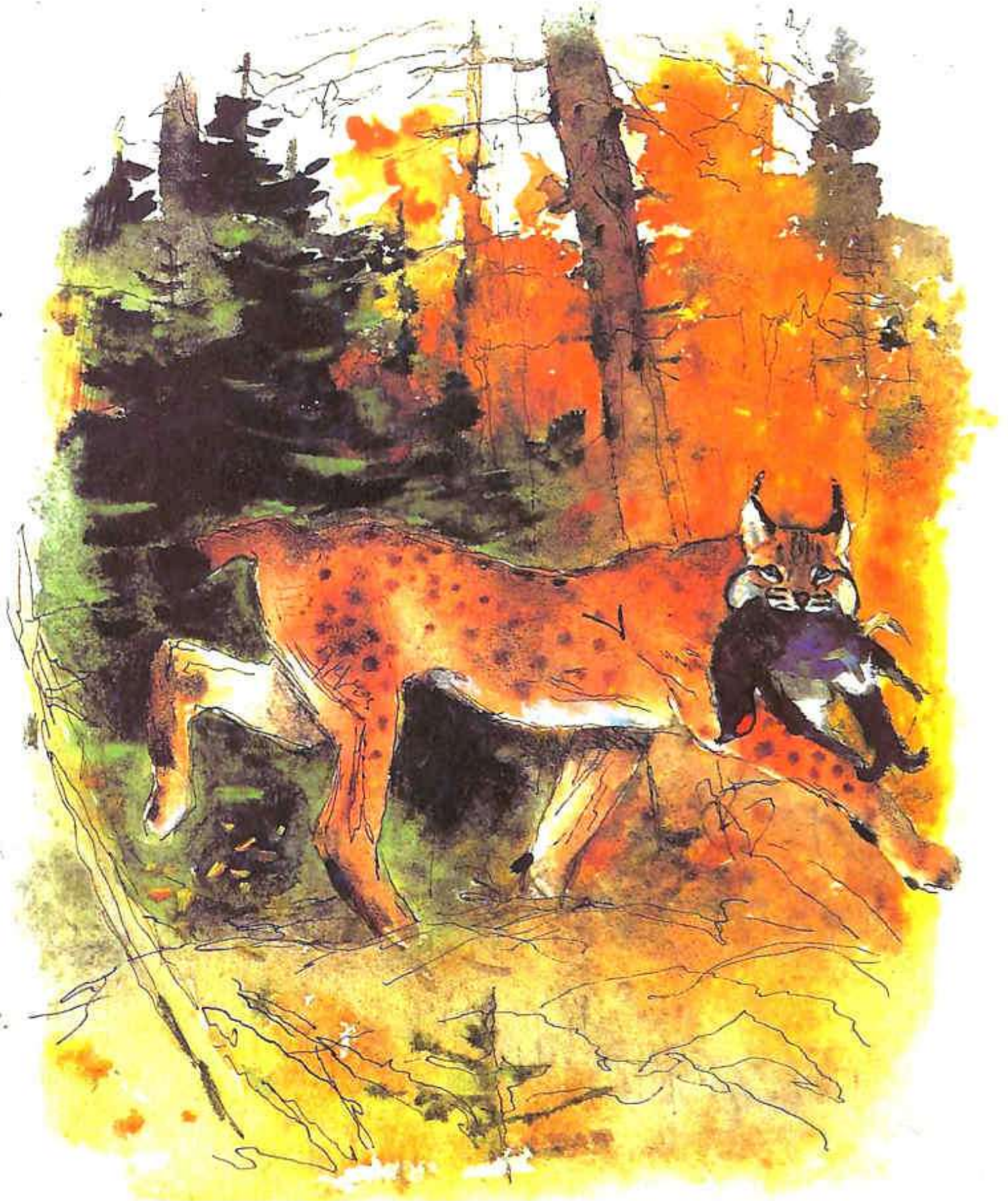
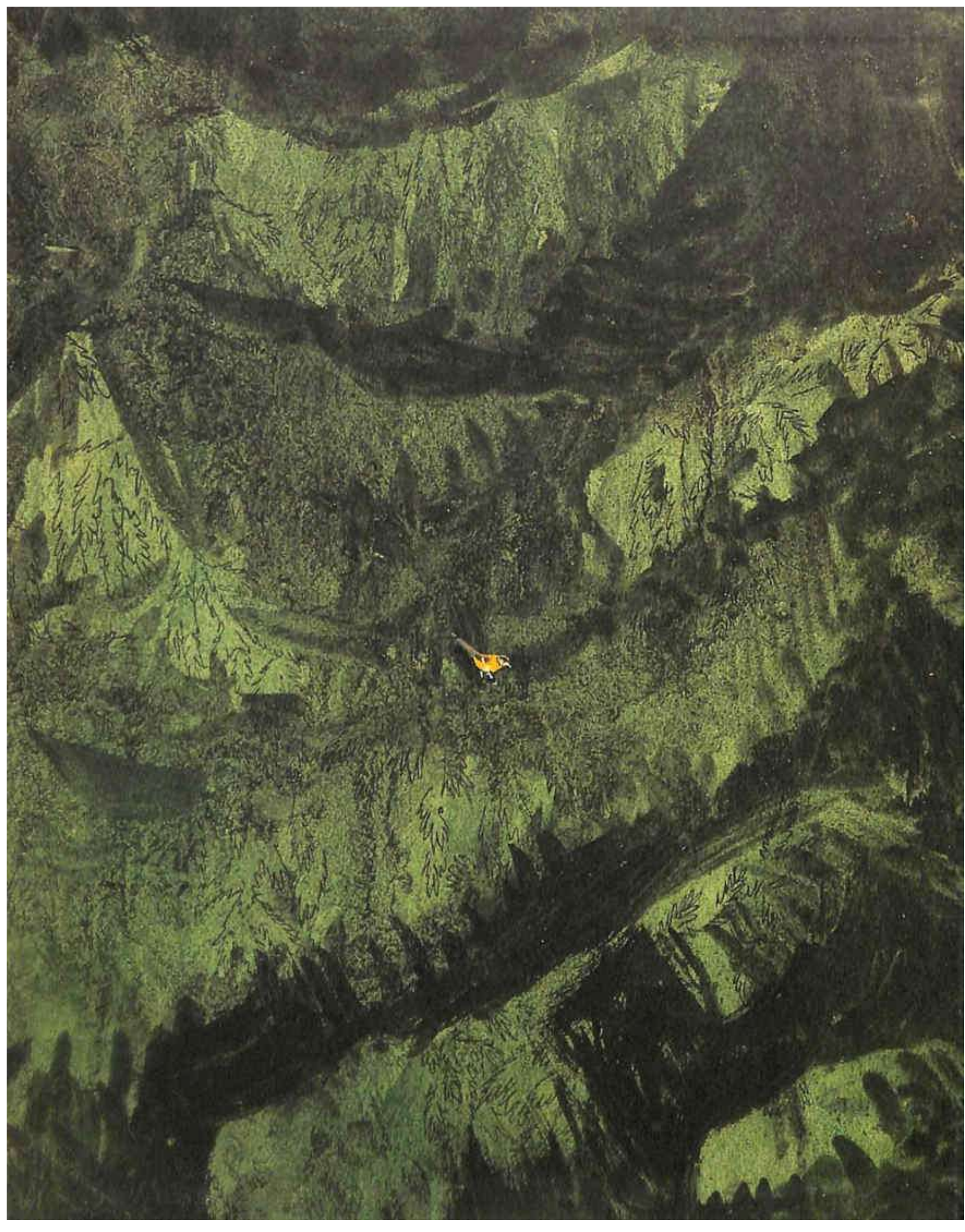


Ivan Sokolov-Mikitov

FOREST SEASONS



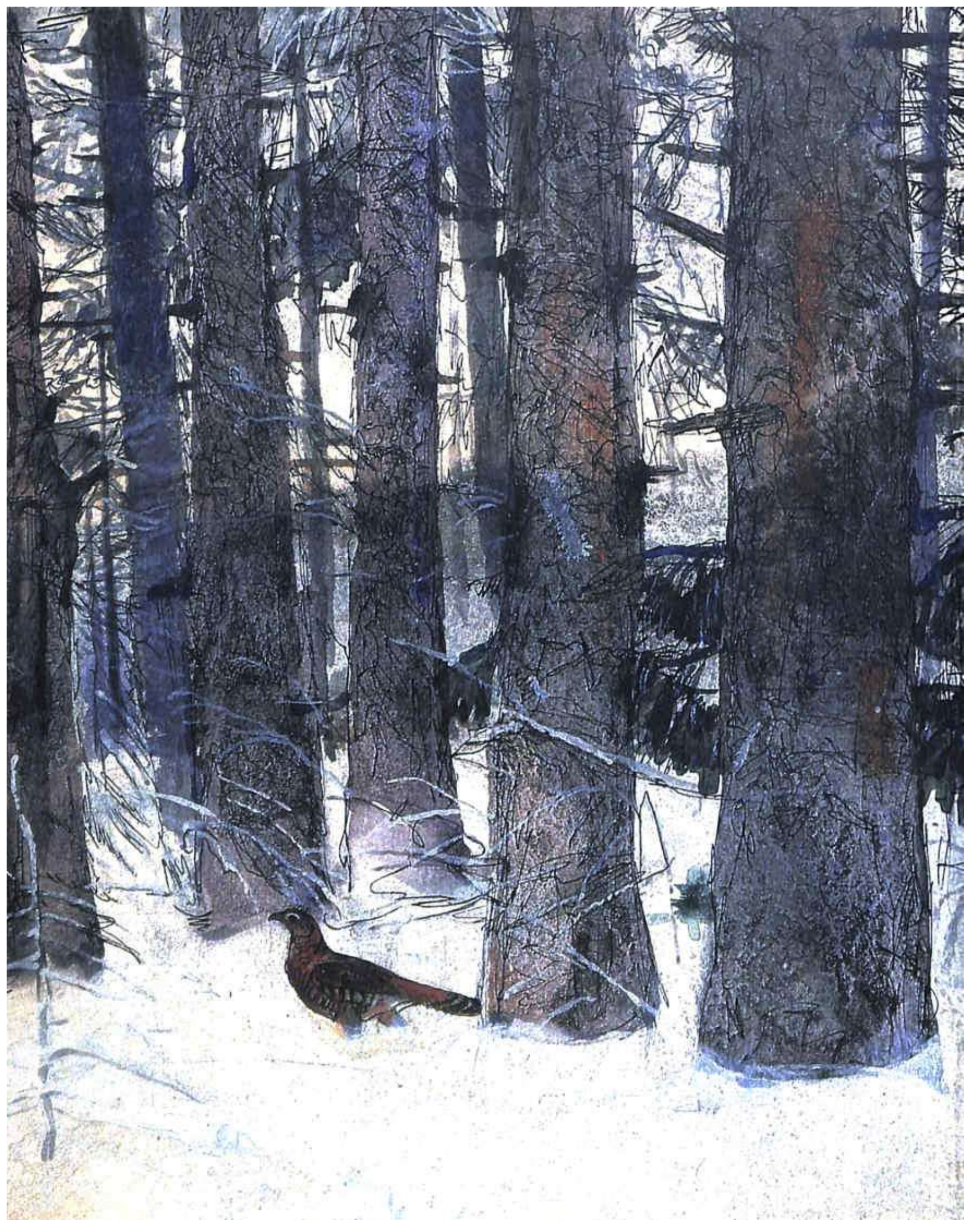




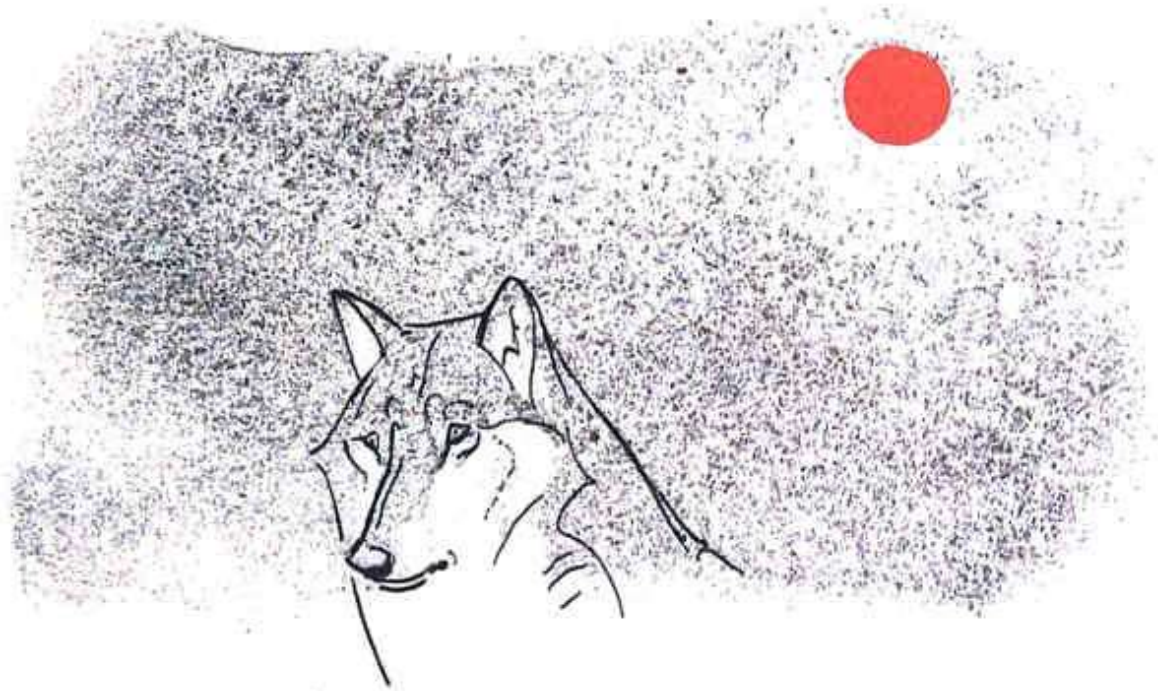




WINTER







Snow has fallen.

The ground is resting under this clean, white blanket. The snowdrifts are deep in places.

The trees put on heavy white hats, and a hush falls on the forest.

Hunters see the intricate and pretty patterns of prints made by birds and beasts in the smooth new snow.

Here are the prints of a hare made in the night around the young aspens he had been gnawing; there goes an ermine with its black-tipped tail raised, out hunting for birds and field mice. The prints of an old he-fox weave along the forest edge in a beautiful chain. And prowling wolves have walked along the very edge of the field in single file, leaving only one set of prints.

And elks have crossed the wide much-used road digging up the snow with their hooves.

A great many large and small beasts and birds live and feed in the quiet, snow-clad forest.





ON THE FOREST EDGE

All is quiet in the winter forest early in the morning. Serenely rises the sun.

The old red he-fox is coming back from the night's hunt along the forest edge, keeping to the rim of the snow-clad field.

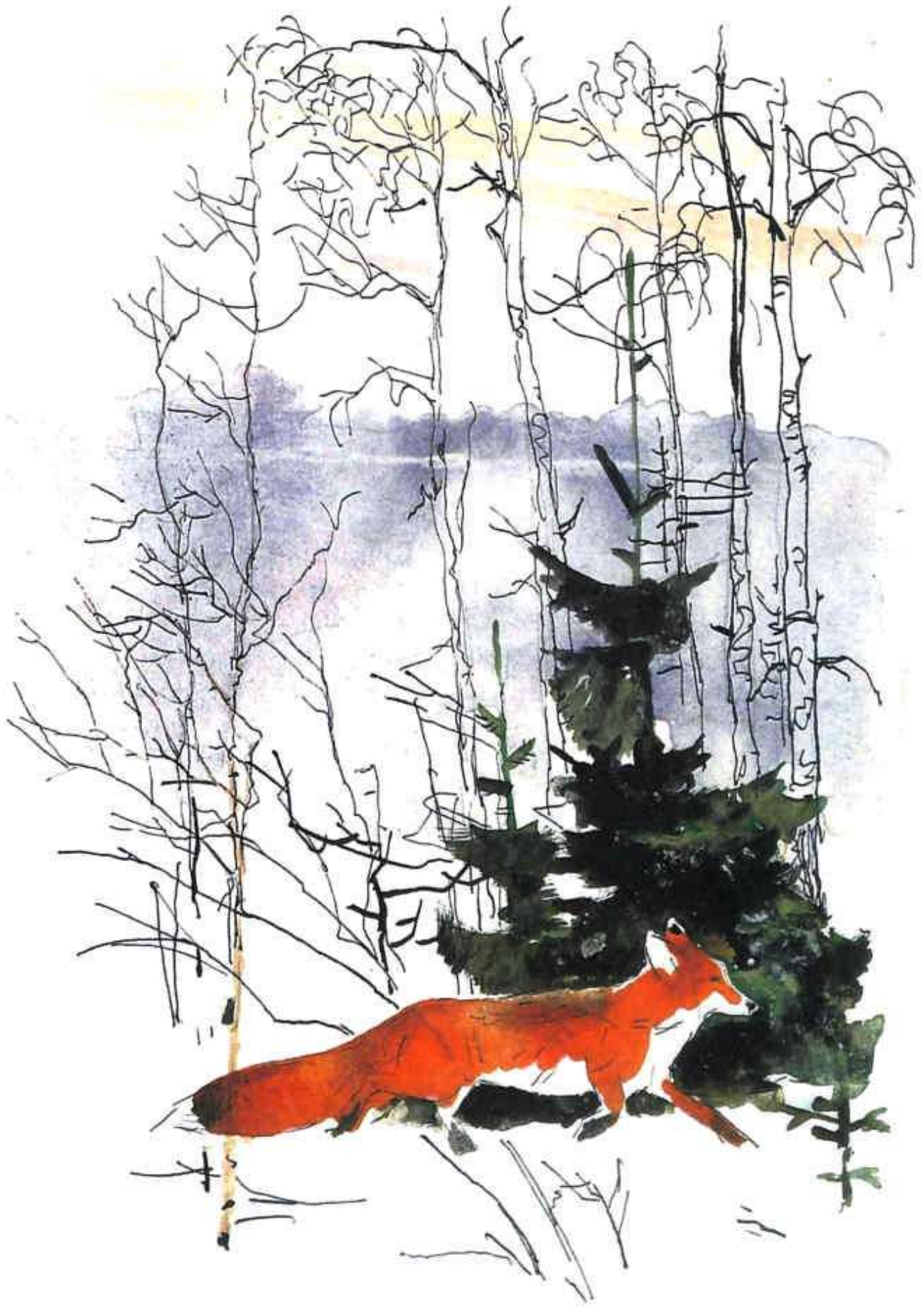
The snow creaks softly and crumbles under his feet as they leave a winding pattern of prints.

The he-fox stops to listen and look, perhaps a mouse will give a squeak in its winter nest under a hummock, or a carefree young hare will jump out from behind a bush.

A titmouse stirs in the branches and on seeing the fox gives a thin little squeak. A small flock of cross-bills flies over the forest edge, whistling to each other, and hastily scatters about the crown of a fir, lavishly adorned with cones.

The old he-fox hears a squirrel returning home to its tree, causing a cushion of snow to come tumbling down from a swaying branch in a spray of sparkling snow-dust.

The sly old he-fox sees everything, hears everything, knows everything in the forest.





BLACK GROUSE

The bright winter sun has risen over the forest, sparkling and lighting up the snows with an amber glow.

A flock of handsome black grouse have flown out of their nighttime hollows made in the deep, fluffy snow and settled on the sunlit birch-tree adorned with lacy rime.

The black grouse are feeding at leisure, pecking at the fragrant leaf-buds, and then strolling under the trees, leaving the pretty crosses of their foot-prints on the clean spread of snow.

They live here all winter in large close-knit flocks. For the night they make deep holes in the snow and bury themselves in.

They cannot be reached there by their mortal foe the goshawk, nor can the sly old fox find them, not even he.

From a distance the old he-fox watches the handsome, ornately feathered birds feeding on the birches and strolling on the snow under the trees.

And the sight makes his mouth water...





ON THE FOREST ROAD

Heavy trucks loaded with logs are coming along the winter road, one after another.

An elk has jumped out of the forest.

Bravely he runs across the wide, much-used road.

One of the drivers stops to admire the powerful, handsome animal.

There are a lot of elk in our forests. They wander in herds over the snow-drifted marshes, and go into hiding in the thickets of large forests.

People do them no harm, they leave them alone.

Only the hungerful wolves venture to attack an elk. The strong elk fight off the vicious wolves with their antlers and hooves.

The elk are not afraid of anyone in the forest. They bravely walk about the forest glades, go across the wide clearings and much-used roads, and often come close to villages and towns.





