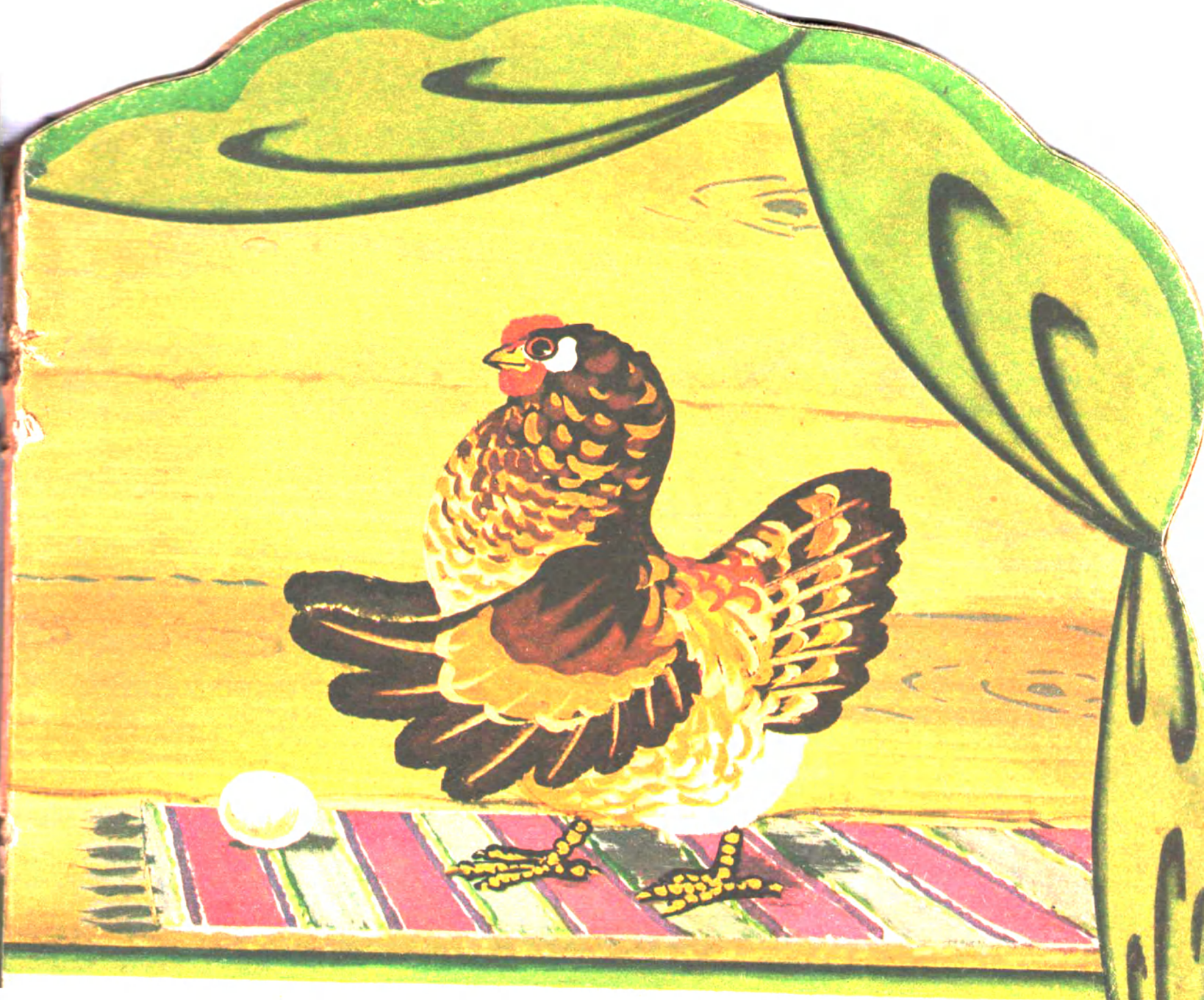




Samuil Marshak

**THE SPECKLED HEN
AND THE TEN DUCKLINGS**





Do you know the tale
About Grandpa and Grandma and the speckled hen?

