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The Secret Hiding Place written by Katharina E. Volk and illustrated by Arianna Ciccio

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The Secret Hiding Place

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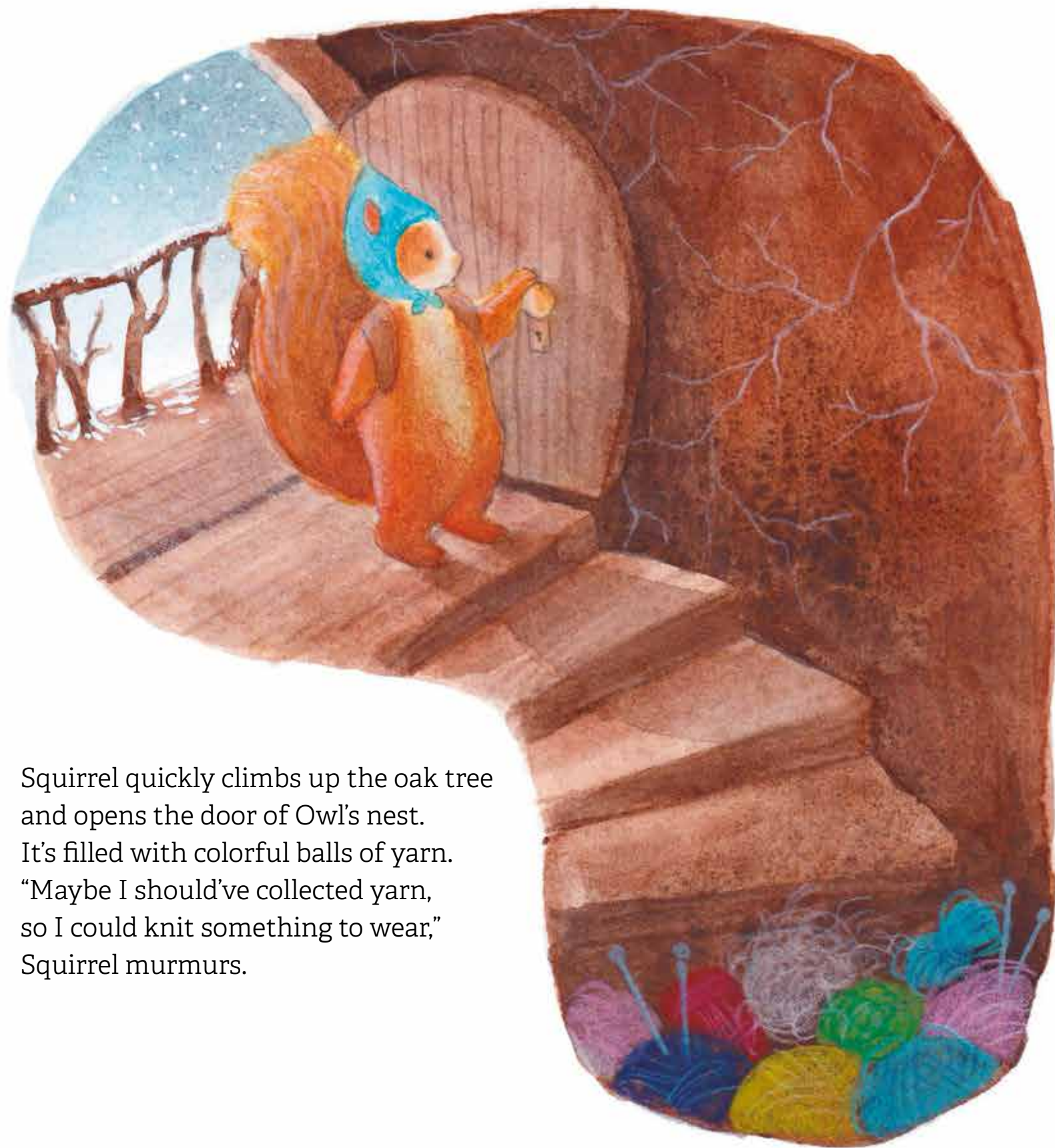
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In the fall Squirrel collected beechnuts,
hazelnuts, and walnuts, and he hid
them well . . . maybe too well!
Because now Squirrel isn't quite
sure where to find them.