CAPERCAILZIES

The capercaillies winter in dense pine forests feeding on the resinous needles of the young pines.

The capercaillie is the largest bird in our forests, and a rare one.

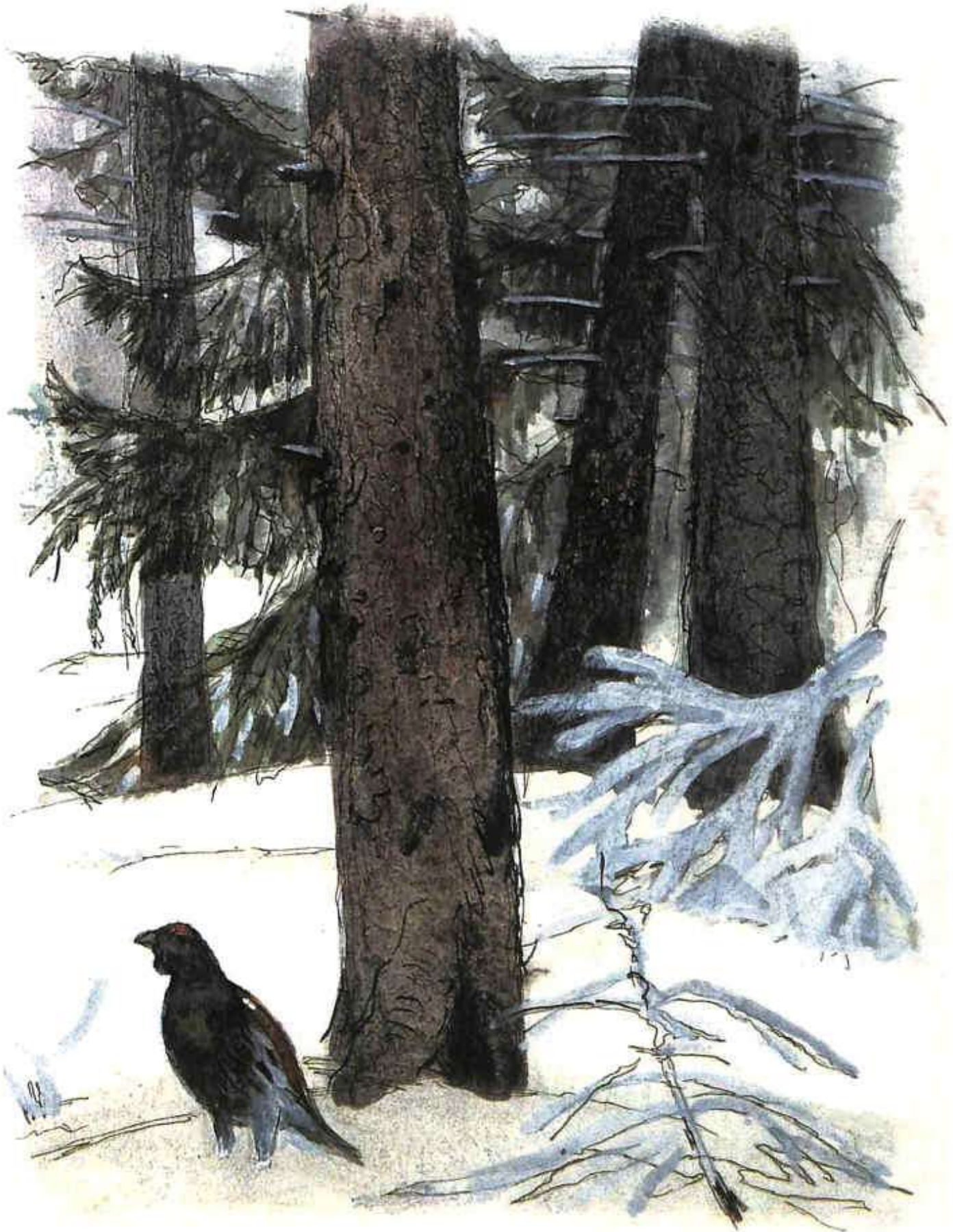
In summer, they keep out of sight, together with the elks, in the thickets and on the mossy marshes.

To see the capercaillies in the forest in winter or hear their wonderful mating song in spring is given only to the fortunate few.

It is only the most patient and skilful hunters, and then not many of them, who know where the capercaillies live, hide and sing.

Good, wise hunters spare these rare forest birds, and only creep up close to them to admire their strength and beauty.







THE HARE AND THE MARTEN

Elks have been passing through the forest and making a lot of noise.

The hare hears the noise, jumps out from under the fir, flattens his ears and tears off blindly as far as his fast legs can carry him.

He bounds through the forest, never looking round, in a panic that the huge elks will catch up with him and trample him to death.

Meanwhile, there is a mean marten sitting in a pine tree. Baring its sharp teeth, the marten is preparing to jump down and pounce on the hare.

The hare does not see the marten up there in the tree, and flies past.

No, there is no hope of catching this fleet-footed hare. If the marten jumps down from the tree it will be too late.

The hare's fast legs will have carried him far, far away by then!





IN THE LAIR

The bears go to hibernate in their lairs early in the winter, as soon as the first snow falls.

They fix up these winter homes of theirs in the forest thickets painstakingly and skilfully. They carpet the floor of the lair with soft, fragrant pine branches, the bark of young firs, and dry forest moss.

It is warm and cosy in the lair.

Once the frost sets in, the bears go to sleep. And the fiercer the cold, and the stronger the wind shaking and tousling the trees, the faster their sleep.

Late in the winter, the she-bears give birth to their tiny, blind cubs. It's nice and warm for the babes in the snow-drifted lair. Smacking their lips they suckle and crawl all over their huge, strong mother.

It is not until the thaw, not until the trees start dripping melted ice and the cushions of snow come falling from the boughs, that the he-bear wakes up. Has spring really come to stay, he wants to make sure. He pokes his head out of the lair, takes a look at the wintry forest, and goes back to sleep again.



WOLVES

In late winter, when the layer of snow grows deep, the wolves prowl over the fields and roads on cold, blizzardy nights. They catch hares, and lure out the credulous dogs.

In the winter, their eerie, hungry song is heard from afar.

The wolves howl, and the dogs in the nearby villages respond with alarmed barking.

After the night's raid, the wolves vanish in the forest.

Hunters on skis with guns slung over their shoulders and with little red flags in their hands soundlessly follow the tracks left by the wolves.

Cautiously they go around the wolves lying low in the thickets, and hang the little red flags, dangling from long strings on the twigs and boughs, to encircle the den.

The little red flags stir in the wind, and the wolves suspect danger in the fluttering. The hunters, having flushed the wolves out of their warm dens, hide in the forest.

An old he-wolf is first to see the little flags, and he stops short. The encircling little flags will keep him there now, there is no escape for him from the hunter and his gun.





DEER

There are deer in our large wild-life preserves and in our virgin forests.

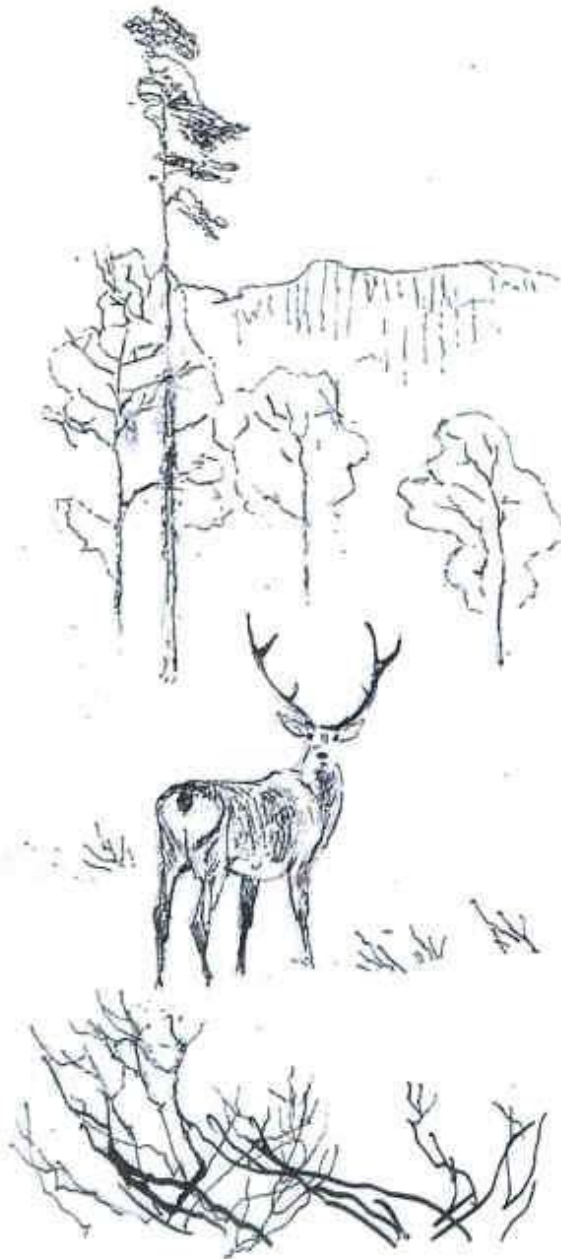
The deer is a beautiful animal with large antlers on its proudly held head.

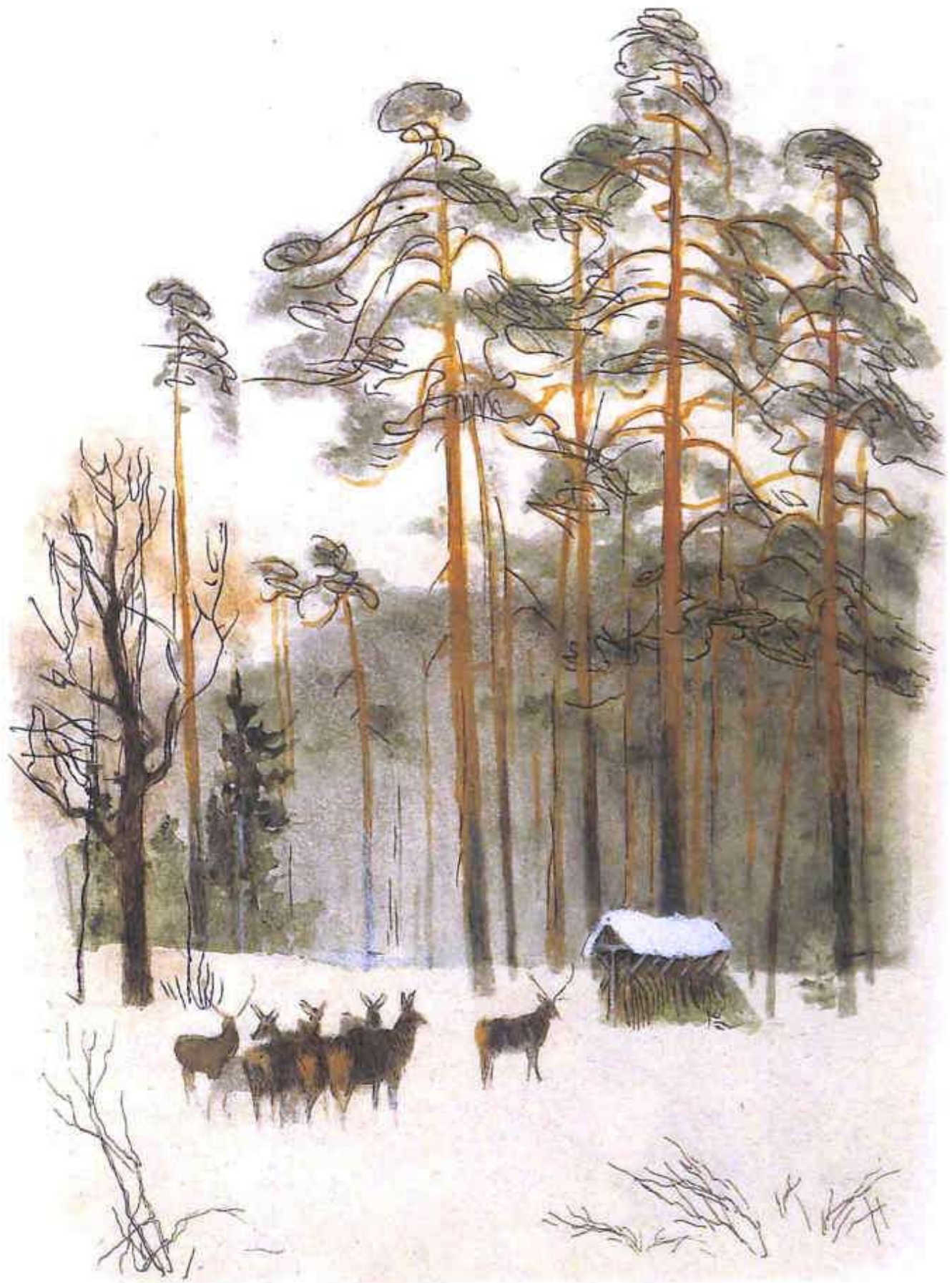
Once upon a time there were many deer everywhere. People caught them in snares, hunted them with hounds, killed them with arrows, stabbed them with spears and knocked them with clubs.

Hunting deer is now strictly forbidden. In the preserves the deer are guarded well. People keep them safe from wolves by shooting the wicked prowlers, they store up hay for the winter and set up feeding troughs for the deer in the forest.

These beautiful, brave animals are very trustful with people.

A feeding trough has been set up in the middle of a glade in the pine wood. Deer come here every evening. They munch the hay calmly and show hardly any fear when someone comes close to feast his eyes on them.







A WINTER NIGHT

Night descends on the forest.

The frost raps quietly on the tree trunks and boughs, making them shed the silver rime in flakes. Millions of bright winter stars are scattered across the dark, tall sky.

There is no sound to be heard in the forest or in the snow-clad forest glades.

And yet, life goes on in the forest on frosty winter nights too. A frozen twig snaps with a crackle — this means that a hare has run under the trees on his way somewhere. Something hoots and laughs horribly: this is an eagle-owl. Wolves break into a howl, and then fall silent.

Lithe weasels and polecats hunting mice run across the sparkling expanse of snow, leaving on it a tracery of their prints, while owls swoop soundlessly over the snowdrifts.

A young, grey, big-headed owlet perches on a bare branch like a sentry. In the darkness of night this owlet hears, sees and watches the life, hidden from the eyes of men, that goes on in the winter forest.



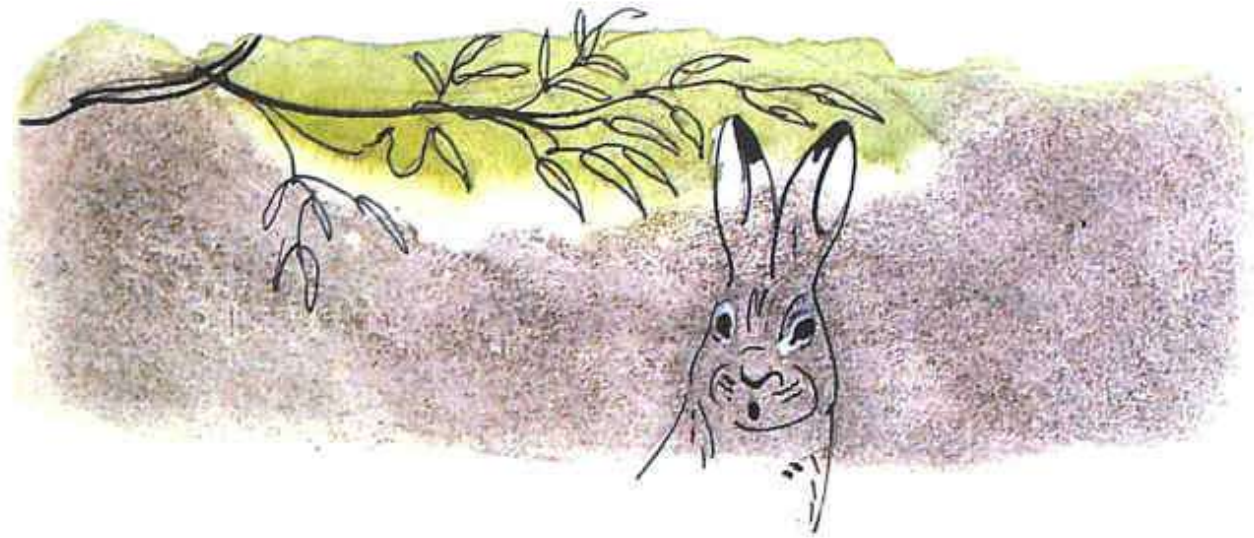




SPRING







In early spring a hunter makes his way across the dark forest through impenetrable thickets and marshes.

He has seen a lot of birds and animals in the awakened forest. He has seen a capercaillie drumming on the edge of the marsh, he has seen elk grazing in the sunlit young aspen grove, and he has seen an old wolf, holding his prey in his teeth, running along a gully to his den.

There is much that this observant hunter has seen and heard in the forest.

Spring is a joyful, noisy and fragrant season. The birds sing in shrill voices, brooks babble under the trees, the burgeoning leaf-buds give out a smell of resin.

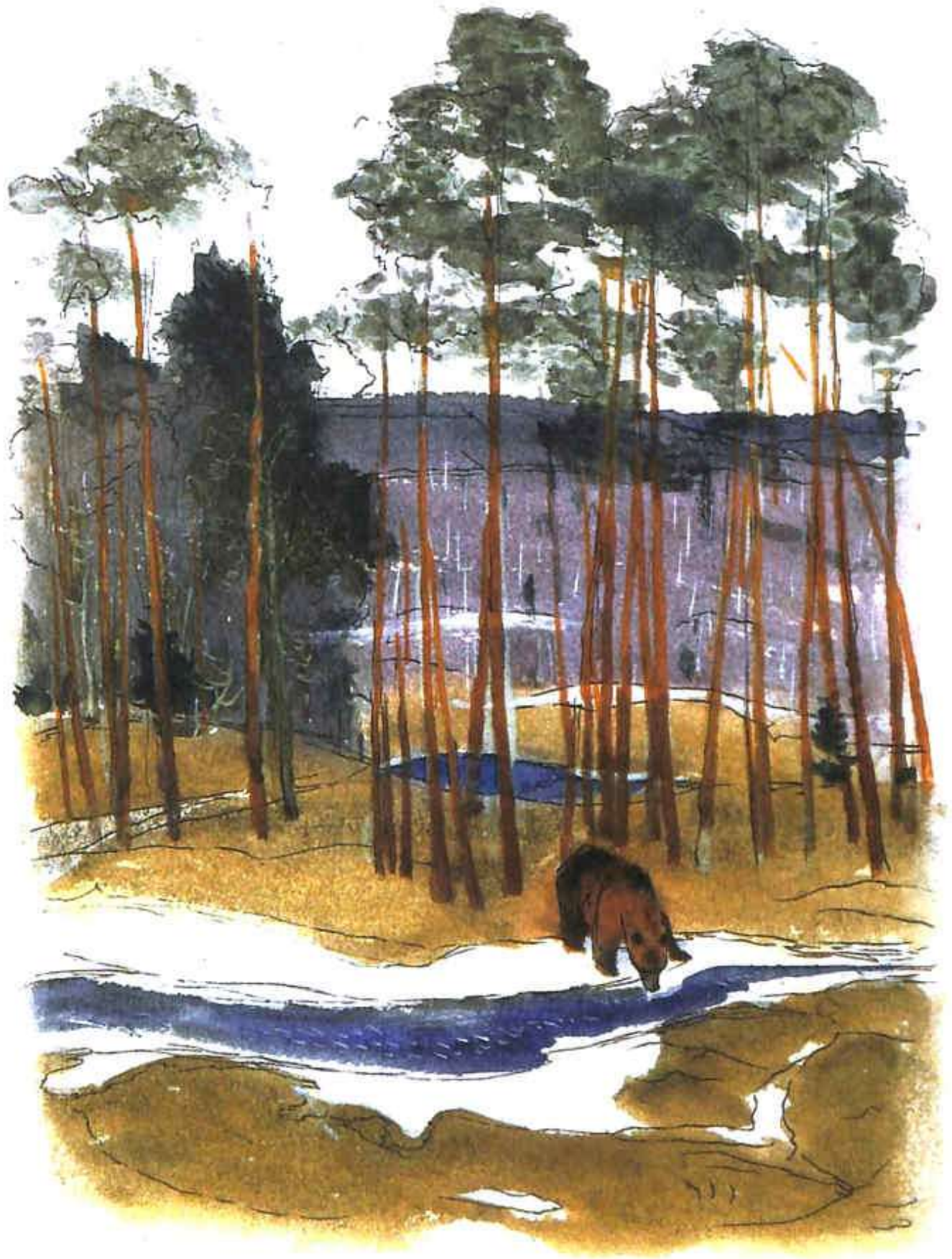
A warm breeze runs through the tree-tops.