If you do, why, then
I'll tell you another
That you can tell your sister
Or your brother.

There once lived, I don't know just when,
Another Grandpa, another Grandma,
And another speckled hen.
Now, the hen laid an egg,

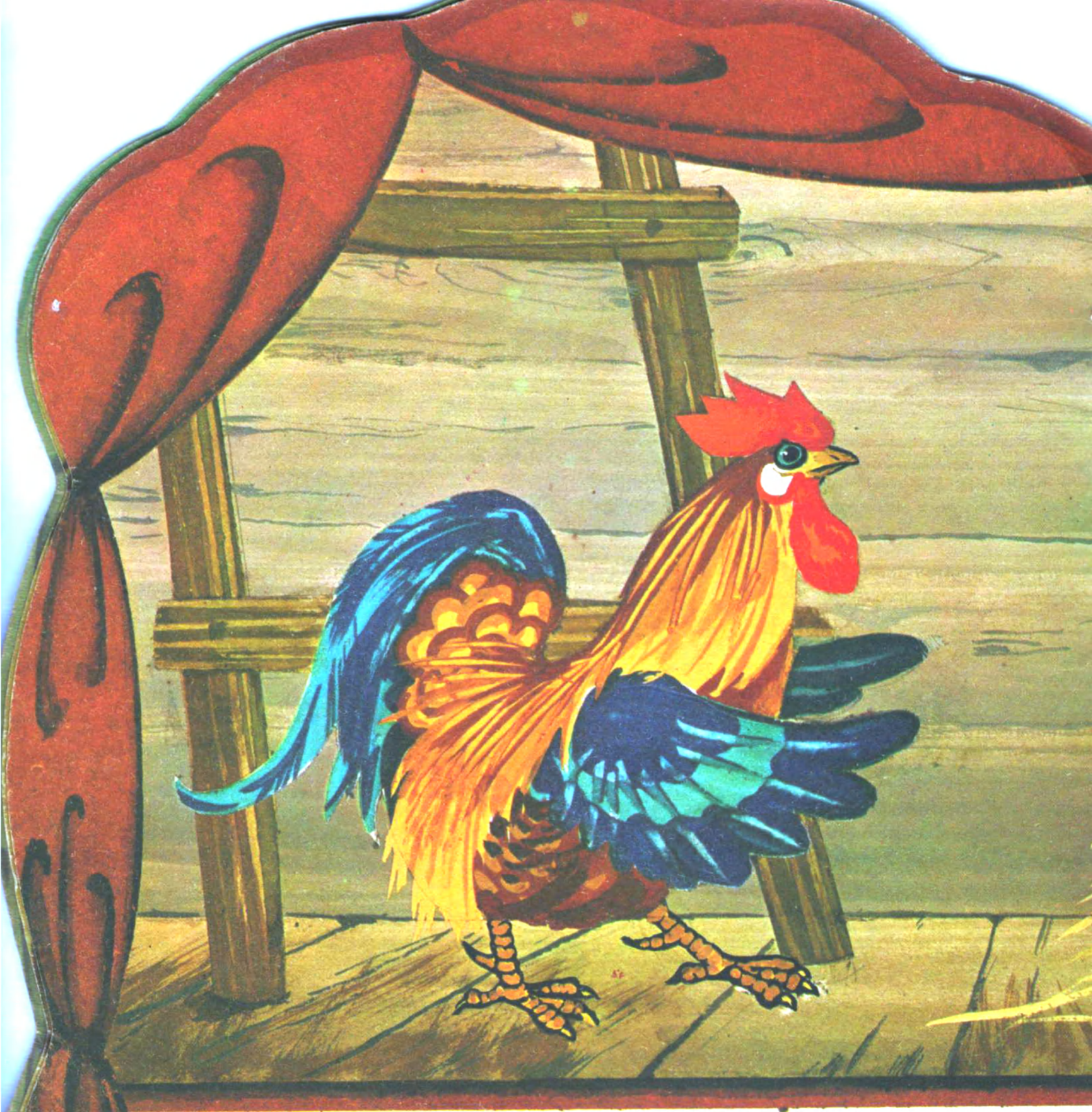




Not one of gold,
But a plain egg, an egg that was raw,
And a better egg you never saw.