He walks along the forest path
and thinks. Maybe they're up in the
old oak tree, hidden in Owl's nest?

A cold wind blows through the forest,
and white snowflakes dance in the air.
It's winter. Squirrel's tummy is getting
grumbly, so he grabs his lantern and
climbs out of his treehouse. It's time
to break into his winter supply of nuts.



Squirrel quickly climbs up the oak tree and opens the door of Owl's nest. It's filled with colorful balls of yarn. "Maybe I should've collected yarn, so I could knit something to wear," Squirrel murmurs.



Along comes Owl, flying back to her nest. "Those balls of yarn are mine!" she says proudly. "I use them to knit wing warmers." When Squirrel tells her about his missing stash of nuts, she wants to help. So they set off to look.



“Maybe the nuts are in the secret hole under the roots of the chestnut tree,” Squirrel says. He walks over and crawls inside. It’s full of books! “I probably should’ve stocked up on books too,” Squirrel realizes, “so I’d have something fun to do when it’s really cold out.” Owl opens a book. “What a great story!” she exclaims.

Along comes Mouse. “Those are all my books,” she says with a big smile. “In winter, I love nothing more than to read.” Mouse also wants to help Squirrel find his nuts. They all head off together.



“Maybe the nuts are in the very secret hut behind the bushes,” says Squirrel. Full of hope, he pushes through the bushes and dashes into the hut. But . . . it’s filled with bags and baskets of grains.

“Yummy baked things come from grains,” whispers Squirrel. “Maybe I should’ve collected grains too. Then I could’ve made something delicious.”

Along comes Hamster with a pot. “These are my grains,” he says with a wave of his paw. “I use flour to bake with, because I love to eat pancakes in winter.” Hamster doesn’t hesitate to join the search for Squirrel’s nuts.





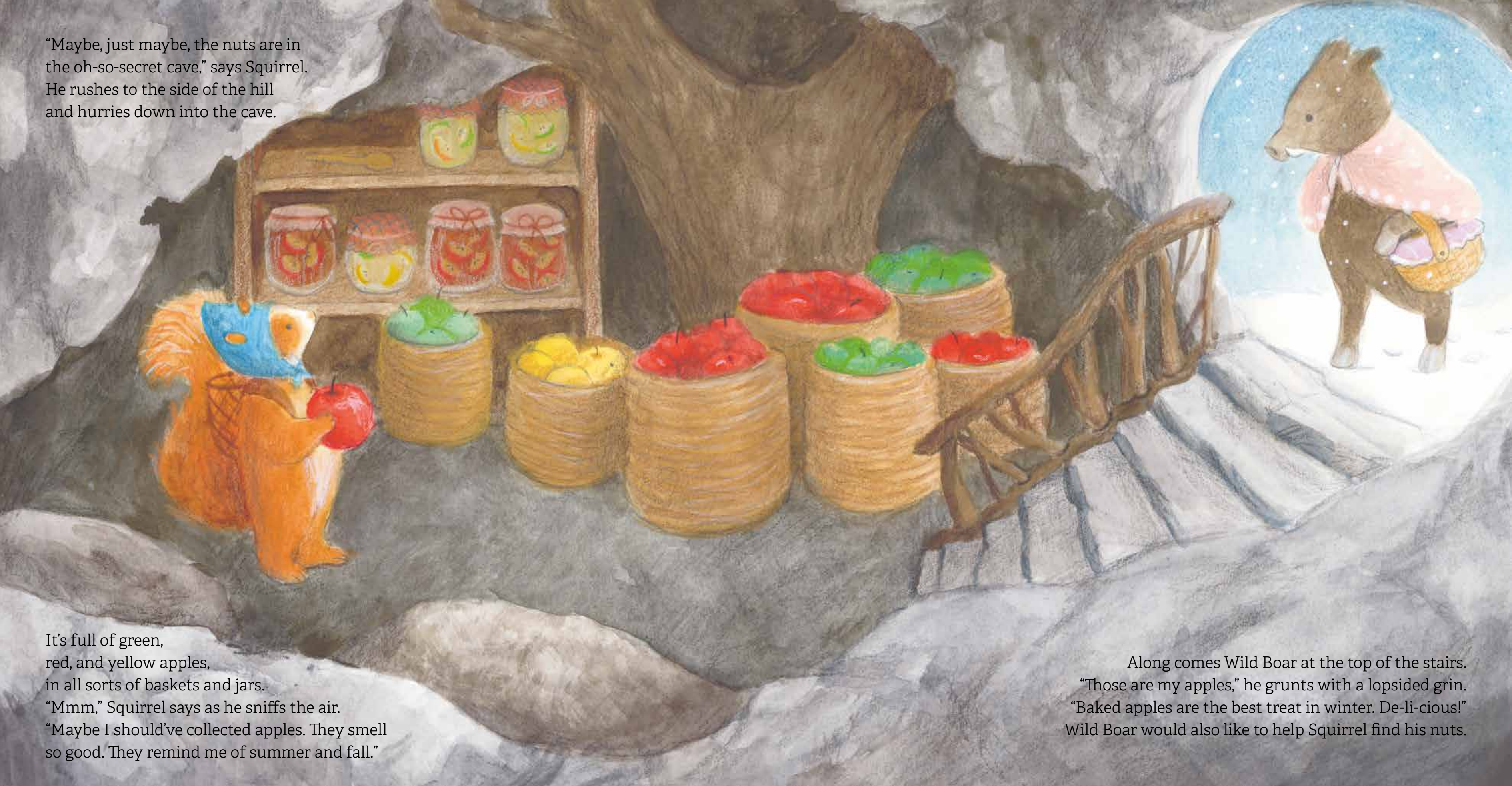
“They’re so soft,” sighs Squirrel. “Maybe I should’ve stocked up on blankets and pillows too, so I could have a cozy winter.”