Soon, very soon the forest will put on its new green finery, the bird-cherry trees on the forest edges will blossom, and nightingales will start trilling their songs in the bushes along the streams. Long-tailed cuckoos will arrive and start calling: "Cuckoo, Cuckoo, Cuckoo!"

Fussy little ants will start running busily about the hummocks, and the first bumble-bee will fly out of its winter asylum and hum for all to hear.

New grass and blue and white snowdrops will soon carpet the little forest glades.

How wonderful and jolly springtime is in the forest!



A SPRING MORNING

A capercailzie can be heard drumming early in the morning on the very edge of the marsh in the dark forest.

"Tek, tek, tek, tek," goes his soft spring song.

The forest is quiet in the morning, and every sound can be heard from a long way away.

That is a hare going through the thickets, stepping on the snapping twigs. A fox runs along the rim of the marsh, and a swift polecat has ducked into his burrow under an old tree root.

A loud trumpeting comes from the marsh where the long-legged cranes thus greet the sun.

A long-beaked snipe tears off from the marsh and flies straight into the sky, and from that height his quavering call sounds like the bleating of a little lamb.

Another snipe, sitting on a hummock, responds gladly with the same kind of cry.

The capercailzie drums faster and faster, ever more hotly, and from afar it sounds as if someone is sharpening his axe.

The capercailzie does not see or hear well when he is drumming. And he did not see or hear the vixen creeping up on him.







ON THE FOREST EDGE

The sun is rising higher and higher over the forest.

An elk has come to the forest edge with her newlyborn long-legged calf and fallen into a doze in the warm sun.

The calf is learning how to run. His long legs trip on the tall hummocks.

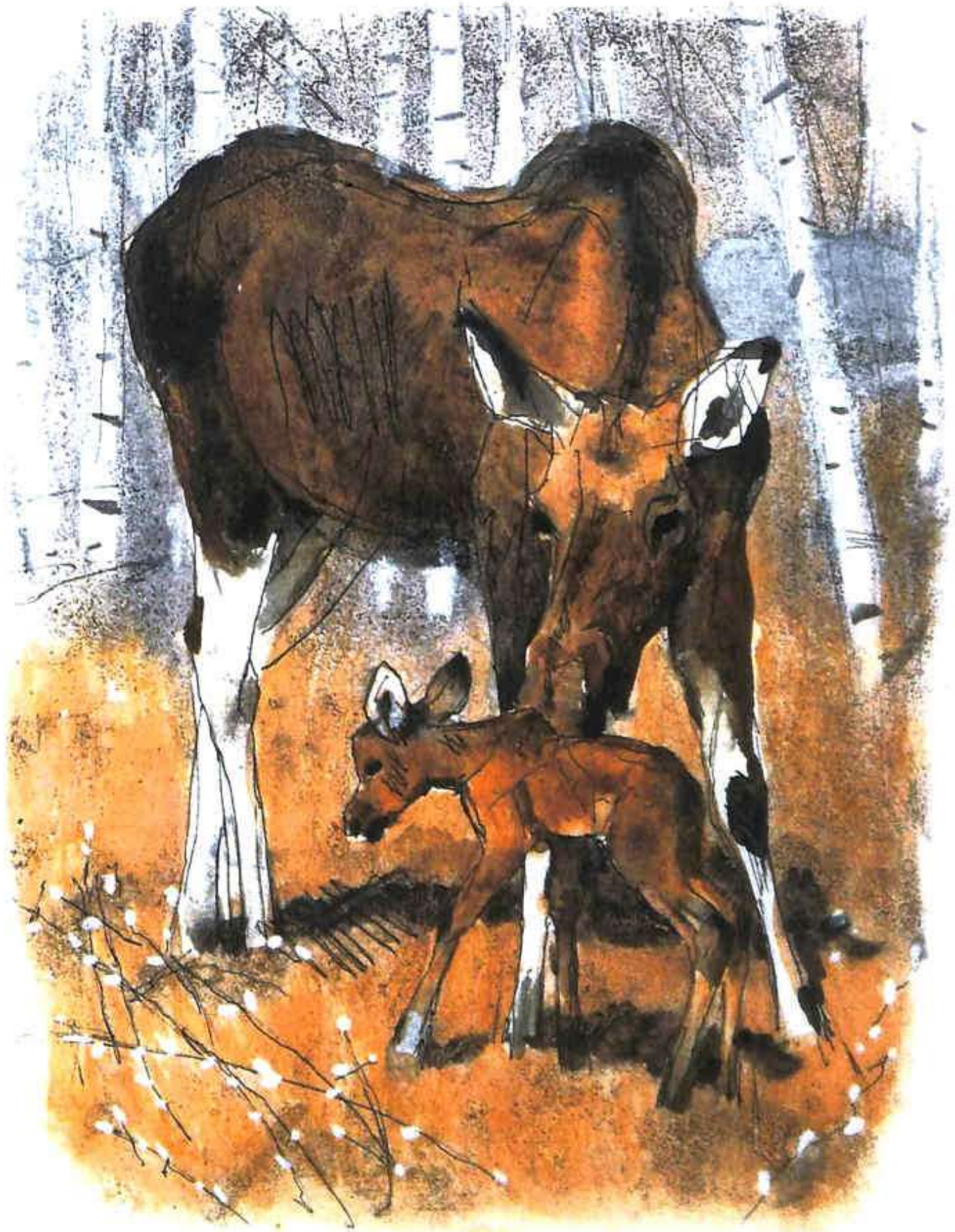
The forest has thinned out towards the edge, and the sun is quite hot here. Fragrant leaf-buds have already filled out on the trees. Drops of sweet sap are oozing from a birch branch that has been broken by an elk.

The puddles in the forest reflect the sky, and the water in them seems to be as blue. And above these blue puddles, above the awakened earth, gnats are swarming in the sun.

Willow bushes have blossomed out in pretty golden puffs; the hummocks under the trees are overgrown with bilberry runners.

The smell is lovely in the forest in spring!

The elk is dozing in the sunshine, but she hears every rustle, every alarming sound. Her calf is happily playing around her. He knows that his strong mother is on the alert and that he need not fear either the hungry grey wolf or the swift and vicious lynx.





IN THE GULLY

An old grey wolf with his prey in his teeth is making his way through the dark forest, keeping to the overgrown gullies.

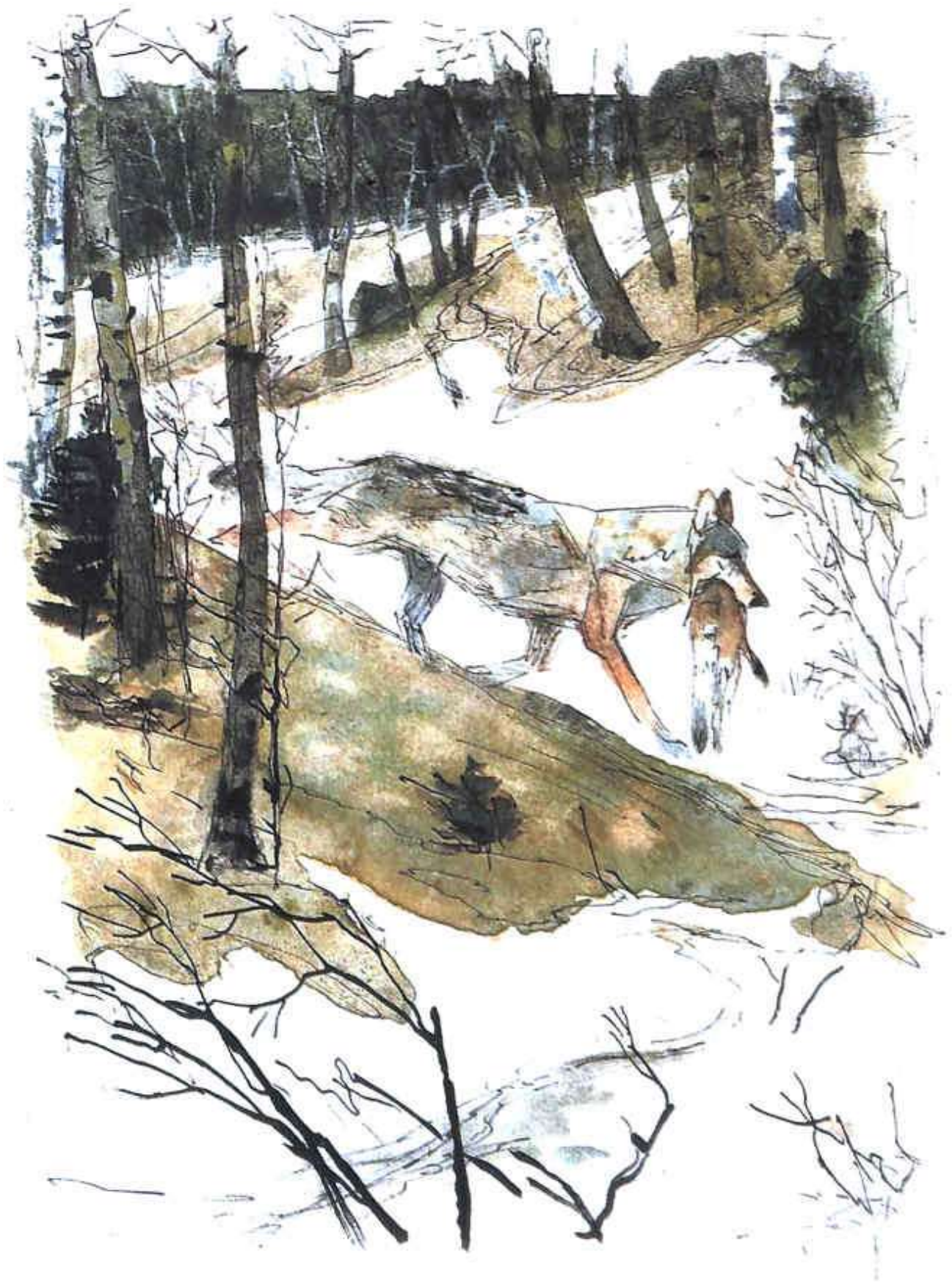
His den is hidden far from the roads and villages.

The cold winter is over. On a warm spring day his mate gave birth to a litter of tiny blind pups.

They were growing fast, the frisky young cubs. The ground in front of their well-hidden den is littered with clean-pecked bones. From the den, twisting paths have been trodden to their watering place.

The old wolf is returning home with his prey late in the morning. The packed snow crackles under his heavy feet. The easily frightened hazel-hens start up and fly into the trees; the titmice watch the forest plunderer out of sight and follow him with frightened squeaks.

He runs bravely through the forest he knows so well, along the familiar path to his hidden den where his insatiable, greedy offspring are anxiously awaiting him.





THE BEAR FAMILY

The mother bear has brought out her cubs to a sunlit forest glade.

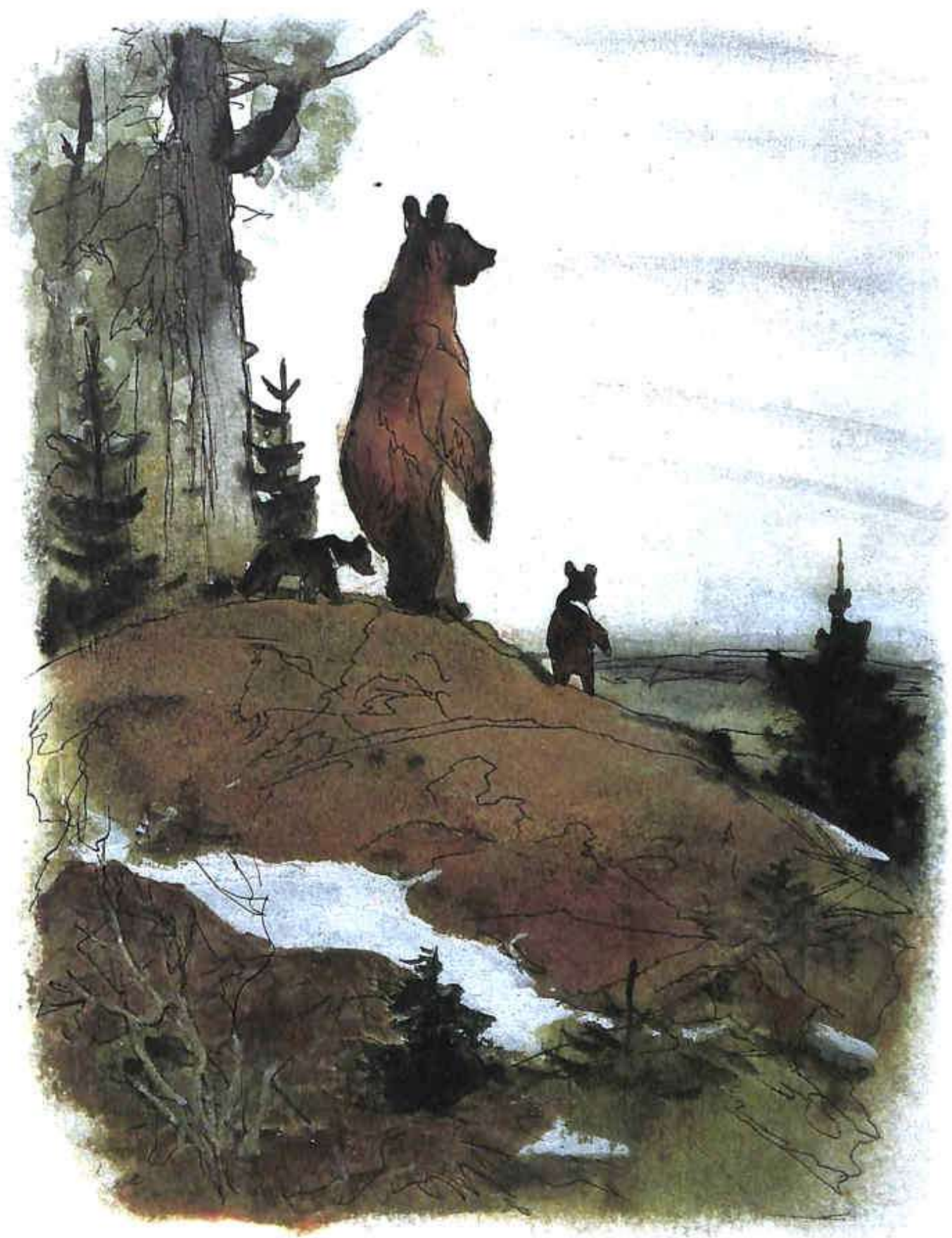
The sight of the bears has frightened a marten.

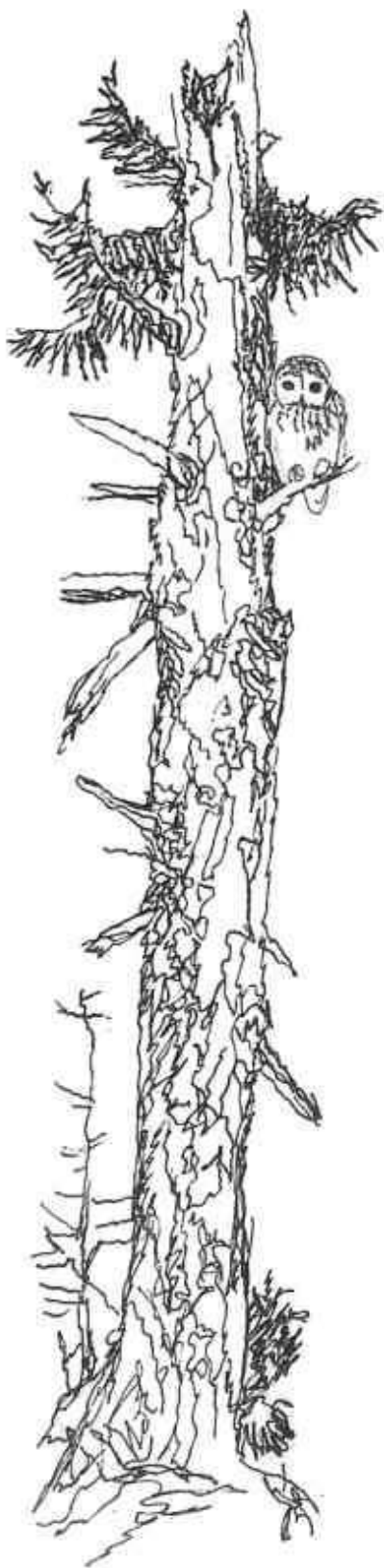
The cautious mother bear stops and listens: is it safe in the forest?

The baby bears cling to their mother. After the snugness of the lair, the vast forest is really terrifying. They listen nervously to the wind swishing in the crowns of the tall trees, to the birds they can not see, whistling to one another and singing, and to the woodpecker drumming high up on a dry pine tree.

Little by little they will become familiar with their native forest, they will play and tumble about on the soft hummocks, and climb up trees.

The mother bear hears and senses danger from far away. And one is never quick enough to see the family disappearing in the darkness of the forest.





THE LYNX'S DEN

A lynx lies low in the dark forest thickets under the overhanging branches.

All night long the lynx has been roaming the forest, ravishing the nests of birds and beasts, catching hares, and snatching birds sleeping on the branches.

It is dark and gloomy in the impenetrable thickets. The boughs and the trunks of the trees have grown long, grey lichen beards. Their knotty roots, covered with moss, have spread this way and that.

The fir-branches have become woven into a roof over the lynx's home.

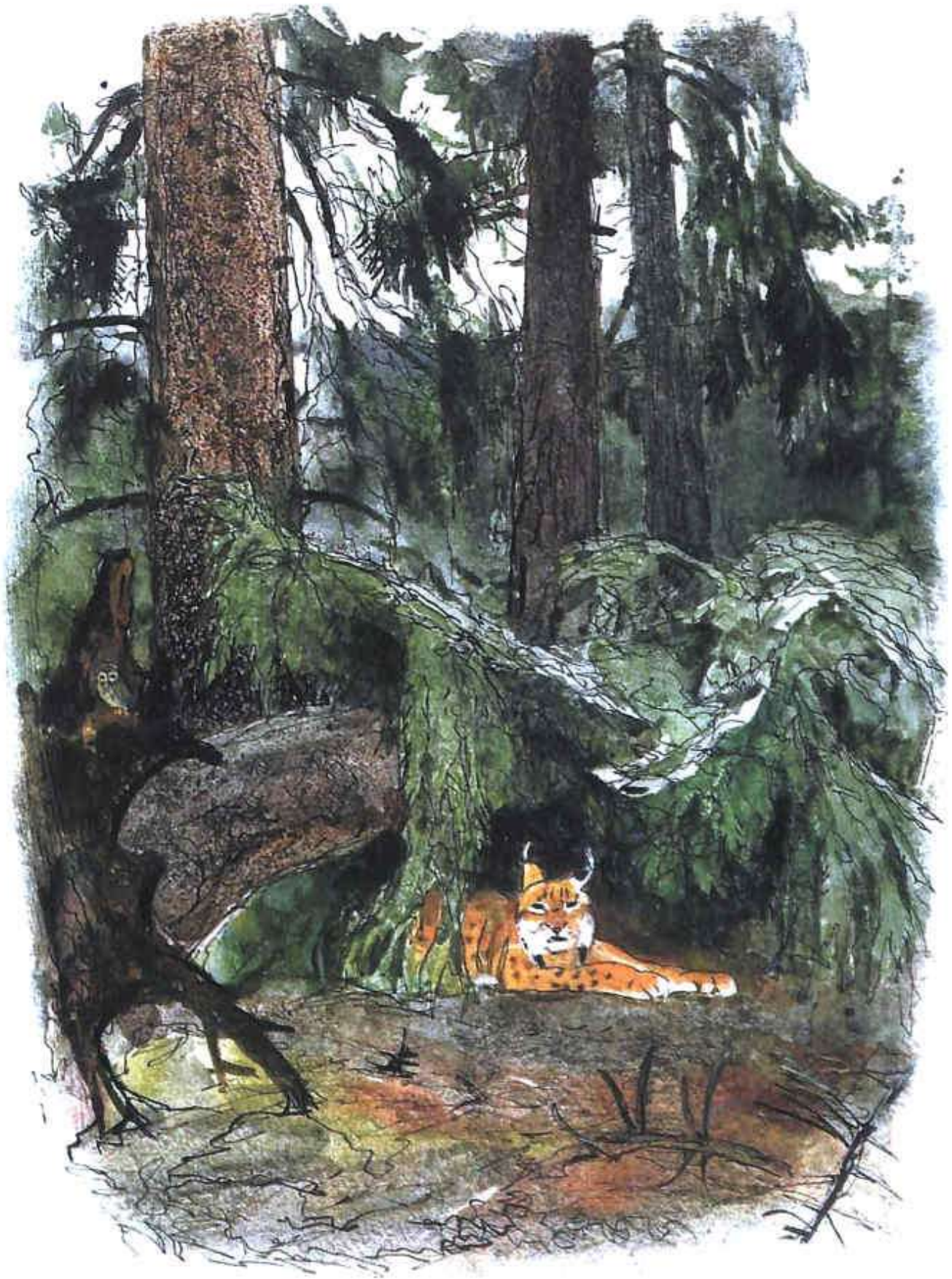
The lynx has eyes that see well in the forest darkness. Its soft feline paws step soundlessly on the ground. And it hears well with its tufted ears.

