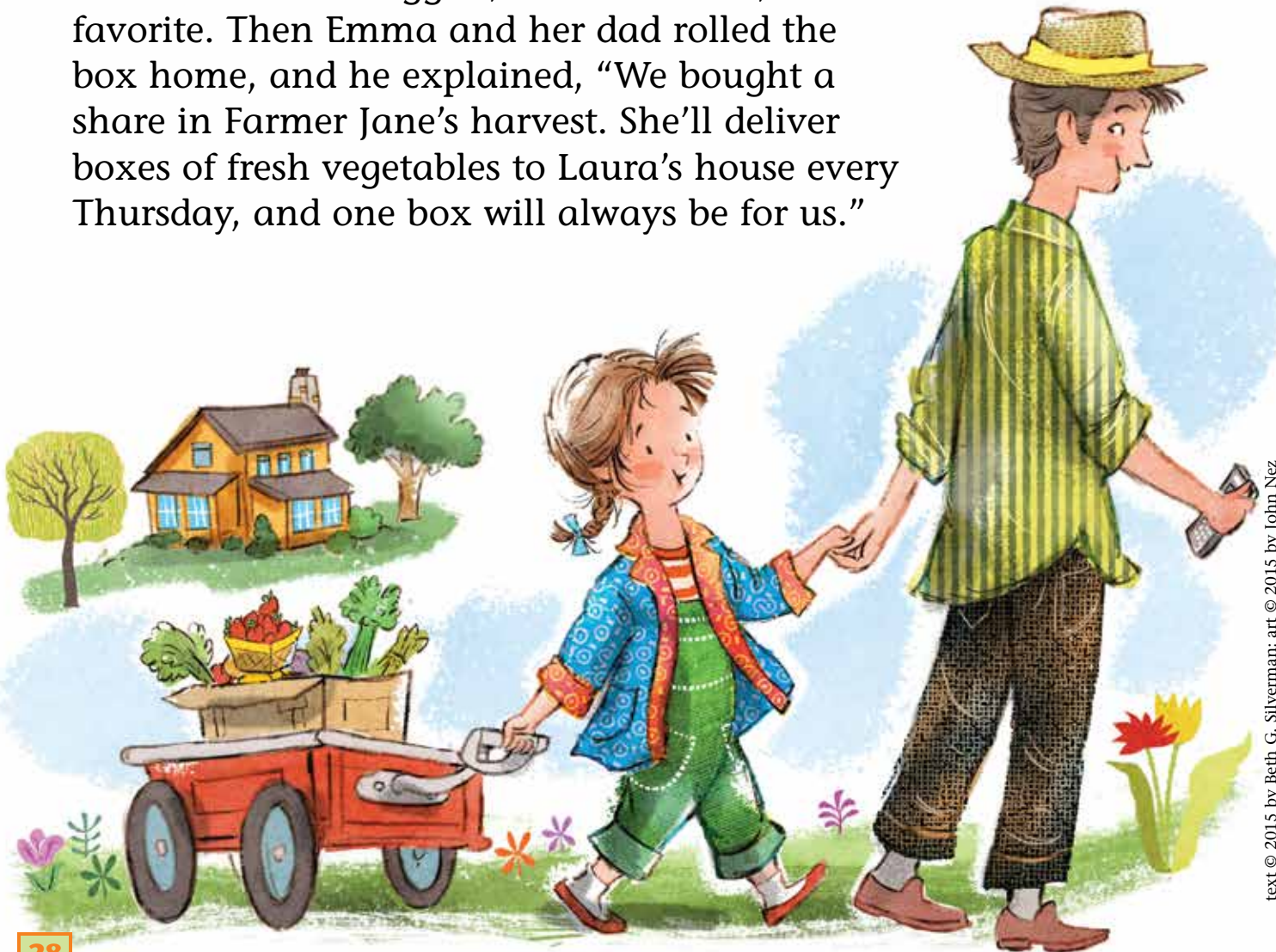


Emma loved Thursdays. That's when she and her dad pulled her wagon to her friend Laura's house. The first time they went, Emma thought it was to play with Laura. But Laura wasn't home, only her mom—and six big boxes sitting on the kitchen floor. "Choose one," said Laura's mom.