But a mouse ran past
As some mice often do,
Pushed the egg with its tail
And it broke in two!

The speckled hen cried
And she could not stop,
And hearing her, Grandma



Came hurrying up.
She held a basket with ten eggs in it.
“Stop crying, Speckles, for a minute!”
She said. “These eggs are duck eggs, true,
But ducklings make nice children, too.”



The speckled hen was pleased as Punch!
Said she, "I think I'll miss my lunch."
And careful where she put her legs,
Herself she seated on the eggs.
Nor did she leave them, day or night,
And was a very touching sight.



Ten ducklings, as the weeks wore on,
Broke through their shells one after one.
Their bills were flat, they had webbed feet.
“Quack-quack!” went they. “We want to eat!
We’re hungry
and we’re thirsty too...”



Please, Mother, hurry, feed us, do!"

The hen had thought that they would say
"Cheep-cheep!" and sighing, looked away.
Still, they were hers, all ten, and so
She said,

"Cack-cackle, come, let's go!"



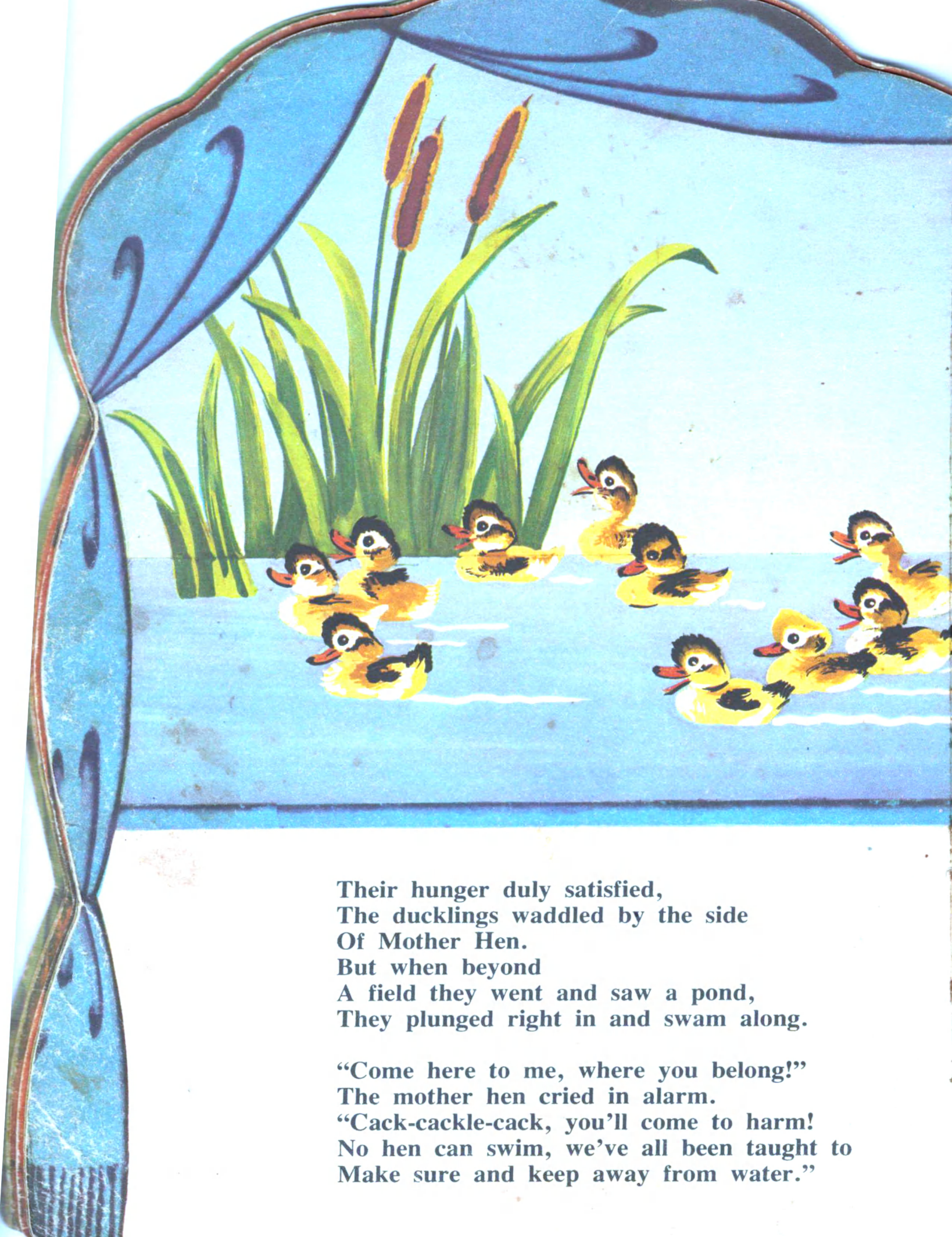
She led them all out through the gate,
And calling to them, "Children, wait!"
Scraped at the ground
and scraped again
In search of some nice worm or grain.