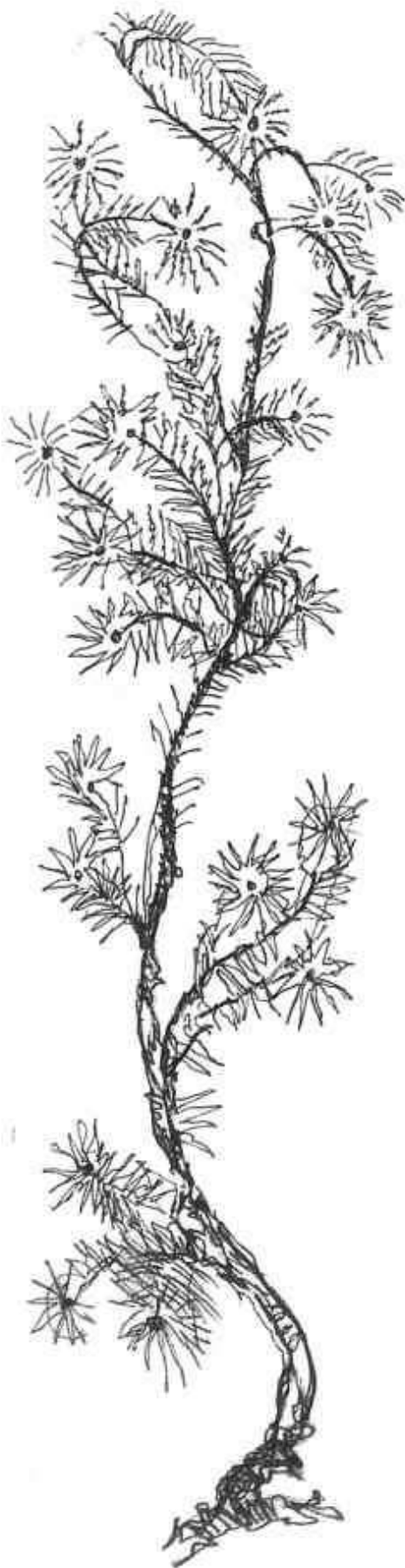
A young pop-eyed, round-headed owl sits erect on a bough as if to guard the lynx's home, but actually it is simply hiding from the too bright daylight in the shadow of the old tree.

The lynx hugs the ground as it finishes eating the night's loot. Its spiteful eyes shine like twin green lights in the darkness.

All the defenseless beasts and all the forest birds go in fear of the lynx, they hide their nests from it as best they can, and guard and defend their young. The lynx is shunned by all.

And so it lives all by itself, secretively and savagely, deep in the forest where it is darkest.





AN OLD PINE TREE

The forest smells of fragrant resin. Squirrels are playing happily round an old sunlit pine. They rejoice in the warm sun, in spring. They have changed their fluffy, grey winter coats, and now their backs and bushy tails are reddish brown.

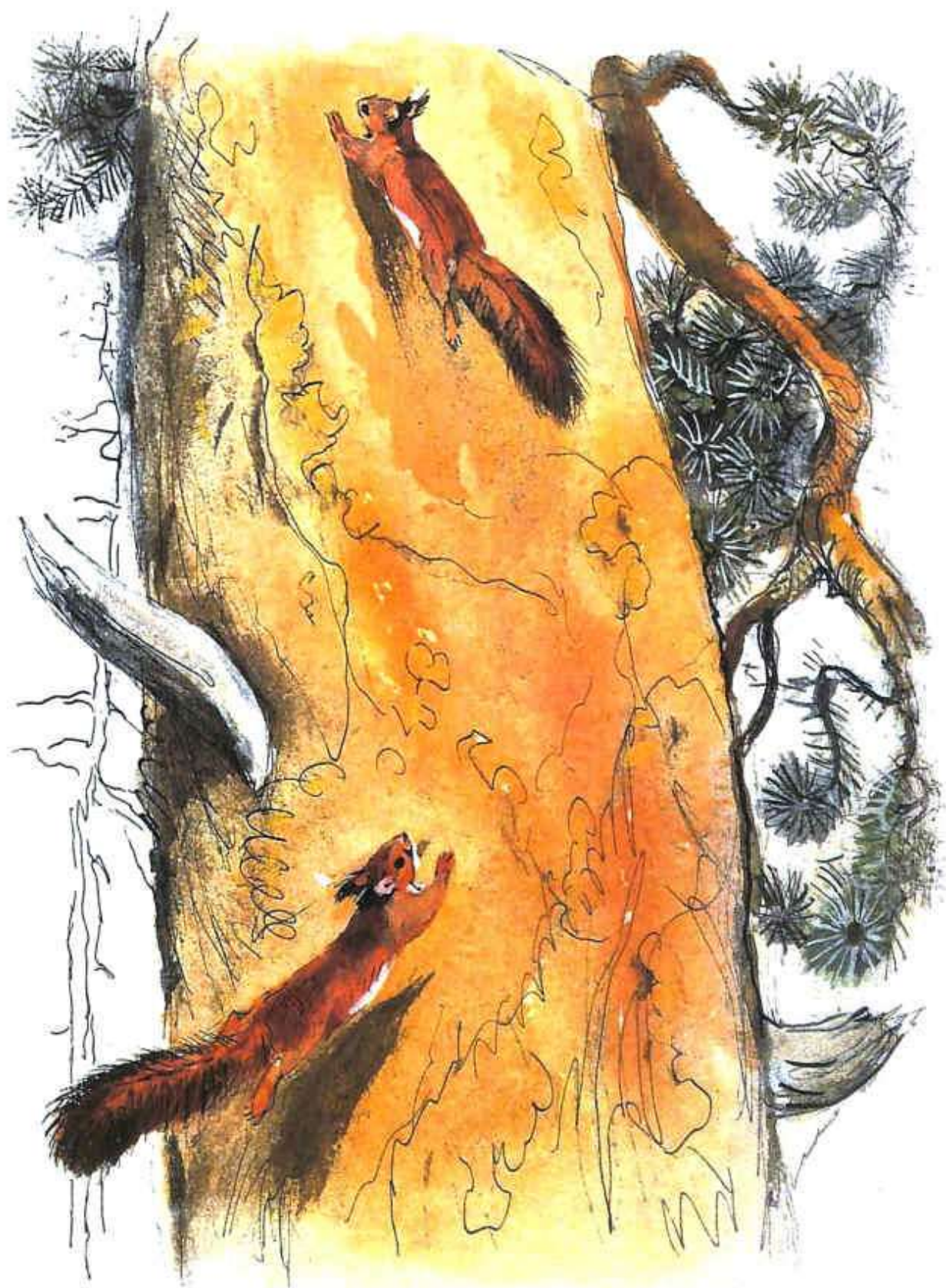
They have spent all that long winter in the tall trees, hiding in their warm nests from the wind and frost, and huddling in deep tree hollows. Leaping from one fir tree to another, from one pine to the next, they fed on the heavy, resinous cones.

Squirrels always have a very busy summer: there are the babies to feed and rear, nuts to be gathered and stored away in the tree hollows, and mushrooms to be picked and dried for the winter.

On hungry years, when the forest yields a poor crop of nuts and cones, squirrels are compelled to undertake long and dangerous journeys. They have to swim across wide rivers, run across open country, and venture through the outskirts of large villages and towns.

Squirrels are peaceful, jolly little beasts, and in the forest they do no one any harm.

They chase one another up and down the trees, leaping from one bough to another, and gladly welcome the warm, sunny spring.





IN EARLY SPRING

These baby hares were born in early spring. Under the trees in the forest the snow still lay in deep drifts, and the early mornings were still cruelly cold. A solid crust had formed on the snow, and both birds and beasts could walk on it safely without fear of sinking.

The baby hares poke their long-eared heads out of their nest, loving the warmth of the smiling sun, and waiting patiently for their mother.

Mother hares feed not just their own babies, but any others that are hungry. A mother hare will stop at someone's nest, nurse the hungry little ones there, and run on her way.

How well these baby hares have hidden themselves in last year's dry grass! They're safe here from both the nasty lynx and the sly fox!

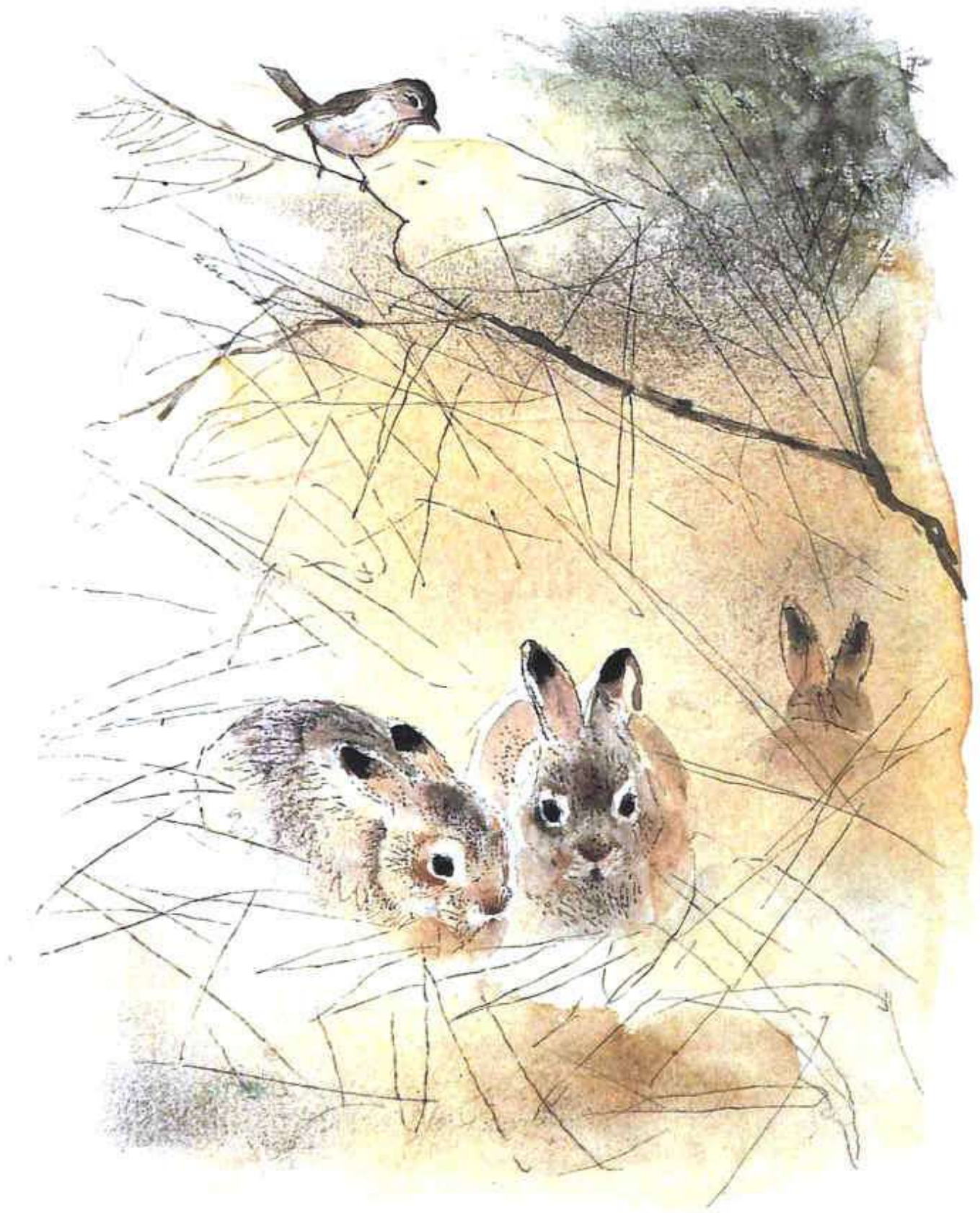
A fussy little bird sees the hares, and perching on a branch above them starts twittering in alarm:

"I can see you! I can see you!"

The hares are only small, timid babies, but to the fussy little bird they seem big and frightening.

"I can see you! I can see you!" the bird screams in a piping little voice, fidgeting on the branch.

And the baby hares stare up at the fussy bird in fright.





ON THE MARSH

Every year the cranes return to their native marsh from distant warm lands in the South.

In spring they start back on their long flight home over seas and plains, over gleaming rivers and dark forests.

The large, impassable marsh has become overgrown with tall reeds, and bristles with last year's dry sedge. The cautious cranes build their nests in the most inaccessible parts of the marsh.

They feel secure there. Neither a wolf nor a fox can get across the marsh, and a lynx cannot steal up on them.

In spring the cranes gather in a circle on the marsh, they wave their wings and dance, happy as can be.

"Cru-cru-cru!" their loud voices can be heard all over the forest.

Very soon, a lot of long-legged, clumsy chicks will be hatched, and their parents will spend the lifelong day catching frogs and snakes for their nestlings.

The chicks will grow into fledglings and start learning how to fly.

The sun sinks lower and lower over the marsh.

One after the other the cranes fly home for the night, and wheel over the marsh where their nests are.





AN EVENING IN SPRING

The sun has disappeared behind the tree-tops. It is cool and damp in the forest. The ground seems to be breathing as it comes back to life. There is a smell of leaf-buds and warm soil.

A wet, last year's leaf lying on the ground gives a tiny twitch, shoved aside by a shoot of new grass.

There are many different sounds in the forest of an evening.

Thrushes are singing in ringing voices up in the trees. A wood pigeon is cooing loudly in the crown of a tall oak.

"I'm here, here, in the tree!" it announces with dignity.

Frogs are croaking in the transparent new puddles.

A wedge of wild duck flies over the forest, their long necks stretched out, their wings whistling.

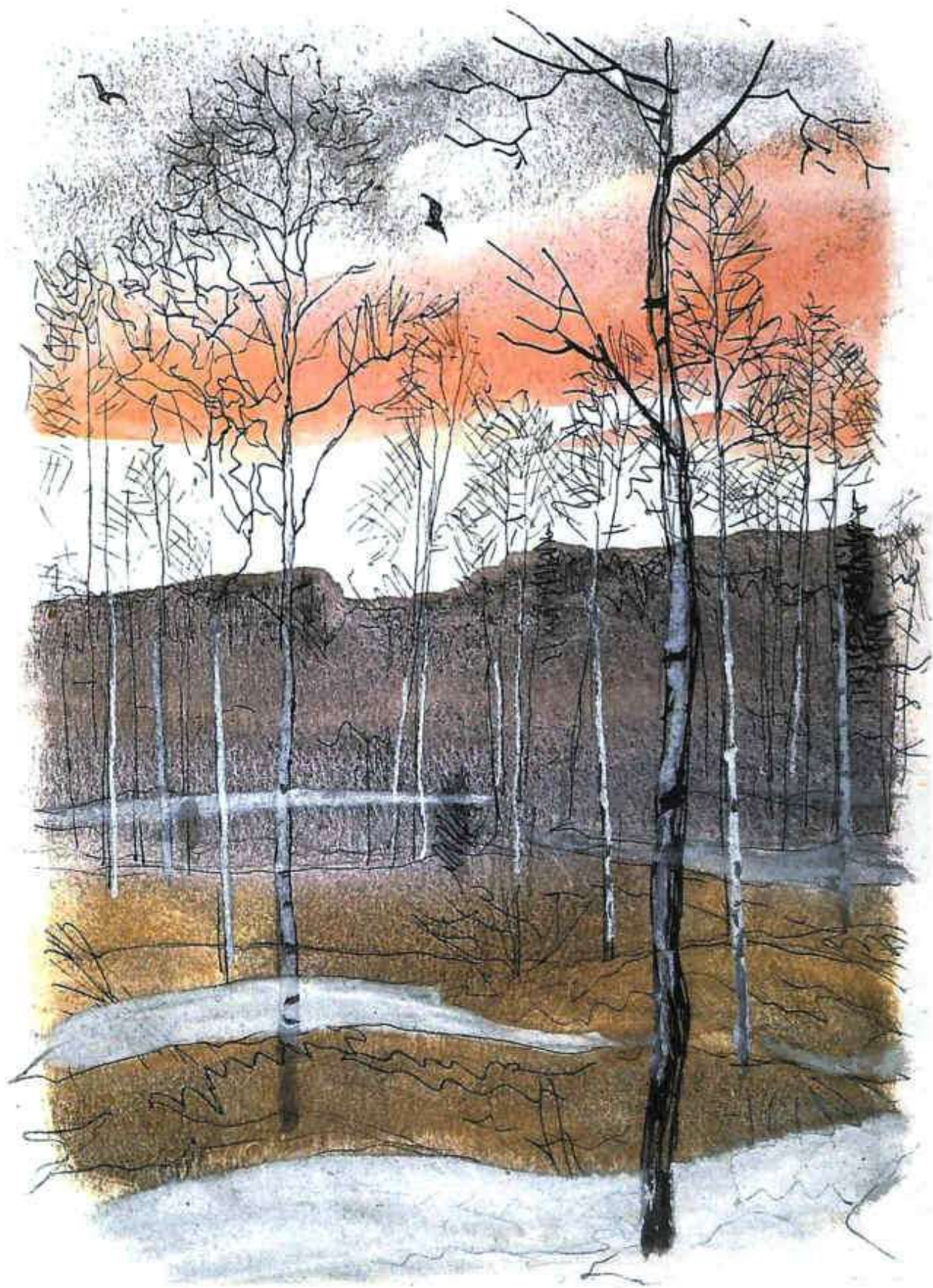
"Chufsh! Chufsh!" suddenly a handsome, red-browed black grouse starts muttering as he struts about the glade.

A hare gives a small hoot, and an owl imitates the sound perfectly as it silently flies past.

An eagle-owl hoots and chortles frighteningly.

Long-beaked woodcock are on their way somewhere, flying over the very tree-tops and slowly waving their wings.

The cool spring night is descending on the forest world.