Along comes Rabbit. He grabs a thick blanket. “These are my blankets and pillows,” he says with a smile.

“They make me feel nice and warm when I go to sleep.” Rabbit is also happy to help find the nuts and joins the friends.

“Maybe the nuts are under the super-secret roots of the old beech tree,” says Squirrel. He quickly heads that way. But what does he find instead? Blankets and pillows!

“Maybe, just maybe, the nuts are in the oh-so-secret cave,” says Squirrel. He rushes to the side of the hill and hurries down into the cave.



It's full of green, red, and yellow apples, in all sorts of baskets and jars. "Mmm," Squirrel says as he sniffs the air. "Maybe I should've collected apples. They smell so good. They remind me of summer and fall."

Along comes Wild Boar at the top of the stairs. "Those are my apples," he grunts with a lopsided grin. "Baked apples are the best treat in winter. De-li-cious!" Wild Boar would also like to help Squirrel find his nuts.



“Where on earth did I hide my nuts?” Squirrel asks himself. Suddenly, he remembers the top-secret cupboard behind the tall grass. He dashes over and opens the curtains. He finds all sorts of jam in the cupboard. “Strawberry jam, raspberry jam, blackberry jam . . .” Squirrel says. “I should’ve stored some jam myself. Then I’d have a tasty treat for my toast.”