Emma looked inside the boxes. They were all filled to the brim with colorful vegetables, and—yum!—each held a little basket of ripe strawberries. Emma picked the box with the biggest, reddest berries, her favorite. Then Emma and her dad rolled the box home, and he explained, "We bought a share in Farmer Jane's harvest. She'll deliver boxes of fresh vegetables to Laura's house every Thursday, and one box will always be for us."

Fresh from the Farm

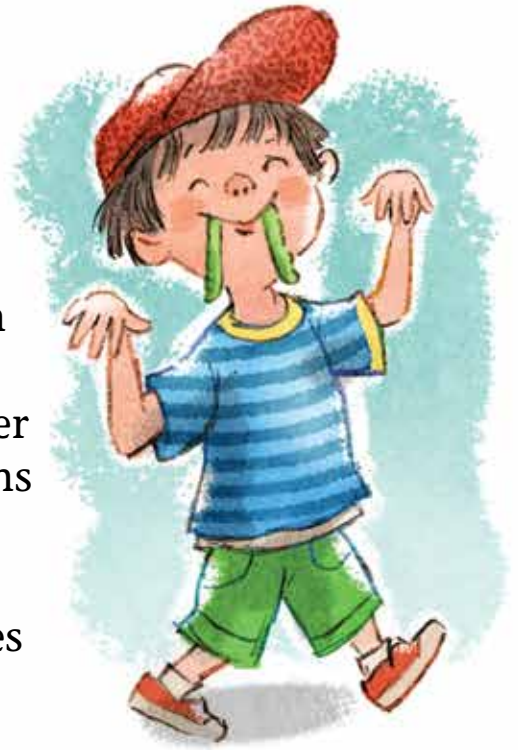
by Buffy Silverman
art by John Nez



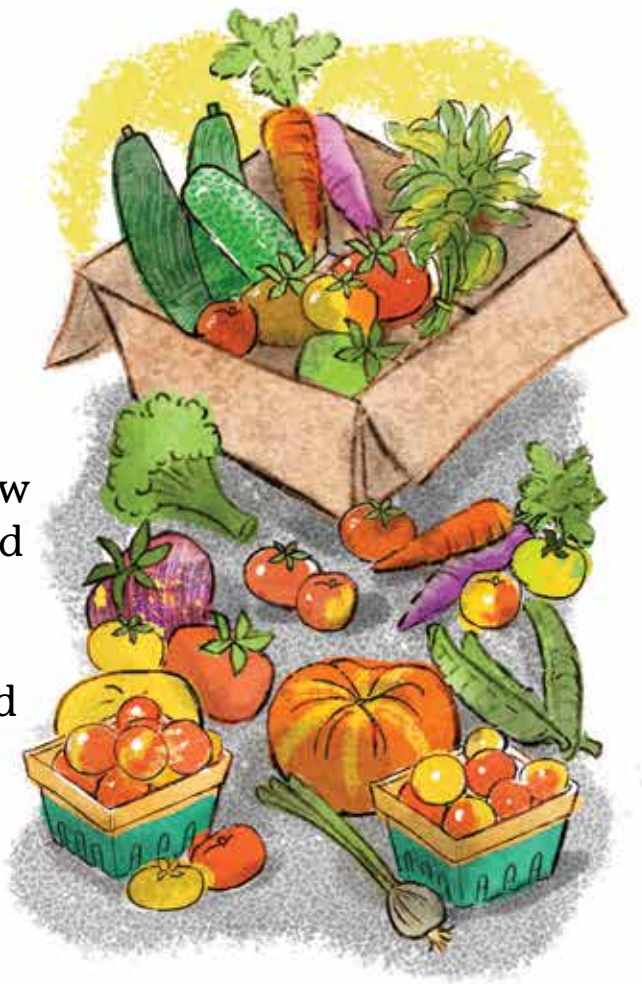
Each week Farmer Jane filled the boxes with whatever food was ready to pick at the farm. In June Emma munched on crunchy pods of sugar snap peas. She washed red and green heads of lettuce and tore the leaves up for salad. And she snacked on sweet, juicy strawberries whenever she had the chance.