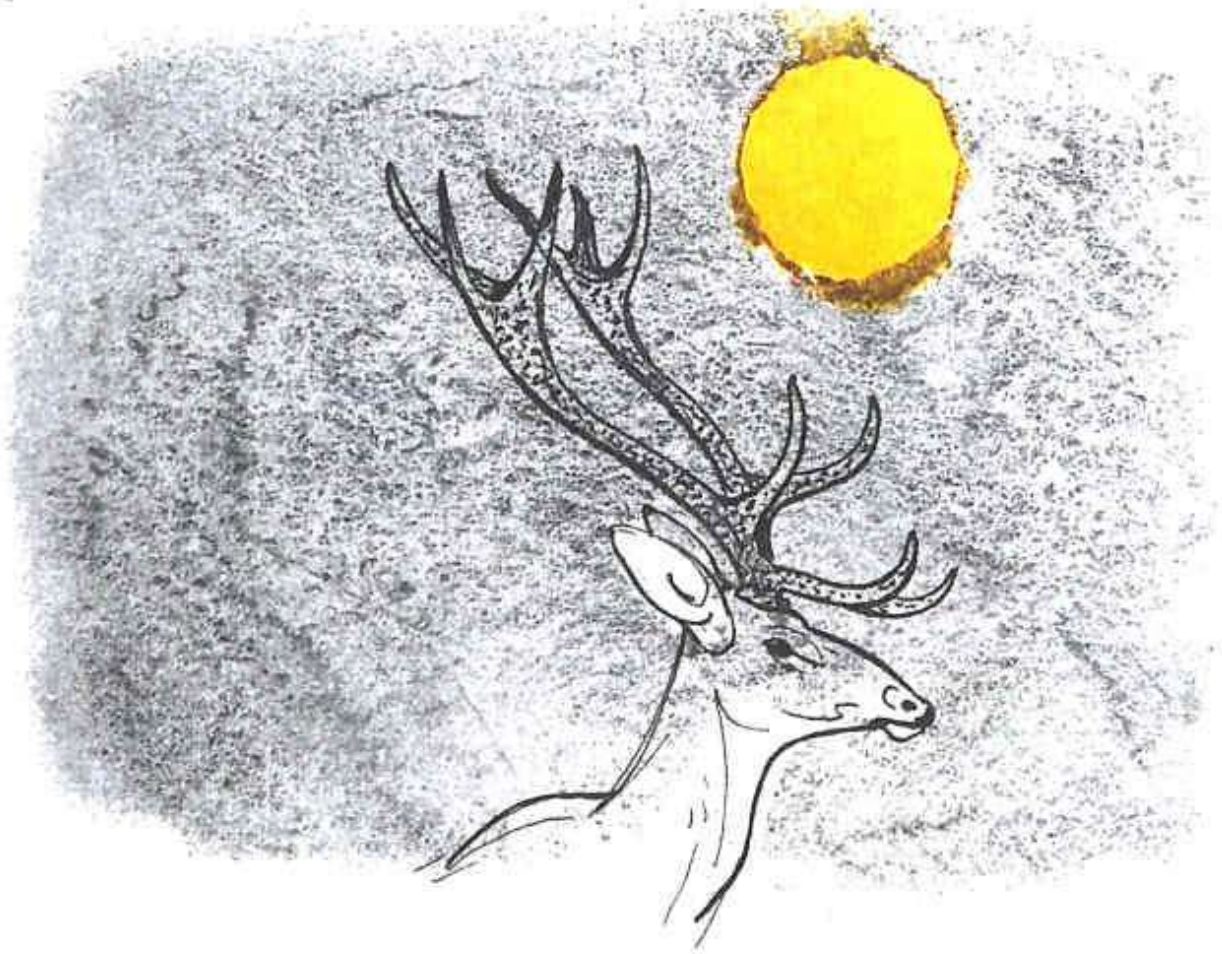




SUMMER







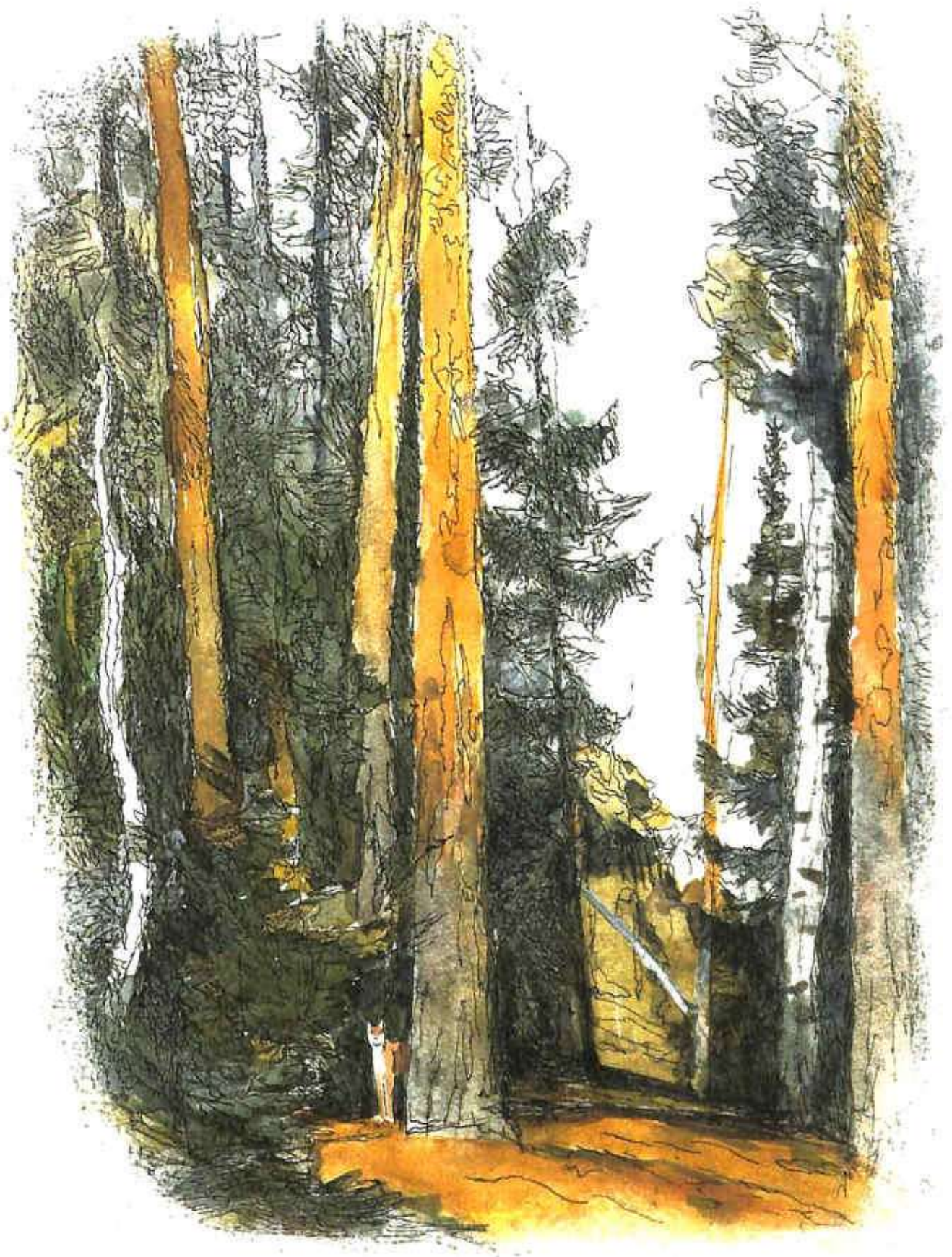
It's wonderful in the forest in summer.

The trees are dressed in bright green leafage. The forest smells of mushrooms and ripe strawberries.

Birds are singing loudly. Orioles are whistling to each other, cuckoos are restlessly flying from one tree to another and calling out all the time, and nightingales are trilling away in the shrubs along the stream.

And in the forest, beasts are prowling under the trees. Bears are wandering about, elk are grazing, squirrels are playing, but the lynx keeps out of sight in the dark thickets.

Near the very top of an old fir, in the thick branches, a family of goshawks has built a nest. Many are the secret forest doings, many are the wonders they can see from that height.





A SUMMER DAWN

The warm summer night is over, and a rosy glow appears in the sky behind the forest.

A light mist still hovers low over the forest glades. Drops of cool dew lie on the tree leaves.

The songbirds have already awakened. A cuckoo clears its throat of sleep, and then calls out for the whole forest to hear:

“Cuckoo! Cuckoo! Cuckoo!”

Very soon the sun will rise and dry up the dew. The birds will burst into even louder song in welcome, and the cuckoo will try to out-call them. The mist will melt away.

Here is a tired little hare returning home from its nocturnal foraging expedition.

The poor little thing has so many enemies! The sly fox chased after him, the horrible eagle-owl hooted to frighten him silly, and the cruel lynx tried to catch him!

But he got away safe and sound, clever little hare.





THE EAGLE-OWL

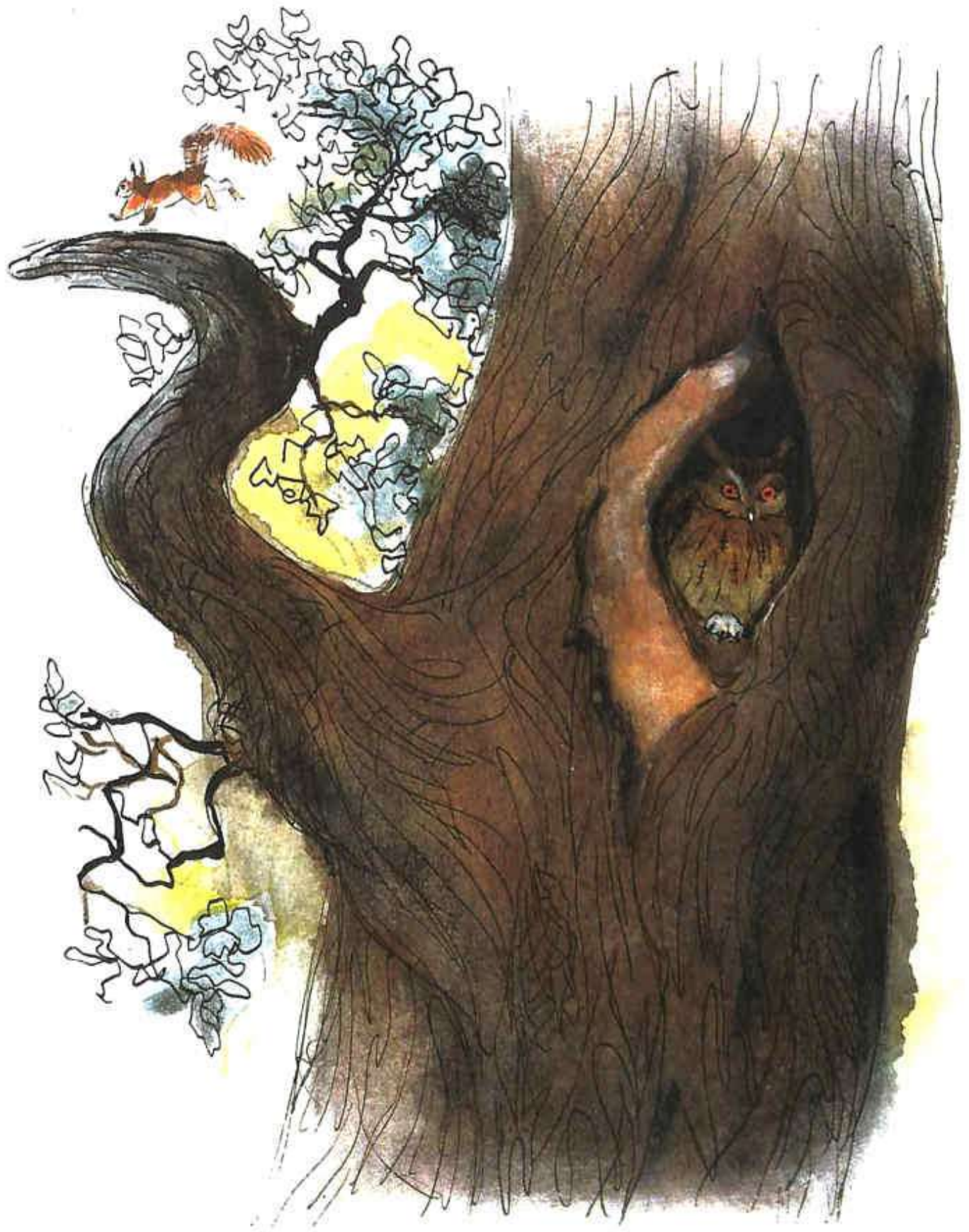
Just before sunrise, this bird of prey hides in his deep and dark tree hollow.

With his huge wings spread wide he has been flying soundlessly all night over the trees looking for food. His cruel, round eyes see perfectly well in the dark. And there is no counting the little animals and birds the eagle-owl has caught and eaten on his nocturnal raids.

Bright sunlight frightens him. And if he is seen about in the daytime, the birds go into a panic. Hearing the excited chatter of the magpies and the cries of the jays, ravens and hawks come flying from all over the forest, and even the smallest birds want to do their bit in punishing this night thief, blinded by the brilliant sunlight.

A wide-awake young squirrel saw the eagle-owl making for his tree hollow, and shrilled for all the forest to hear:

"It's here the villain lives, it's here!"





THE CLEARING

The warm sun lights up the forest clearing, and dries up the cold dew.

All is peace and quiet here. The air is sweet with the smell of marsh tea and ripe strawberries.

A capercailzie has brought her brood for an outing as far as the clearing. The chicks scatter like fluffy little balls to catch midges in the grass and peck at the sweet strawberries.

Their mother flies on to a tree stump and keeps watch from there. Now she looks up into the sky, now peers into the forest to make sure that no goshawk is in sight and that it is only the breeze that stirs the grass and not a fox or a weasel stealing up on her family.

The chicks run about the clearing and the forest edge under the watchful eye of their alert mother.





FOREST GUARDS

Ravens are the cleverest and sharpest birds of all.

These forest guards see and hear everything that goes on.

Sighting a wolf hurrying through the forest with the kill in his teeth, the keen-eyed ravens started wheeling above him and screaming at the top of their voices:

“Caw! Caw! Come all! Come all! We’ve got the wolf!”

True, the wolf fled to his den, but warning was given to all.

Another time, the ravens noticed a fox returning to the den on the shore of a forest lake. This vixen had ravished a lot of birds’ nests and killed a lot of chicks.

The ravens screamed at the top of their voices:

“Caw! Caw! Catch the fox! Catch the fox!”

Frightened, the fox ran for the dark thickets knowing that those ravens, the forest guards, would not let her ravish any birds’ nests!





THE FOXES' DEN

A vixen has dug out a deep hole for her home in the pine wood.

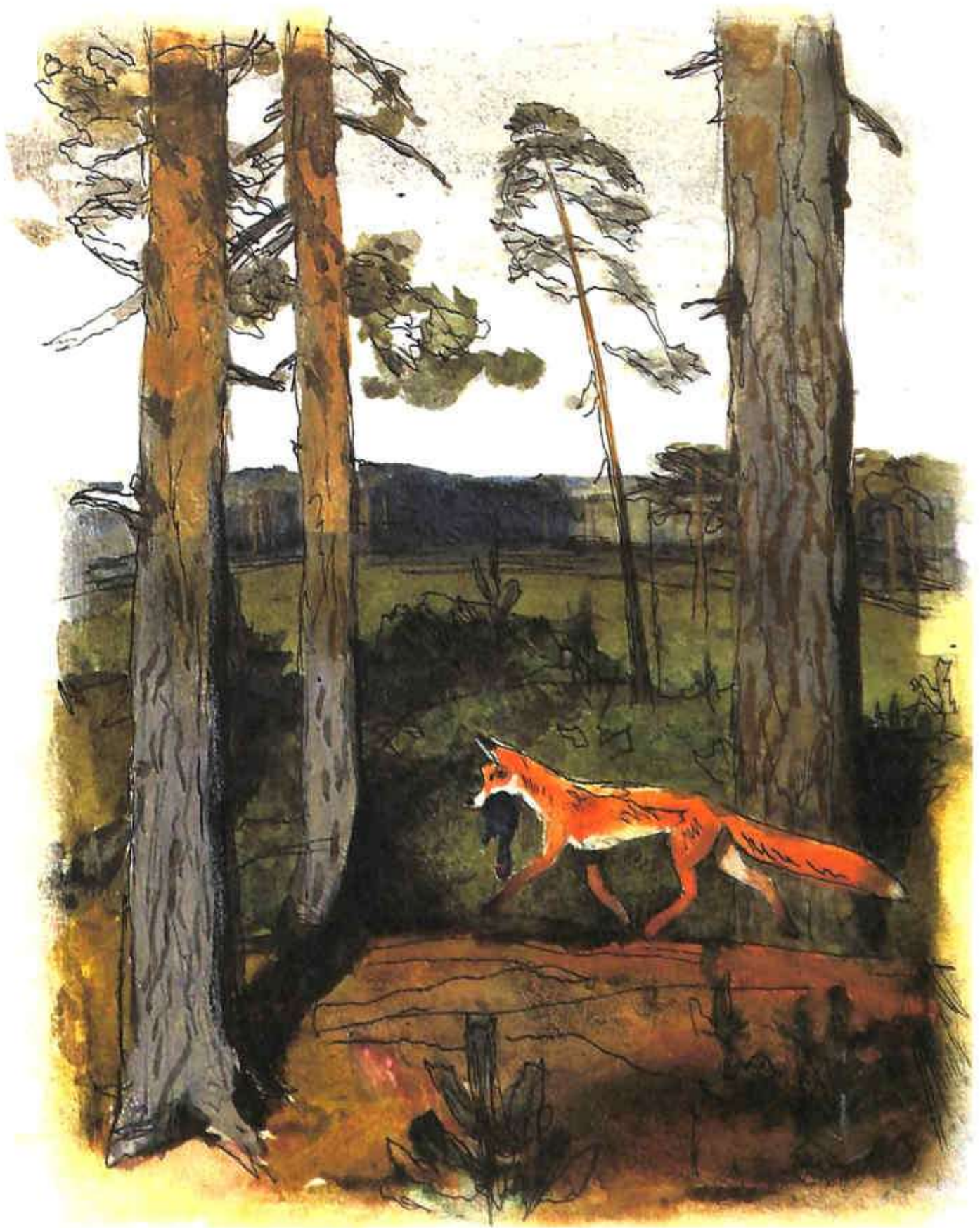
And here her blind little ones were born in early spring.

The mother goes out hunting every day, leaving the babies behind in the safety of the den.

They have grown bigger and stronger now, and their mother allows them to come out of the dark, cramped hole to play and romp on the soft moss in the forest under the trees.

When the mother returns with food, careful to keep out of sight behind the trees, the baby foxes pounce ravenously on whatever she has brought.

They eat a lot and grow quickly.





THE RIVER BANKS

Pines grow along the banks of the river.

A wind blows over the river. White-crested waves splash against the banks.

A huge fishing eagle, holding a live, thrashing fish in his talons, soars into the sky straight up from the water. These keen-eyed birds drop into the river from an enormous height, grab the fish they have sighted, and quickly fly off.

The fishing eagles build their nests in the crowns of the tallest trees, where their ever-hungry chicks are always crying for more and more food.

These powerful birds are very keen-sighted. On clear days they hover right under the clouds, and from there they see where a hare is hiding in the grass, where a fish has splashed in the river, and where a mother capercailzie has brought her brood for an outing.





A BABY LYNX

A mother lynx has stretched out on the ground under an old pine, basking in the sun.

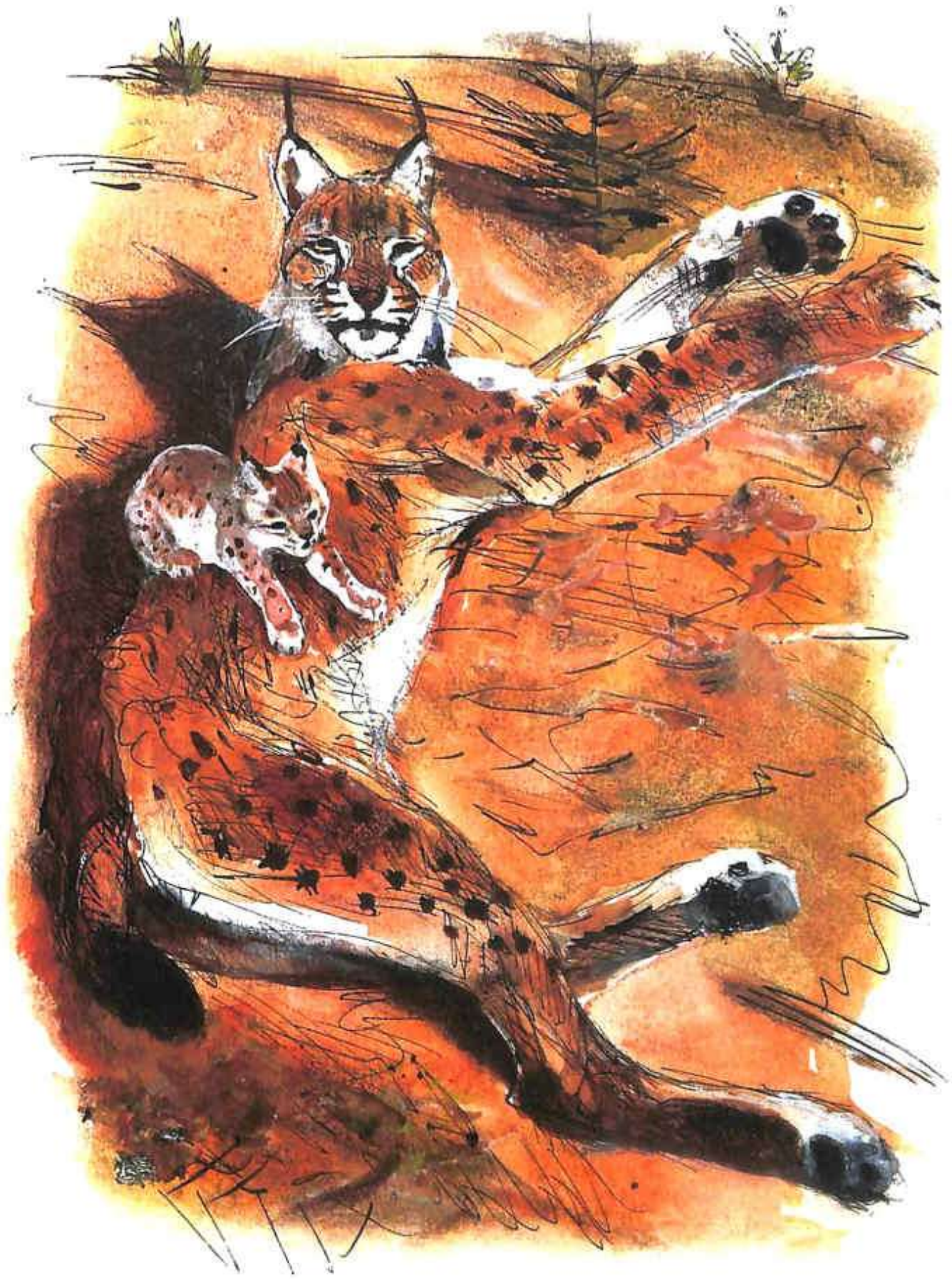
It is quiet in the thickets. The mother lynx hears the piping of a titmouse as it swings on a twig, she hears a forest mouse rustling in the grass.

