

The Helium Egg

E. Dorinda Shelley

Eleanor A. Hutton, Illustrator

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Surprising and strange, The Helium Egg is a colorful picture book whose suspense leads somewhere unexpected.

E. Dorinda Shelley and Eleanor A. Hutton's boldly colorful picture book *The Helium Egg* shows how a community of farm animals help to care for each other.

A young farm girl named Kath discovers a soft, blue egg in the chicken coop one day and gives it to Little Black Hen to sit on and help hatch. The egg, however, is not like the other chicken eggs; it grows and grows in size and begins to float into the air, as if there were helium inside. Together, the farm animals—including ducks, turkeys, cats, geese, peacocks, and more—help the hen hold the strange egg down. When it's finally ready to hatch, there are odd, unexpected creatures inside—baby ghosts—which the hen accepts as her own.

Suspense builds over the course of the book at an exciting pace. Though the curious properties of the egg are never explained—except to imply that's simply what baby ghost eggs are like—the egg's increasingly strange behavior and growing size keep the pages turning.

The characters, including Kath and the Little Black Hen, do not have developed personalities, though their presence adds humor to the tale. All of the characters function to build suspense, as more and more animals work to protect the egg as it continues to grow and float faster.

While Kath narrates at the start of the story, she leaves the chicken coop after giving the egg to the hen, only to return when the egg has hatched. The narrative turns to the third person later.

The book's illustrations are brightly colored, with pink cats, a red horse, and green and orange ducks, and are entertaining and interesting to look at. Some pages are crowded with animals, making it difficult to discern what is going on. The last few pages are repetitive, with the Little Black Hen sitting with the baby ghosts and baby chicks. The book's theme is unclear, though the cooperation between its farm animals—while never explored in depth—is endearing.

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AIMÉE JODOIN (January 31, 2019)

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