Strawberry season was over too soon for Emma, but she loved the big bags of green beans that Farmer Jane packed in July. “Can I eat some green beans raw?” she asked her mom. Mom gave Emma and her little brother Derek a plate of beans. Derek stuck two beans under his lips and pretended to be a walrus. Emma laughed. One week she looked in the box and found a bunch of carrots with leaves on the top. “Look,” she said. “Some of the carrots are purple!”



In August Emma was excited to see tomatoes in the box. There were red ones, orange ones, yellow ones, purple ones, and even striped ones. Some were the size of grapefruits! “I like the tiny, red tomatoes best,” said Emma, and she popped one in her mouth. Farmer Jane had also packed long, skinny green zucchini and yellow summer squashes. Emma’s mom sliced and cooked them in a big pan with herbs from the box. She served them on top of spaghetti. Yum! Emma loved spaghetti with vegetable sauce.



Sometimes the farm box had vegetables that Emma had never tasted before. Would she like beets, Swiss chard, bok choy, or kale? Bravely, Emma took a tiny bite of a dark green kale leaf. “Yuck!” she said. “Kale is bitter.” But then Emma and Dad tore the leaves into pieces and baked crunchy kale chips. “They taste like potato chips!” Emma said, and she gobbled them up.

Every family that had bought a share in the farm's harvest took a turn helping Farmer Jane. All summer Emma asked when it would be her family's turn to help. The big day finally came in September.

At the farm Emma saw a tall boy wearing a cap. "Do you know Farmer Jane?" she asked. "We're here to help her."

The boy smiled. "I'm Luke, Farmer Jane's son. Follow me and I'll show you what we're going to harvest today."

Emma turned to her little brother. "That means picking the vegetables," she explained.