The fluffy little baby lynx has climbed on to its mother's back. She purrs and stretches contentedly, and plays with her jolly little son.

At night, the mother goes on the hunt. Creeping soundlessly under the trees, she catches birds and unwary young hares.

Once she gets her sharp claws into anyone there is no escape, not for the little hare caught napping, not for the old black-grouse or the heavy capercailzie, not for the dozing, easily frightened hazel-grouse.

The vicious lynx causes plenty of grief in the forest.



ELK

Evening has descended on the forest. The sun has disappeared behind the tree-tops.

A mother elk is grazing on the edge of the marsh with her clumsy, leggy little son.

They have eaten their fill of the succulent grass.

There are swarms of tiresome, buzzing mosquitoes here. The elks shake their long ears to beat them off.

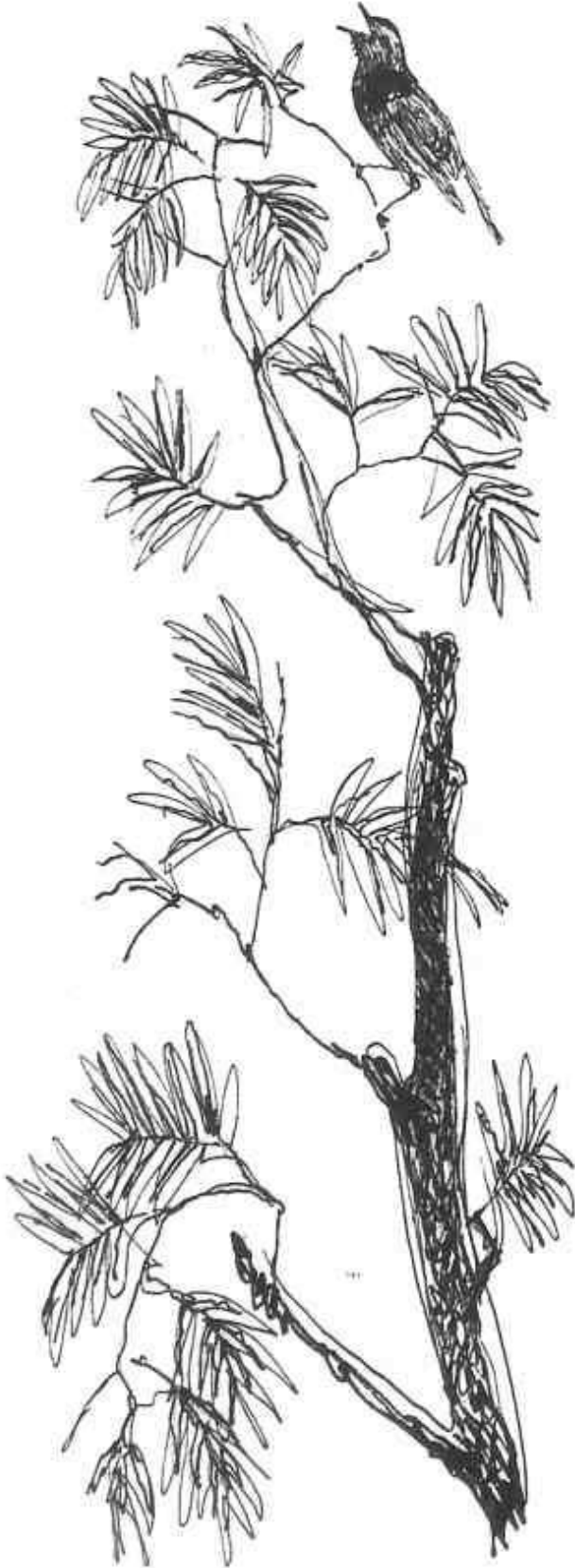
To get away from the mosquitoes, elk sometimes seek safety in rivers or lakes. These strong animals are not afraid of water, of swamps, or of dark, impenetrable thickets.

They wander all over the forest, they make their way through the swamps, and swim across wide rivers and deep forest lakes.

They come out of the forest where they know that people mean them no ill. Elk are often seen on the outskirts of villages and towns, and sometimes they wander into gardens and out-of-town parks. Real hunters never fire at elks. These handsome, harmless animals must be preserved and admired.







A SUMMER NIGHT

A warm summer night has fallen in the forest.

The moon shines down on a glade, surrounded by trees. Nightingales are shrilling their songs in the bushes.

Swift, leggy landrails are crying in their loud, hoarse voices with never a pause for breath here, there and everywhere in the tall grass.

Bats are rushing about soundlessly.

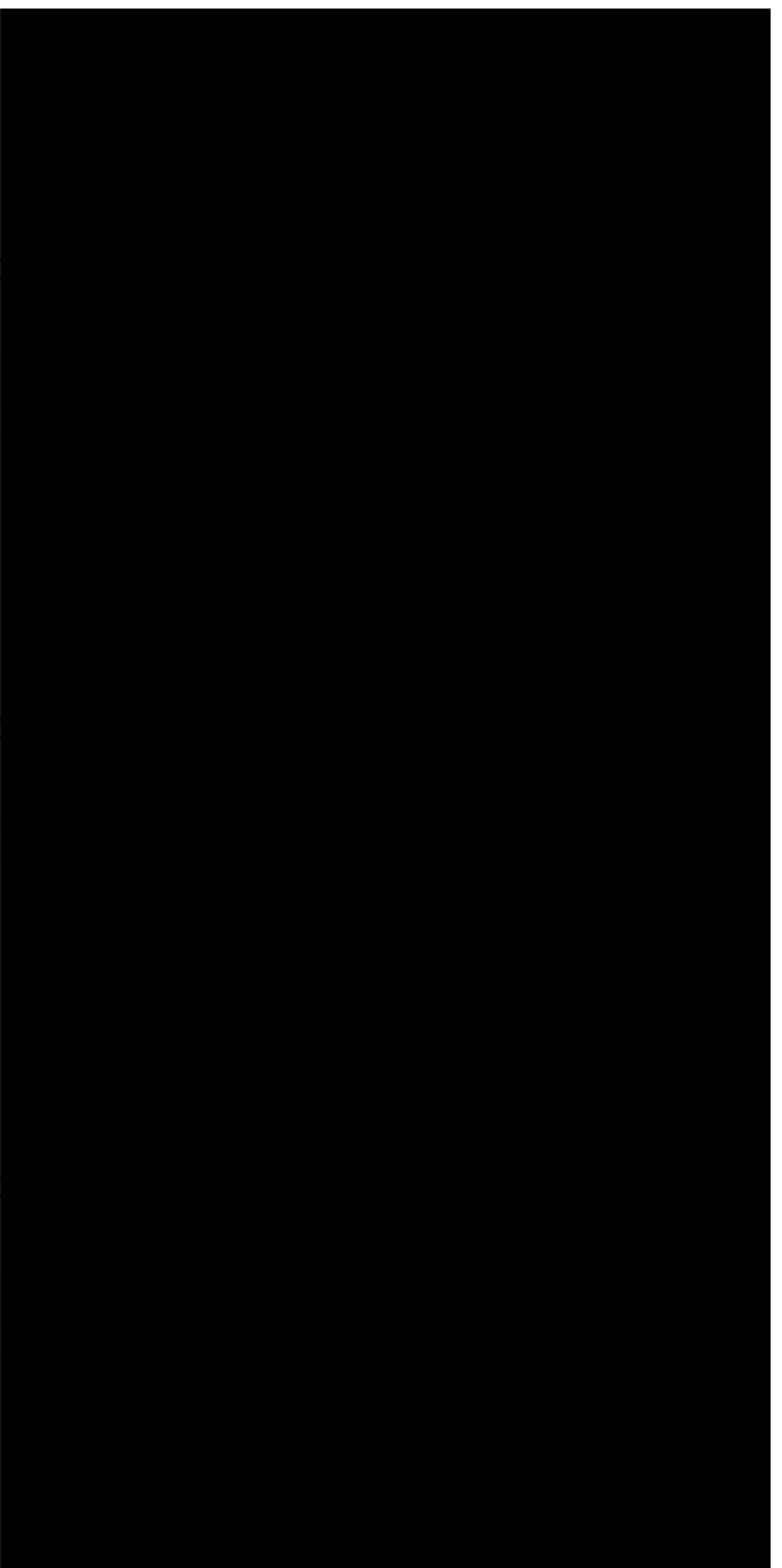
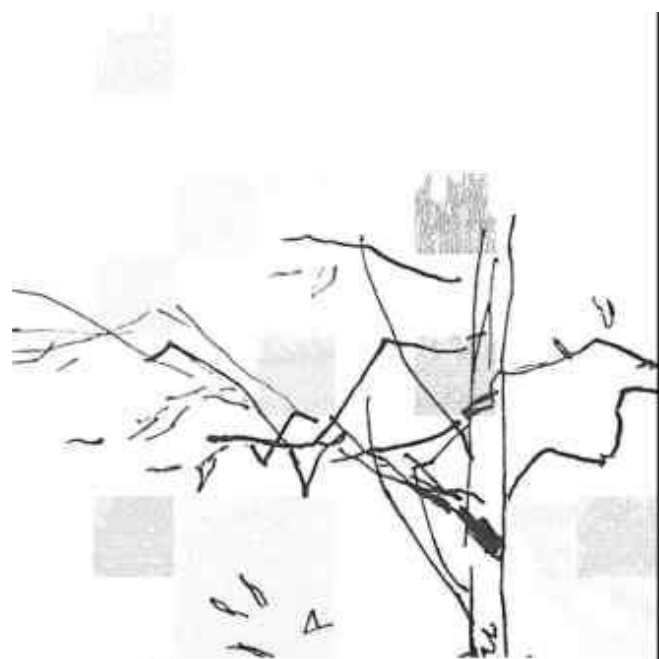
On the edge of the path here and there, glowworms have switched on their tiny green lights.

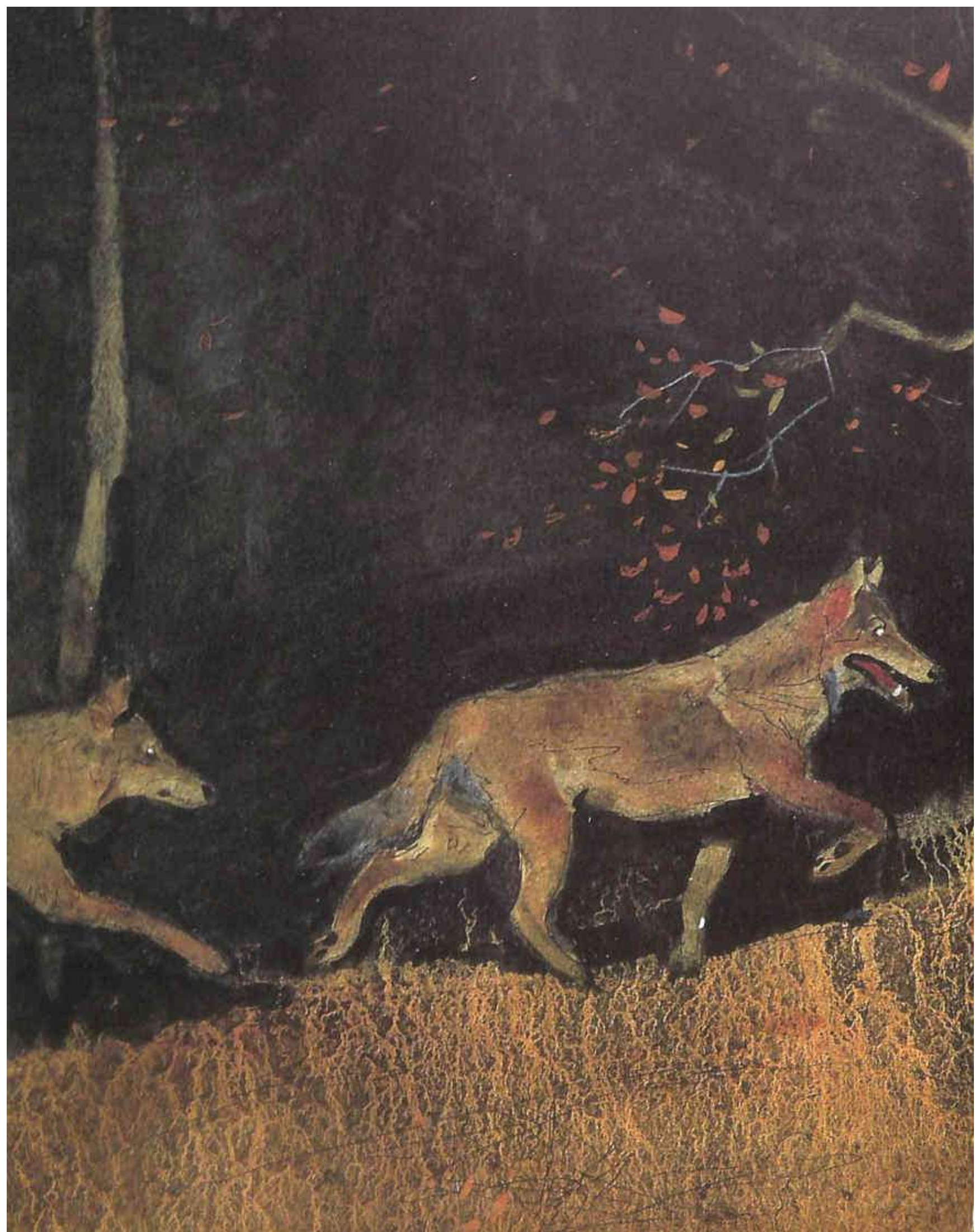
Silence reigns in the forest at night, fragrant with violets. A hidden brook is babbling very, very softly. A twig snaps, which means that a hare has gone foraging. An owl flies silently across the glade, casting a faint shadow on it, and vanishes again.

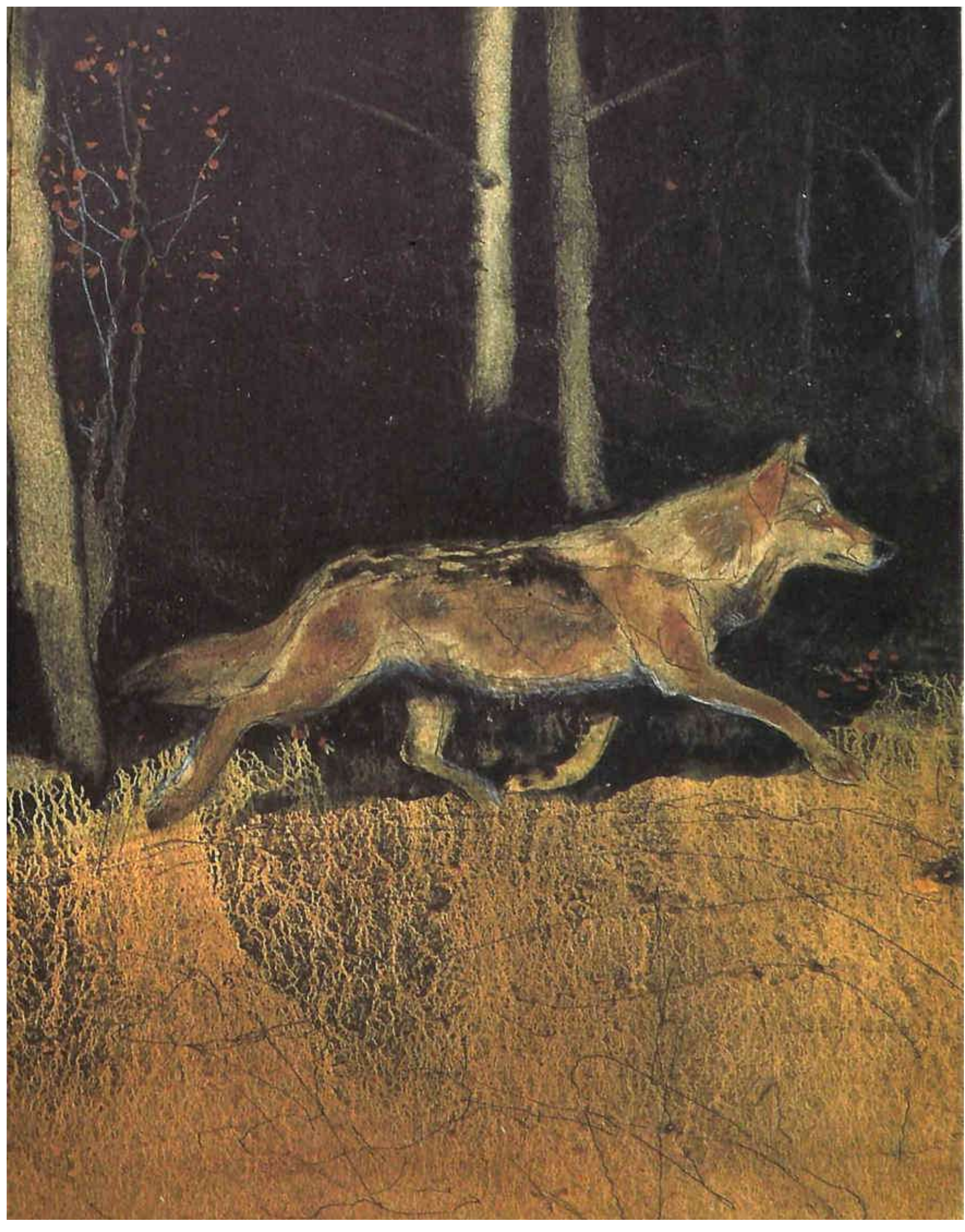
An eagle-owl hoots and chortles eerily in the depths of the forest, shattering the silence, and frightening a little forest bird brooding in her nest...













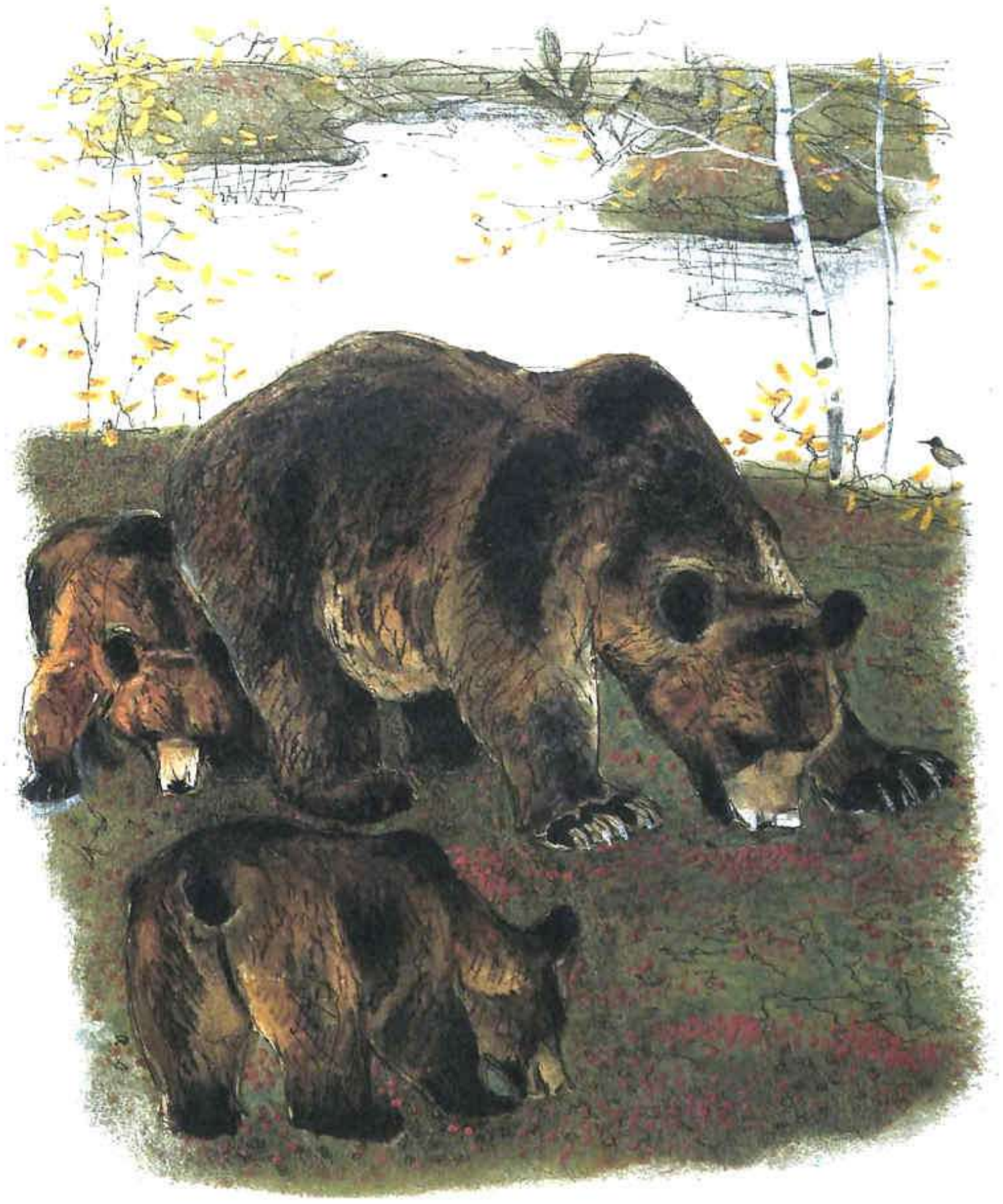
September has come. The sultry summer and the warm August days are over, and golden autumn is here.

