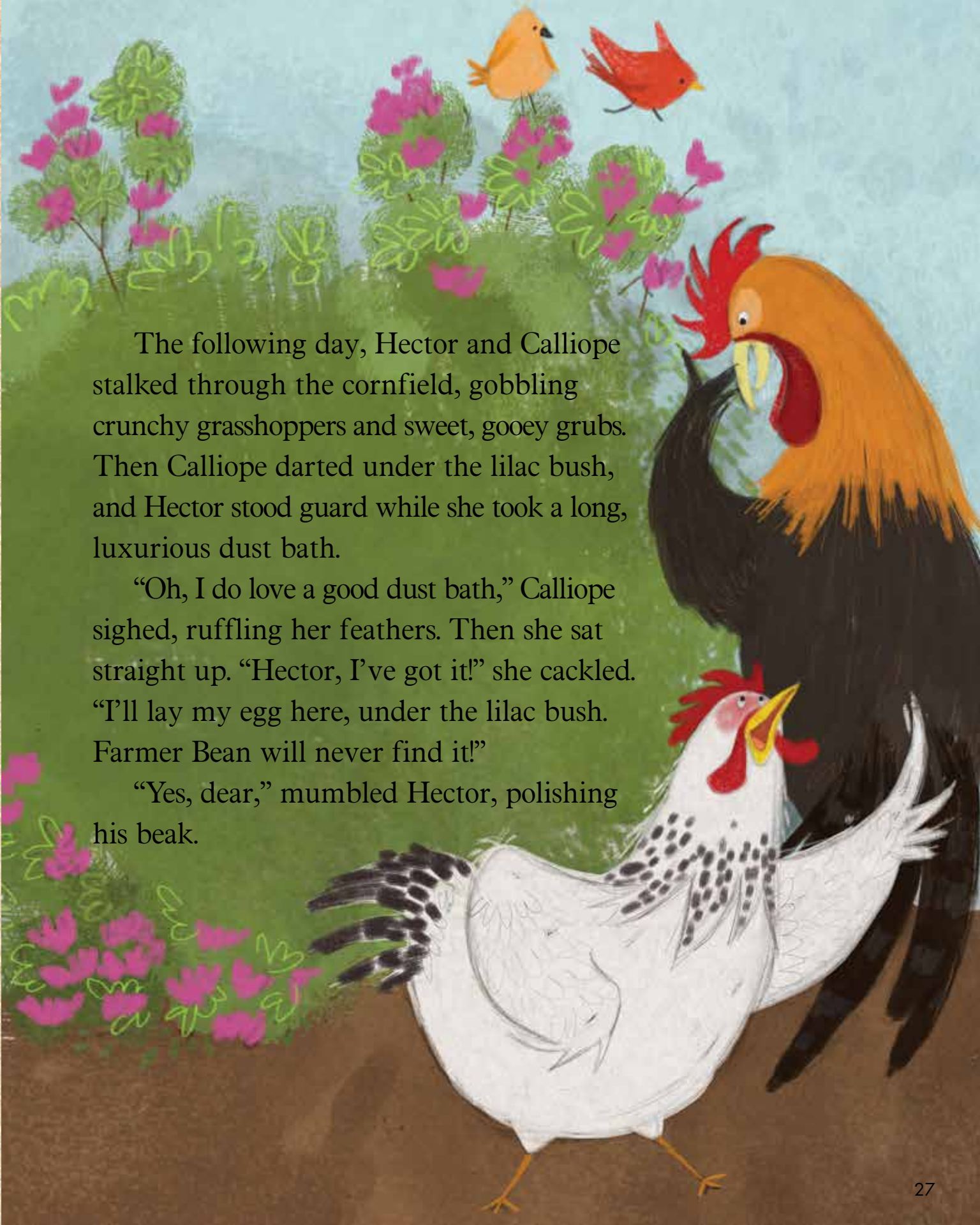
The next day, Calliope tried again. “I am immovable,” she told Hector. “When Farmer Bean comes to take my egg today, I will be ready for him.”

“Yes, dear,” said Hector. He tilted his head to admire his comb.