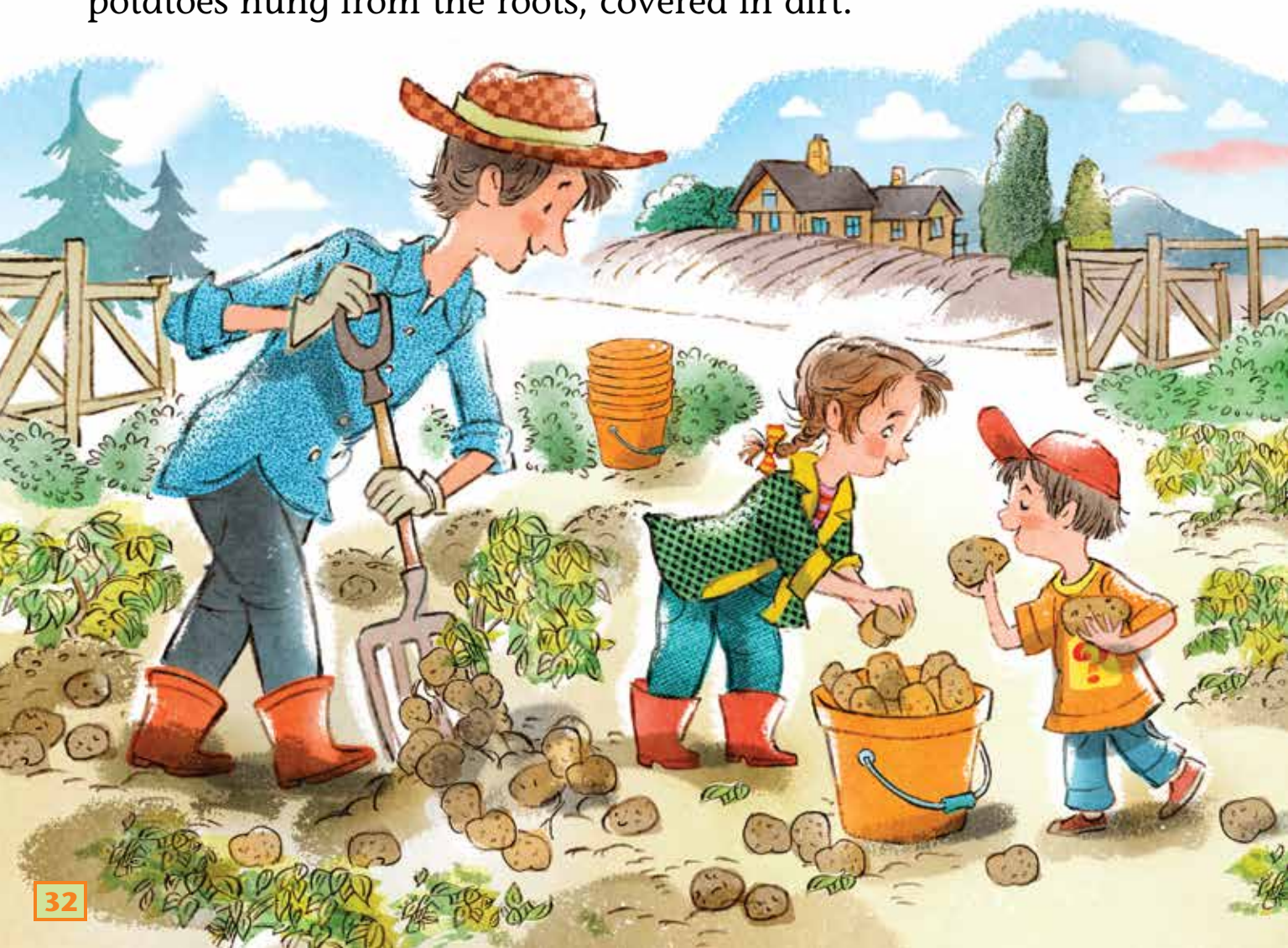
“That’s right,” said Dad. “Sometimes you need special tools to pick vegetables.” He carried a garden fork that Luke had given him.

Emma ran to Farmer Jane when she saw her in the field. “What are we going to harvest?” she asked.

Farmer Jane smiled. She had a fork in her hand like the one Dad carried. “We’re picking potatoes!”

Where were the potatoes? All Emma saw were pale, floppy plants. Then Luke showed them what to do. The potatoes were underground!

Dad dug carefully in the soil the way Luke had shown him. He lifted a plant. Round, brown potatoes hung from the roots, covered in dirt.