Mushrooms are still growing on the forest edge — orange caps, russulas, saffron milk-caps, milk-agarics, and spindly-legged honey agarics huddling together on large old tree stumps.

Red cranberries cover the hummocks in the marshes. And clusters of red ashberries have ripened on the sunlit forest glades.

The air is clean and transparent. Sounds carry far, and voices ring clearly and distinctly. Every pebble, every blade of grass can be seen on the floor of a forest stream. White clouds are racing across the transparent sky. On warm, windless days, sticky gossamer flies in the air and plasters people's faces.

Many birds are getting ready to fly south. Swallows and swifts have already gone. Hazel-grouse, wood-grouse and partridges are staying here for the winter. Starlings and many songbirds are assembling in flocks to fly to warm lands. Wild duck are starting on their journey, and cranes are leaving their native marshes.



CRANES

The golden autumn days mean that it is time for the cranes to start south. Before setting out on their long journey, they circle again and again over the river and over their native marsh, and then, assembling into regular wedges, begin their flight to distant warm lands.

They fly high up in the sky over forests, over fields, and over noisy towns.

They stop for a rest on the edge of a swamp in a dense forest, and are up before dawn.

The light is only just breaking over the river, over the tree-tops. The forest is dark and glum at that early hour.

One after the other the cranes rise from the swamp. It is the hour when birds wake in the forest, and sandpipers start running about the edge of the swamp.

Soon the sun will rise and shine down on the river and the forest which will shed its glumness and look quite different in the light of day.

The cranes will rise high in the sky, and their farewell cries will be clearly heard by people watching them and wishing them a happy journey!







A FOREST LAKE

The forest lake, filled with clean, transparent water, is wide and deep. The sun rises high in the sky over the forest and lake.

The shores of the lake are like a brightly coloured carpet sprinkled with diamond dewdrops. The hummocks are overgrown with moss, heather, marsh tea and blueberries, and there are pine trees, few and far between, growing among them.

It is quiet here in the morning. A titmouse will give a tiny squeak now and again, or a woodpecker will fly across to another tree and start his drumming.

Just as day was breaking, a capercaillie came here to strut up and down the water's edge, pick out some round little pebbles and peck them. They do this every autumn. They need the round little pebbles to grind the coarse winter food in their craw. The whole of the coming long winter they will feed on prickly and hard pine needles.

There struts the capercaillie choosing the pebbles. The surface of the transparent water never stirs. And the sun rises higher and higher in the sky.







THE HARE

A timid little hare has jumped out of his burrow. He sits up and listens.

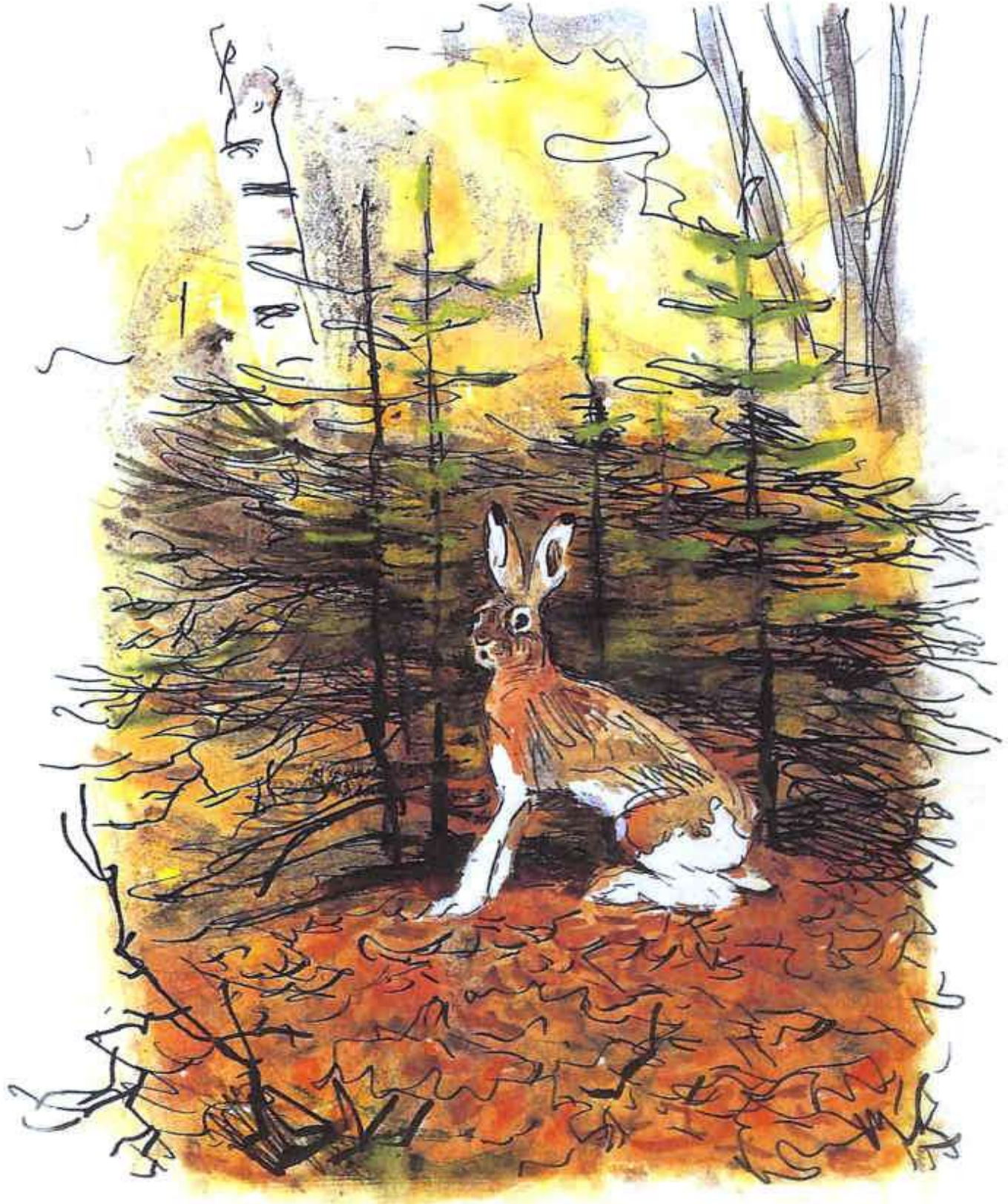
Everything is so frightening! He has so many enemies in the forest. The sly fox may steal up on him, a hungry wolf may snatch him, or the swift lynx may jump down from a tree and savage him...

Every sound terrifies the little hare. If an old tree creaks, he fancies that he is hearing the tread of ravenous wolves. If a frog jumps out from under his feet, he shrinks in terror. And when an owl hoots at night, he is simply frightened out of his wits.

He lives in fear almost the whole year round, but it's worst in these transparent autumn days. He can be seen from afar no matter where he hides or how low he lies: everything around him has turned golden and yellow, and he is already changing into his white coat. There's no sleep for the poor thing, come night or come day.

He can hardly wait for the winter to come and bring plenty of snow.

The hare is white all over in winter, and no fox, wolf or lynx can see him in a snowdrift.





THE HEDGEHOG

The hedgehog is making his way home over tree stumps and fallen trees, over tall hummocks, across large open forest glades.

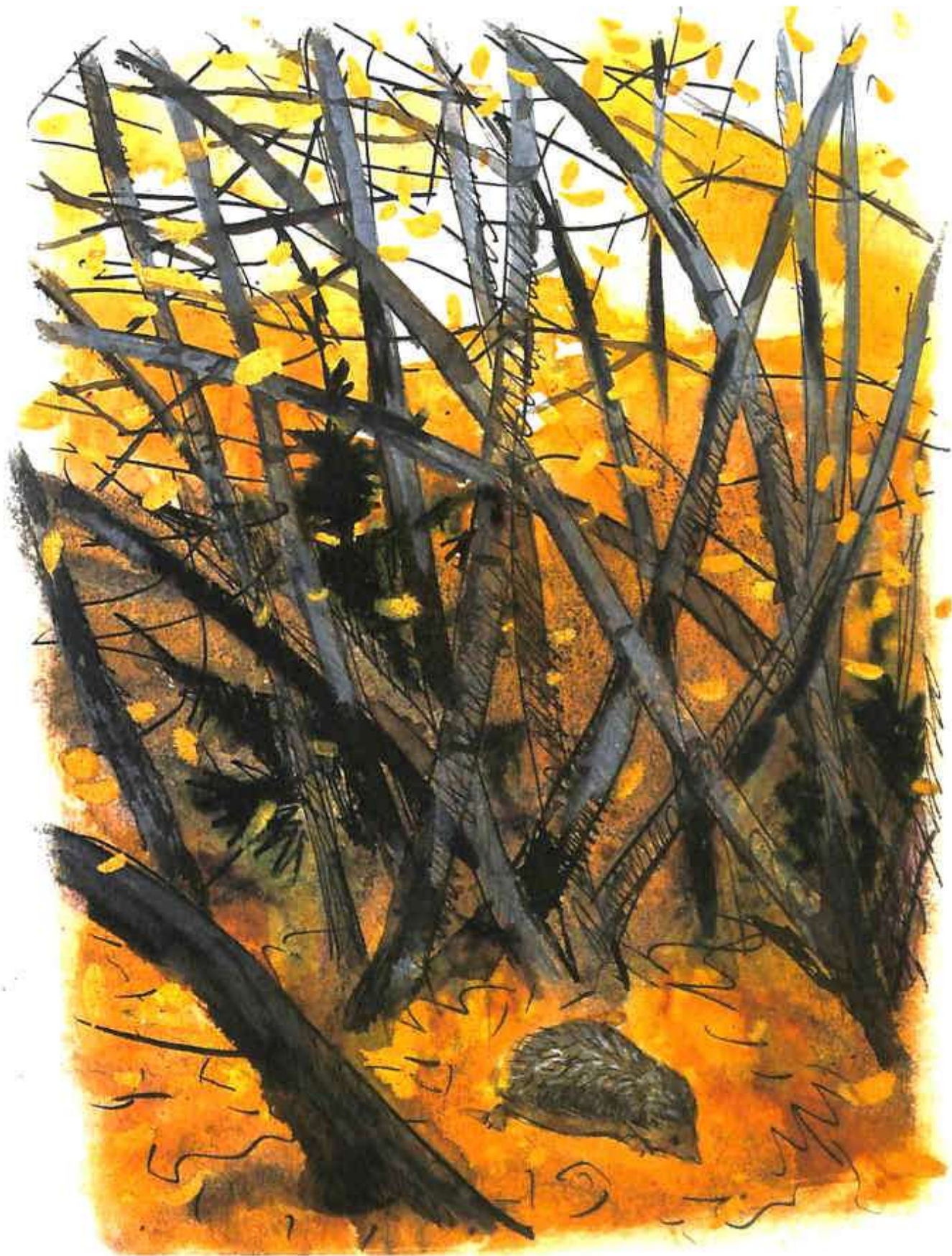
There is little for the hedgehog to eat in the autumn. The worms have all hidden in the ground, the quick little lizards have disappeared, and the slippery snakes and black grass snakes have rolled themselves up into balls. Even beetles and silly frogs are hard to find.

On clear autumn days the hedgehog fusses and bustles making himself a nice, warm place to hibernate in. Day and night he keeps busy, carrying fragrant dry leaves and bits of soft forest moss into the hole under an old tree stump to line his bed with.

Very soon he will climb in and stay there the whole long winter. He will not run about the forest any more, catching worms and beetles.

Winter will come and snow will be drifted over his lair, keeping out the cold.

No one will find his lair, no one will wake him up. The hedgehog will sleep there all winter until the spring sun melts the snow, and all winter he will dream his hedgehoggy dreams.





SQUIRRELS

Squirrels are busy from morning till late at night in their dark fir forest. Now they climb to the top of the highest tree, now they leap from one bough to another, now they hurry down the trunk, head-down, to gather mushrooms on the ground.

They have hung up some mushrooms to dry on a forked dry twig, and have put in a store of choice nuts for the winter in their forest cellars.

Late in the autumn they will change their reddish coats for silvery gray ones.

High up in the thick branches they have their warm nests in deep tree hollows, thickly lined with soft moss. Here they rear their young, and in the winter find asylum from the fierce frosts and icy winds.

The squirrel is the jolliest, quickest and fussiest little animal in our forests.





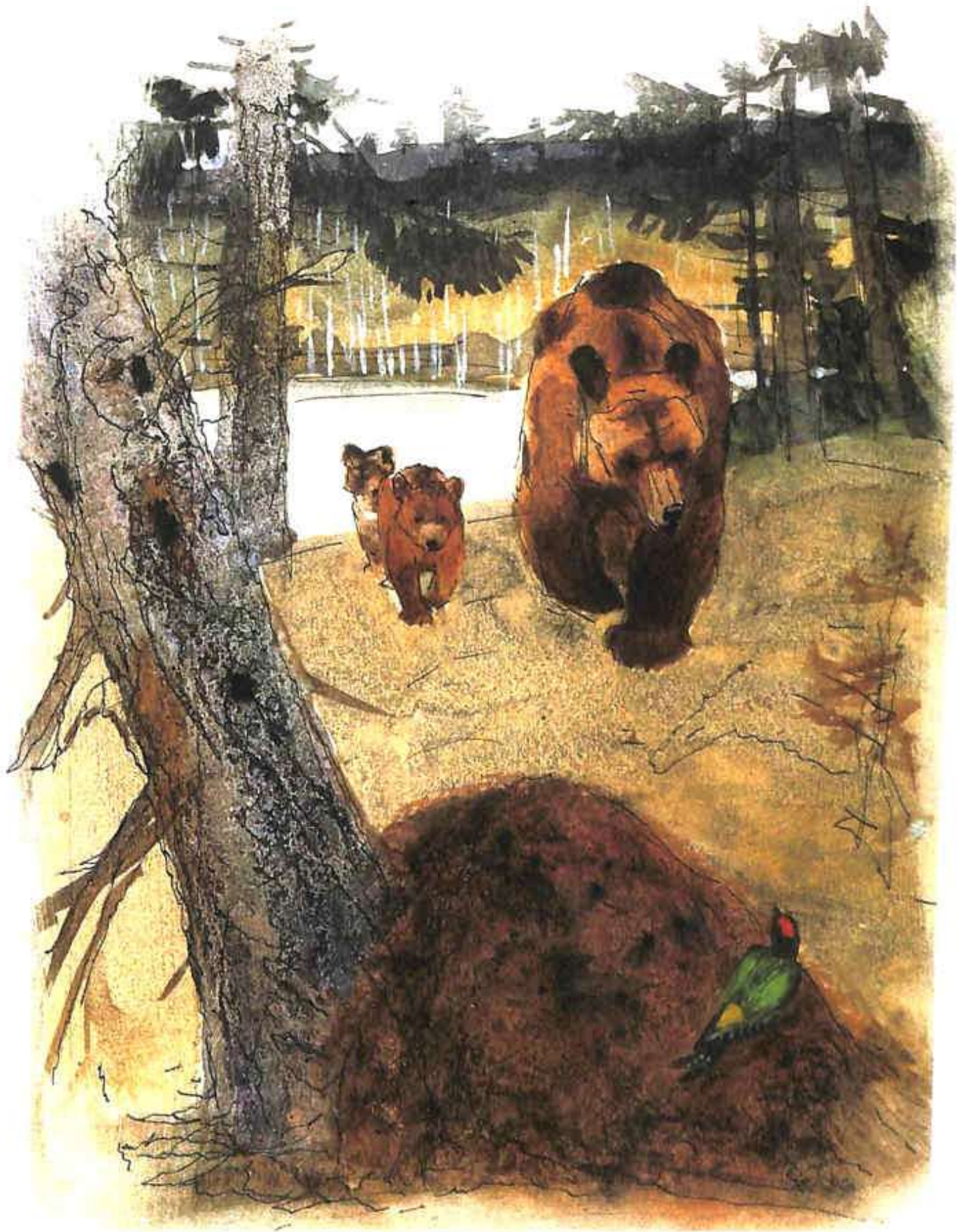
BEARS

In the evening the mother bear comes out with her cub to the glade and sees an anthill. She wants to treat her cub to some ants, and have some herself.

There is a green ant-eating woodpecker sitting on the anthill and digging for ants' eggs. When he hears the bears approaching, he flits away to the forest.

The mother bear starts raking the anthill with a paw, and then she thrusts in her long red tongue. When it becomes plastered with ants she quickly pulls it in and swallows them. The cub is watching his mother and learning how to eat ants.

In the autumn the bears have many cares. They have to stuff themselves with food to last them the long winter, grow as much fat as they can, and also fix up a warm lair to sleep in. They will climb in late in the autumn, and sleep there till spring, till the sun shines hotly again.





THE LYNX

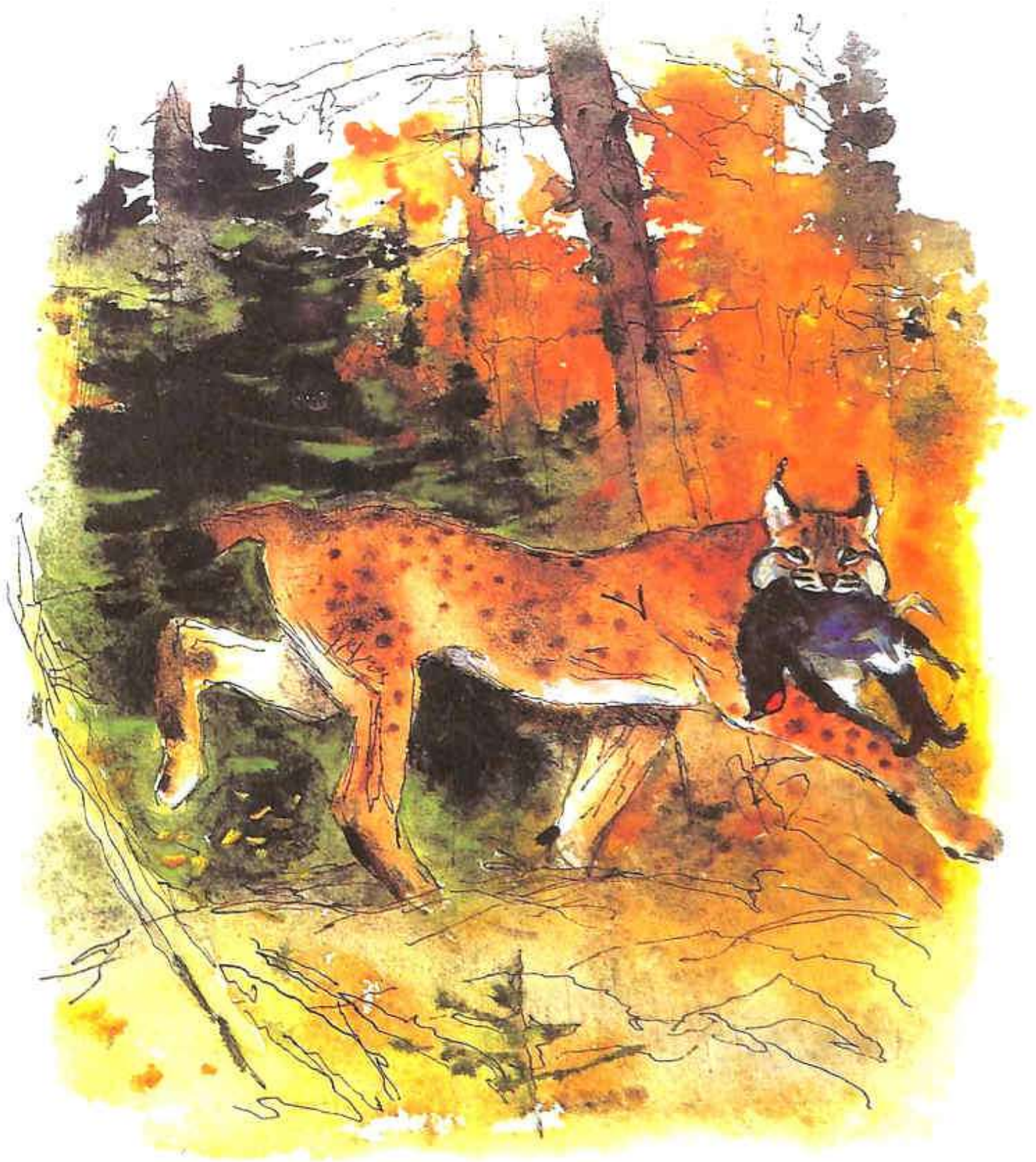
Late in the evening, after hunting, the lynx came out into the forest glade carrying a black grouse with red eyebrows in its teeth.