Calliope hunched down on her egg and waited. When Farmer Bean came to collect the eggs, she jabbed at his fingers with her sharp beak.



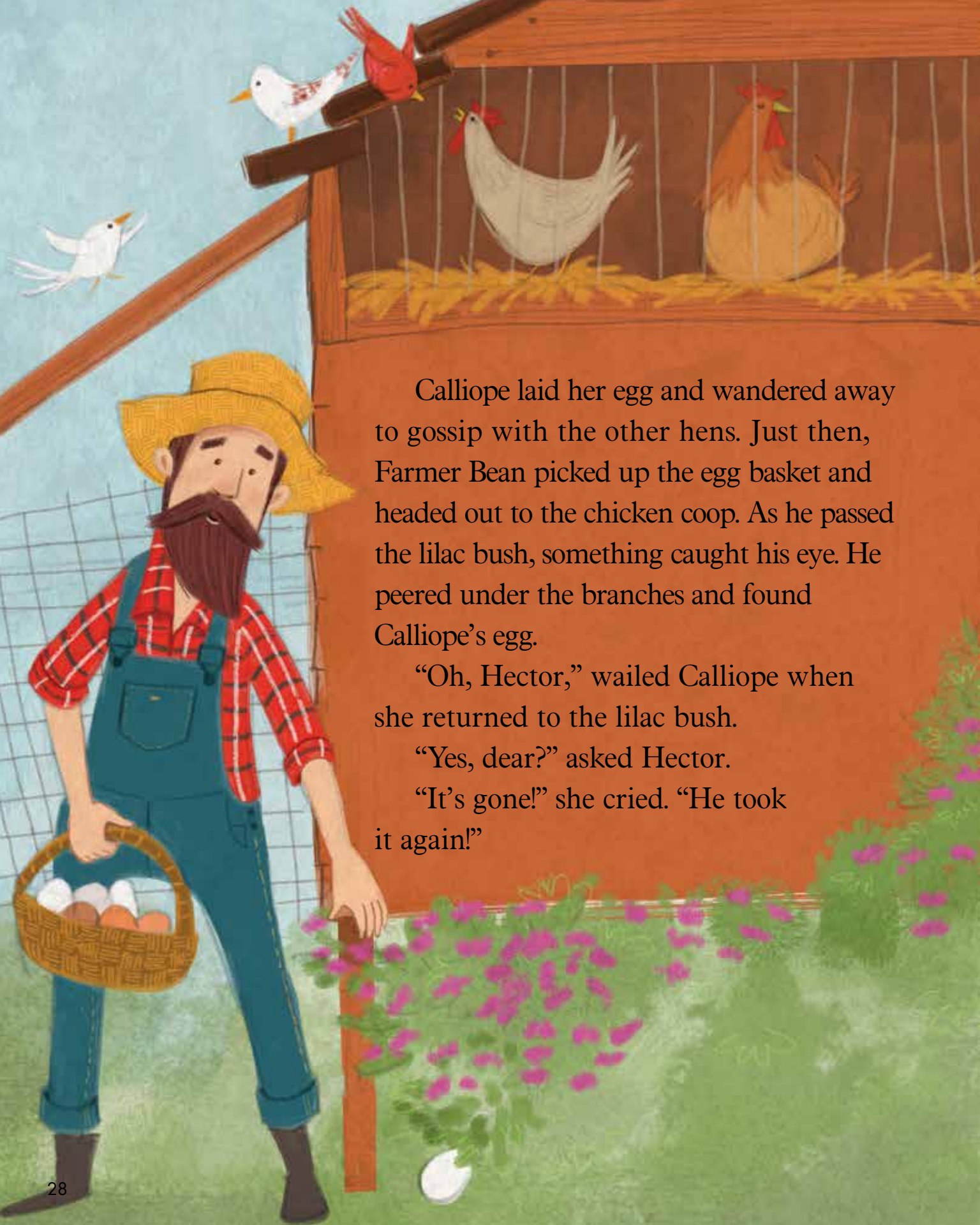
“Ouch!” yelled Farmer Bean. He slipped on a glove and gingerly retrieved the egg beneath Calliope, muttering, “What has gotten into you, Calliope?”