She soon found both, and to her brood
Called gaily, "Here, come get your food!"—



But all to no avail, for they,
Which quite amazed her,
Stayed away.
Instead, they pecked at grass, which you
Will surely know, no chick can do.

Its beak's too short for that, you see,
And also made quite differently.



Their hunger duly satisfied,
The ducklings waddled by the side
Of Mother Hen.
But when beyond
A field they went and saw a pond,
They plunged right in and swam along.

"Come here to me, where you belong!"
The mother hen cried in alarm.
"Cack-cackle-cack, you'll come to harm!
No hen can swim, we've all been taught to
Make sure and keep away from water."

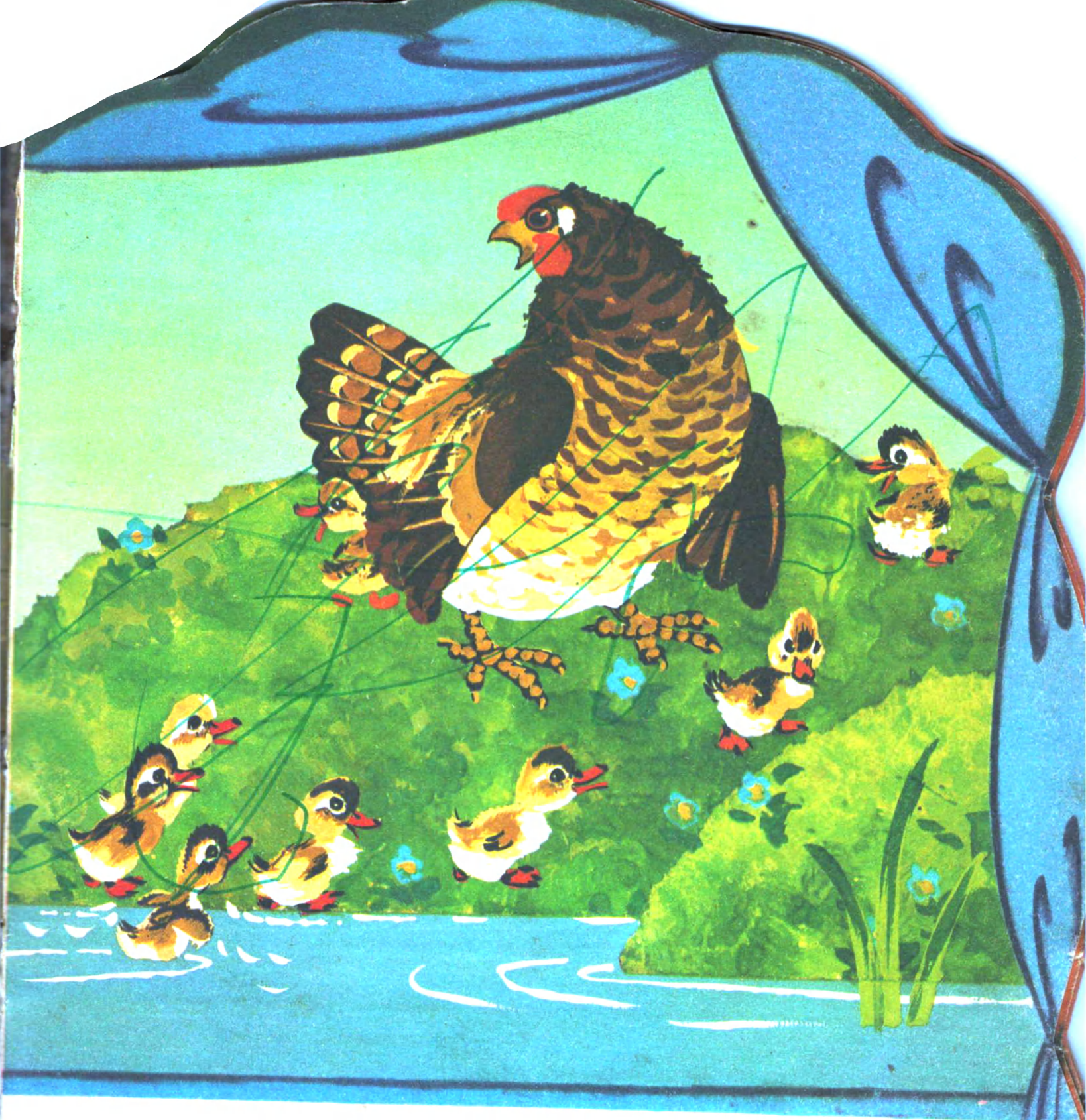


But though she shouted, "Oh, oh, oh!"
And in distress ran to and fro,
She could not get them to come out
And was quite scared, I have no doubt.
But in the end, still cackling loudly,
She watched as they swam past her proudly.

Time passed, and now, nine of the brood
On to the shore stepped, feeling good.
Not so the tenth, who splashed about



And said that he would not come out!
He saw a bug and dived right down.
Cried Mother Hen,
“Help! He will drown!”
But no, for soon he joined her too,
And now all followed her anew.
And oh, what fun in store lay for them—



Another pond lay just before them!
They made for it, but stopped in fright
As of a tomcat they caught sight,
Who, hidden by tall blades of grass,
Lay there in wait for them.