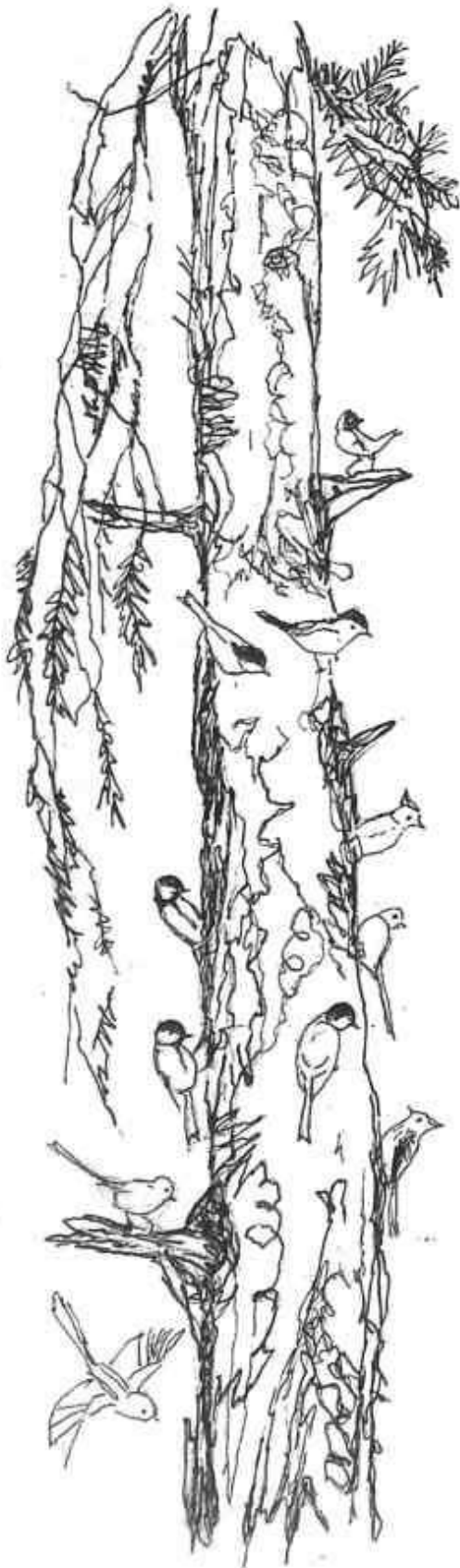
In the evening it's quiet and gloomy in the dense forest. The tall dark firs never stir. And the lynx runs under them lightly and soundlessly.

The lynx sees and hears everything that's going on in the forest depths.

It hears the leaves drifting down from the trees, it hears the whistling of the hazel-grouse and the squeaking of the titmice; it hears the woodpecker flitting on to another dry tree and settling down there.

All summer and winter the lynx roams the forest in search of food. Now it catches an unwary hare, now a squirrel, now it steals up on a slumbering black grouse, and gobbles a forest mouse as it goes along. The lynx is too careful and its senses are too alert for anyone to see it. It moves noiselessly and hears sounds from a long distance away, and is also good at climbing the tallest trees.





AN AUTUMN EVENING

Dusk falls quickly in the dense forest.

The trees cast dark shadows on the ground. The old pines and spreading, dense firs are dark and motionless.

The forest smells of resin, pine needles, and fallen leaves.

The sinking sun disappears behind the trees.

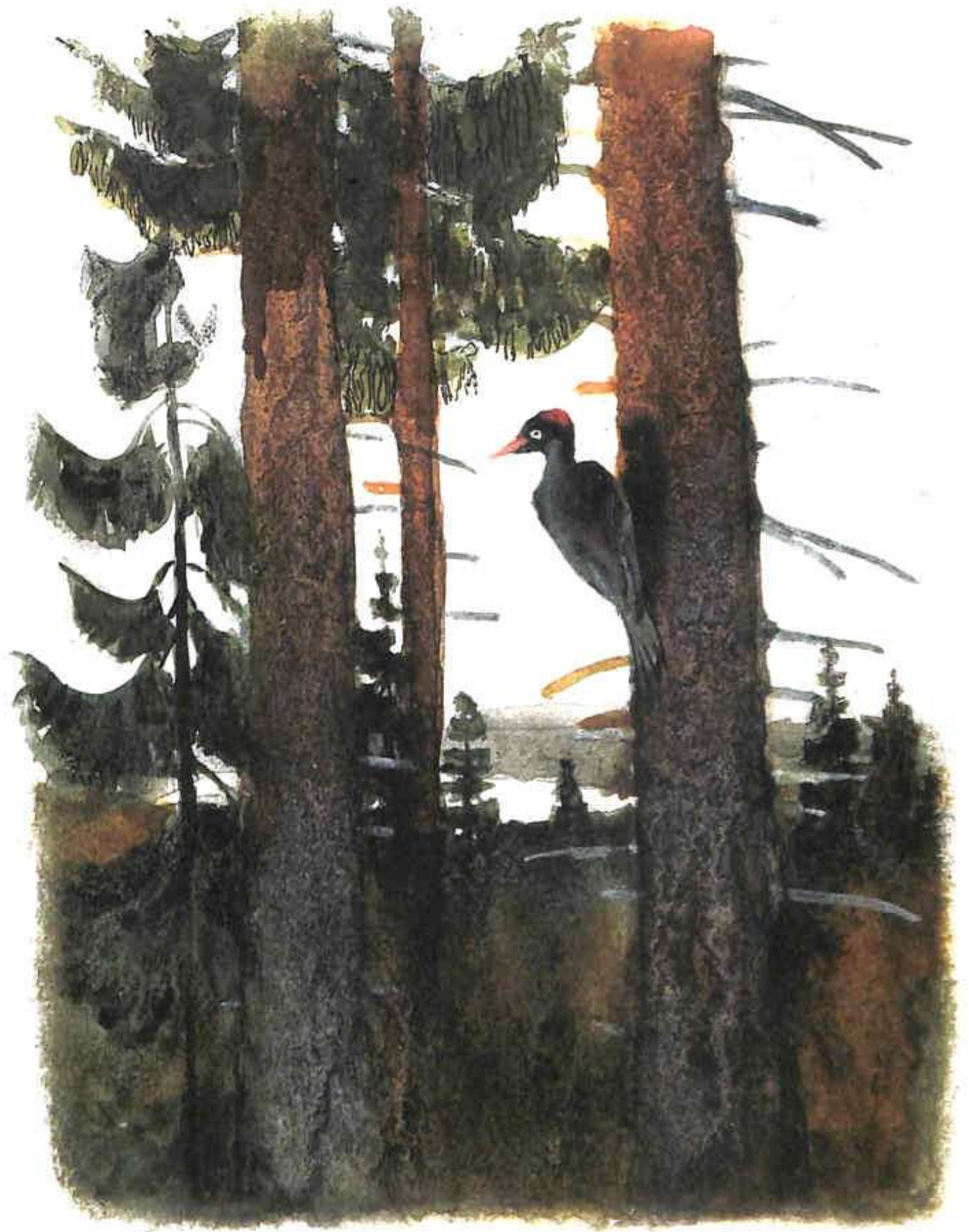
The birds have not gone to sleep yet, they are still feeding.

A black woodpecker with a red cap on its head has settled down to peck a dry old tree trunk. The hasty drumming can be heard from afar in the quiet of the evening forest.

The drumming has attracted several titmice: they fuss round the woodpecker and pick up whatever bugs and worms come their way.

Before long pitch-black night will fall over the forest. All but the nocturnal birds and beasts will go to sleep.

The hare will emerge from his daytime burrow, and timidly limp over the dry, brittle leaves. It's frightening at night in the forest: now an owl swoops past on silent wings, now a lynx snaps a dry twig, now the wolves will start howling in the distant marsh, calling their cubs together.



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Translation from the Russian

И. Соколов-Микитов

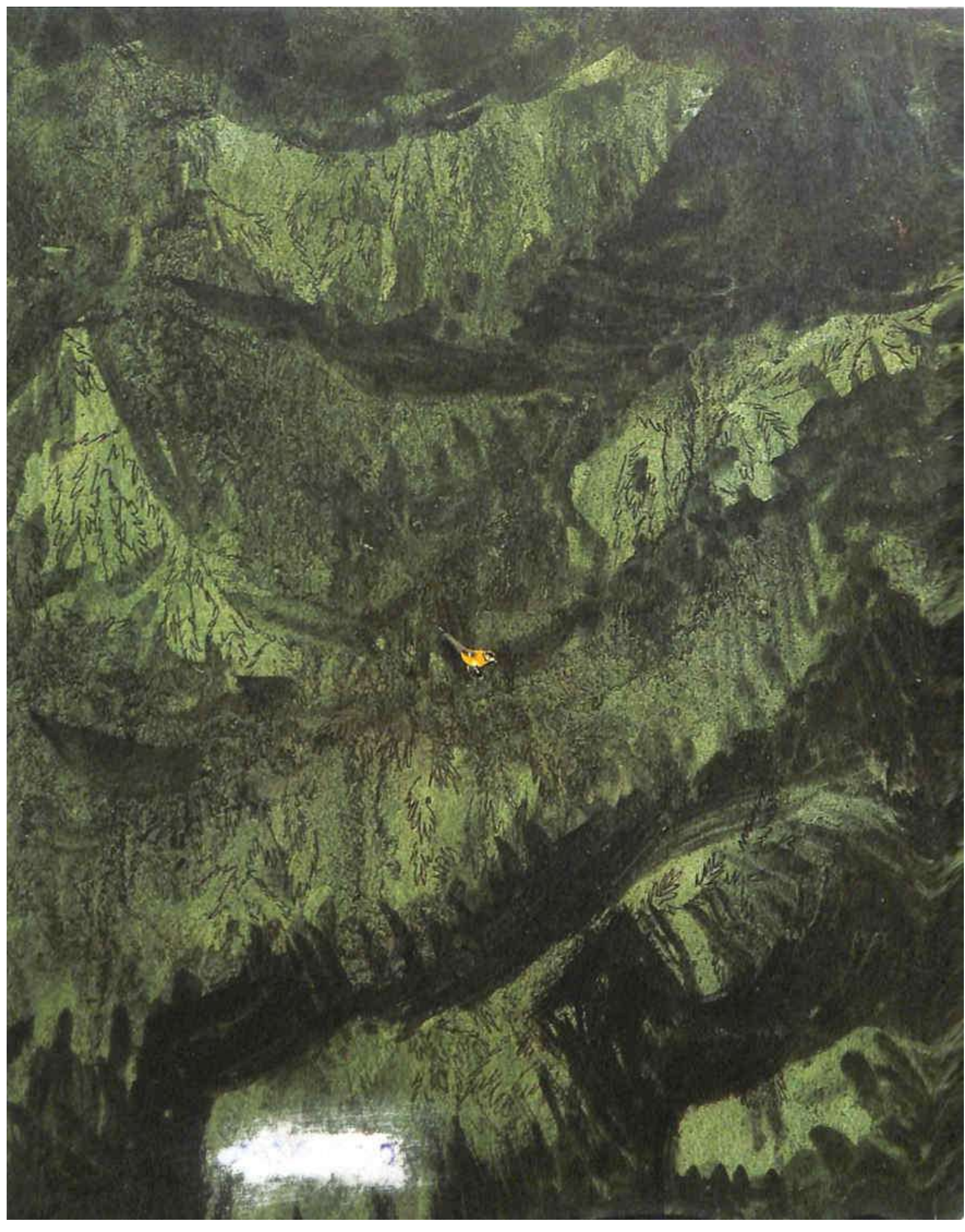
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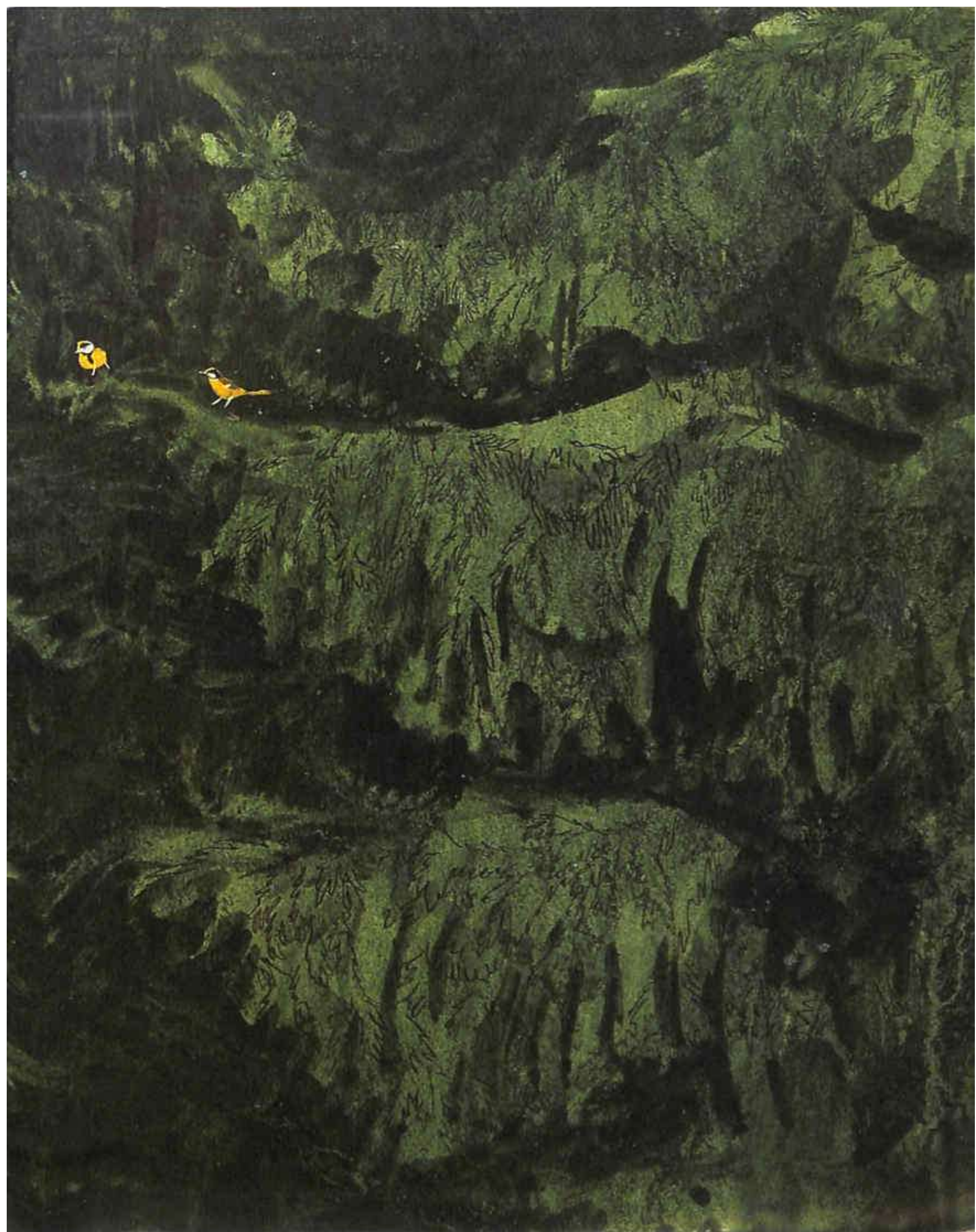
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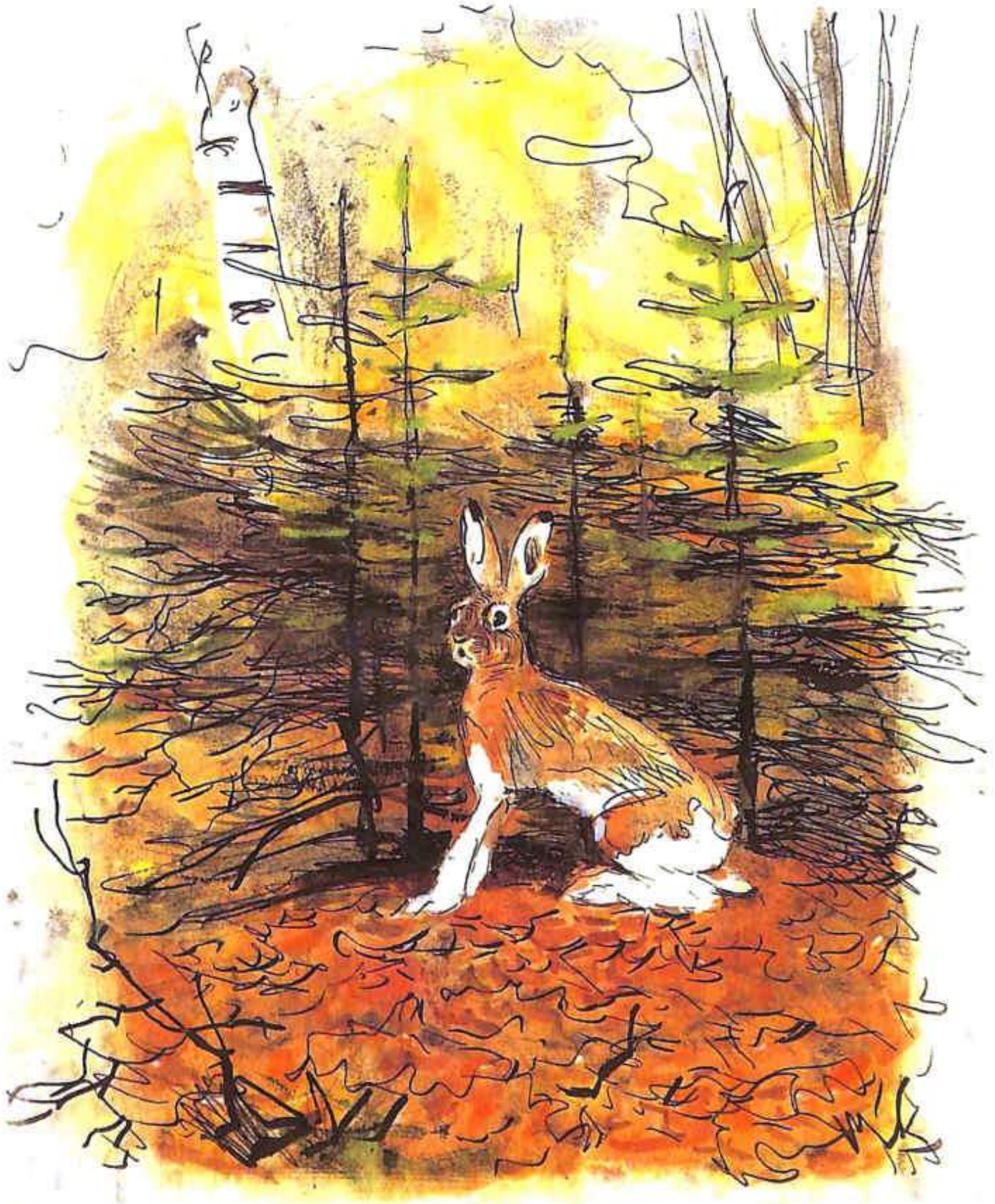
English translation © Raduga Publishers 1989

Printed in the Union of Soviet Socialist Republics

ISBN 5-05-002491-9







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