An illustration of a rooster and a hen in a garden. The rooster, Hector, is on the right, with a large red comb and wattle, and feathers in shades of orange, black, and red. The hen, Calliope, is on the left, white with black spots on her neck and wings, and a red comb. They are surrounded by green bushes with pink flowers. Two small birds, one orange and one red, are perched on the bushes in the background. The background is a light blue sky.

The following day, Hector and Calliope stalked through the cornfield, gobbling crunchy grasshoppers and sweet, gooey grubs. Then Calliope darted under the lilac bush, and Hector stood guard while she took a long, luxurious dust bath.

“Oh, I do love a good dust bath,” Calliope sighed, ruffling her feathers. Then she sat straight up. “Hector, I’ve got it!” she cackled. “I’ll lay my egg here, under the lilac bush. Farmer Bean will never find it!”

“Yes, dear,” mumbled Hector, polishing his beak.



Calliope laid her egg and wandered away to gossip with the other hens. Just then, Farmer Bean picked up the egg basket and headed out to the chicken coop. As he passed the lilac bush, something caught his eye. He peered under the branches and found Calliope's egg.

"Oh, Hector," wailed Calliope when she returned to the lilac bush.

"Yes, dear?" asked Hector.

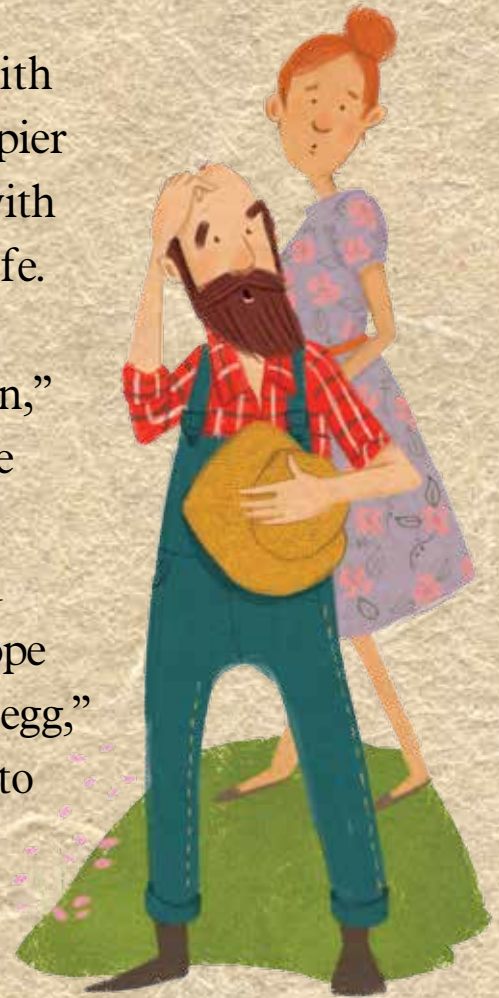
"It's gone!" she cried. "He took it again!"

The contest continued for several days, with Farmer Bean and Calliope both growing grumpier by the moment. “I don’t know what’s wrong with that hen,” Farmer Bean complained to his wife. “That birdbrain is making my life difficult!”

“I don’t know what’s wrong with that man,” Calliope complained to Hector. “Why does he have to make life so difficult?”

Hector scratched his ear with one pointed toenail then sat down to think. That gave Calliope an idea. “Hector, maybe YOU should sit on the egg,” she shrieked. “Farmer Bean will never think to look there!”

“Yes, dear,” agreed Hector. Feeling important, Hector puffed out his chest feathers.



“Oh, Hector,” Calliope sighed. “Thank you so much. You are an EGG-CELLENT friend!” She quickly laid an egg and shoved it under Hector’s tail just as Farmer Bean opened the henhouse door. Farmer Bean peered in the empty nesting box and frowned. He looked curiously at Calliope, who was busily scratching for bugs, and left empty-handed.



As soon as Farmer Bean was out of sight, Calliope rushed over to Hector. “We did it!” she cackled, then ruffled her feathers and sat on her beautiful egg. She closed her eyes and sighed contentedly. A few moments later, she looked up. “Hector?” she said.

“Yes, dear?”

“I wonder what happens next!” 🐣