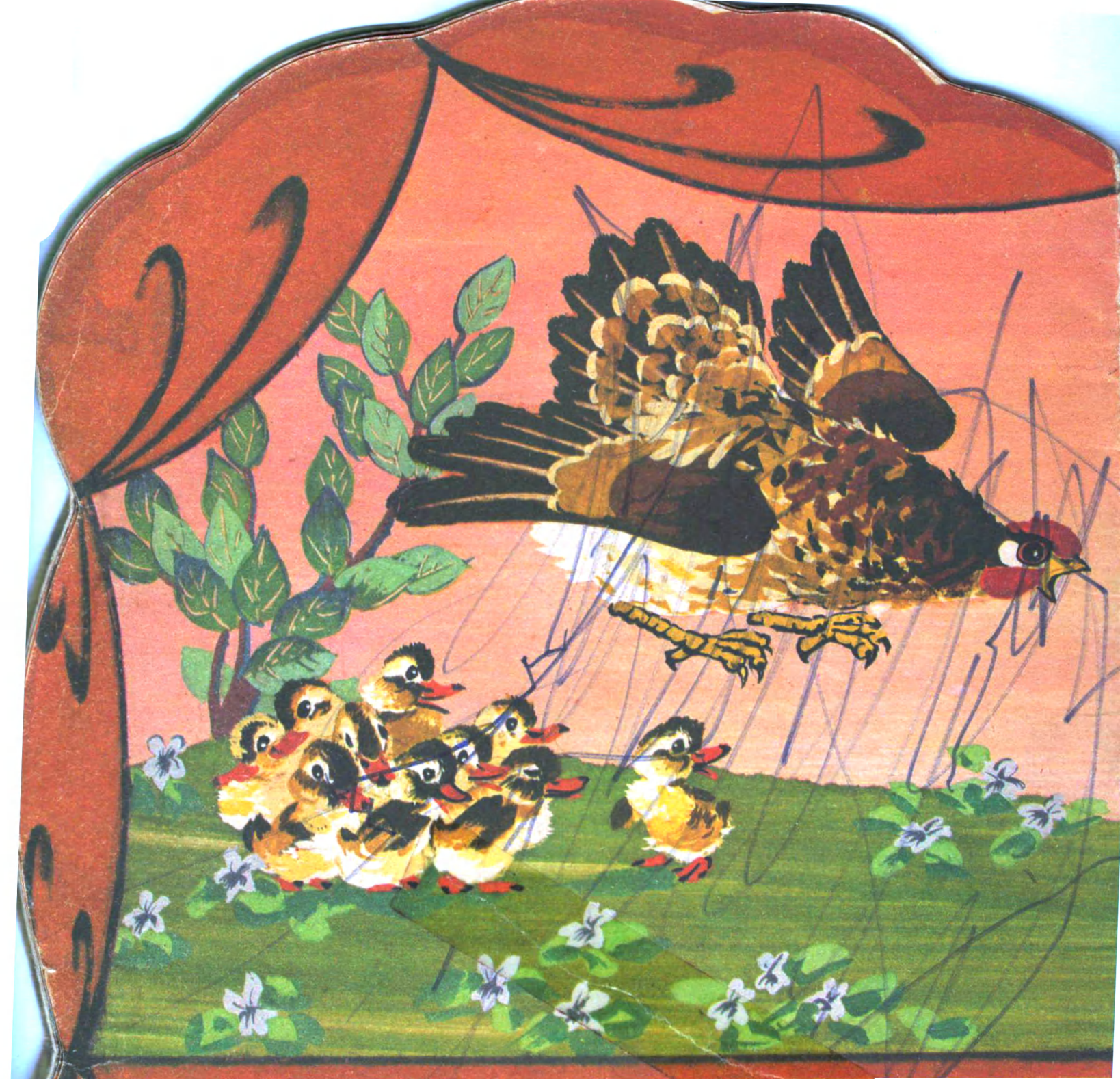
But as
He was about to spring, the hen



Fixed her eye crossly on him, then,
Although she'd never learned to fly,
To do so made an earnest try,
And, feathers ruffled, wings outspread,
With pointed beak and lowered head,
Went straight at him, and with good cause:
To save her children from his claws!



The cat was routed in the fight
And very wisely took to flight.
Past hummocks, stumps and trees he ran
As fast as only few cats can.



And yet, enraged, determined, grim,
The mother hen kept after him.
No gully stopped her, nor a hill—
On, on she chased him with a will.

I'm pretty sure that you'll agree:
No hen was born as brave as she!



The illustration depicts a single duckling with a white body, a black patch around its eye, and a red beak, standing in a pond. The pond is surrounded by green lily pads and several blue flowers. The background is a dark, textured brown with a large, reddish-brown circular shape in the upper center. The entire scene is framed by a dark, irregular border.

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