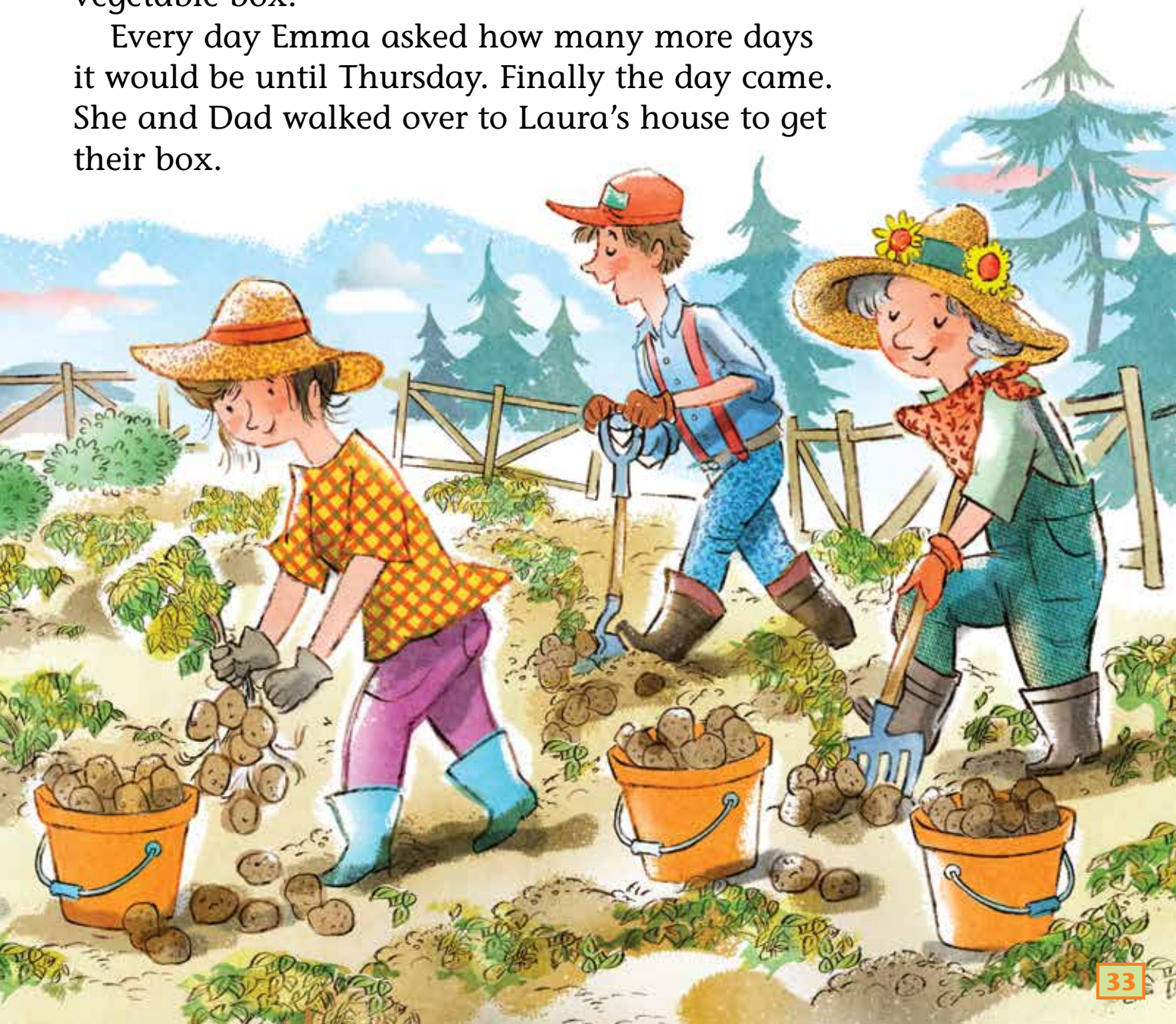


Emma and Derek felt in the soil and found more potatoes. It was like finding buried treasure! They put the potatoes in buckets. That afternoon they helped fill many buckets of potatoes.

“Can we bring a bucket of potatoes home?” asked Emma.

“The potatoes need to dry first,” said Farmer Jane. “Then we’ll brush off the dirt. But on Thursday you might find some potatoes in your vegetable box.”

Every day Emma asked how many more days it would be until Thursday. Finally the day came. She and Dad walked over to Laura’s house to get their box.



Six boxes stood on the counter. And one of them had her name on it! “Farmer Jane said this was your special box,” said Laura’s mom.

When Emma and her dad got home, they unpacked the vegetable box. Emma took out tomatoes, cucumbers, radishes, and zucchini. There were winter squashes and bags of lettuce.

At the bottom of the box was a special treasure—Emma’s potatoes! She found a note from Farmer Jane too. It said, **Thank you for helping harvest potatoes.** She and Dad washed some potatoes for dinner. Emma could hardly wait to eat them.