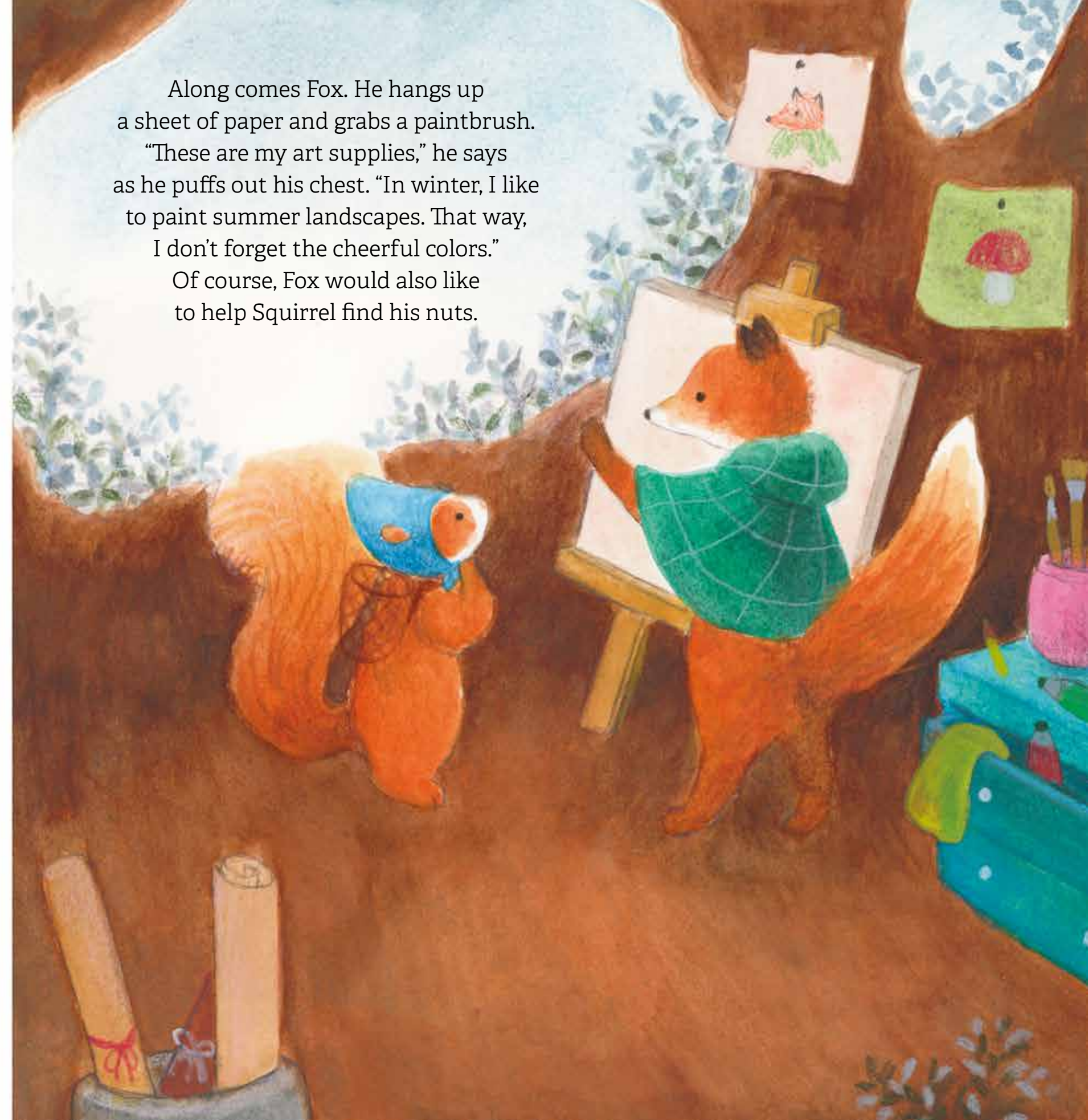


Along comes Hedgehog, running to pick up a jar of cherry jam. “This is my jam,” he says gleefully. “Everything tastes better with it: bread, pastries, and even my morning oatmeal!” Hedgehog happily joins the search for Squirrel’s nuts.



“Where are my nuts?” sighs Squirrel.
 “They haven’t been stolen, have they?”
 Then he thinks of the really secret
 hiding place behind the hazelnut bush.
 Squirrel runs over and opens the door.
 He sees drawing and painting supplies!
 “I should’ve stocked up on those too,”
 Squirrel murmurs, “so I could draw in winter.”

Along comes Fox. He hangs up
 a sheet of paper and grabs a paintbrush.
 “These are my art supplies,” he says
 as he puffs out his chest. “In winter, I like
 to paint summer landscapes. That way,
 I don’t forget the cheerful colors.”
 Of course, Fox would also like
 to help Squirrel find his nuts.





As the friends continue on their search for the hidden nuts, they meet Bear. "We're looking for my missing nuts," explains Squirrel. "Are you perhaps hiding them in your shed? I can't find them *anywhere*!" "Not at all," hums Bear as he follows along behind them. "You put them in your most secret hiding place!" "My most secret hiding place?" says Squirrel. "Where's that? I don't remember."



"Over there, in the tree trunk," Bear replies. "That's *right*!" Squirrel shouts happily, skipping toward the tree. He opens the door, and sure enough, there are the nuts he has saved for winter! Squirrel quickly fills the basket on his back to the brim. Then he carefully closes the door of his very secret hiding place.

The friends all walk to Bear's den to celebrate Squirrel's discovery. "Say, Bear, what supplies do you have in your shed?" asks Squirrel.

"None," Bear answers.

"What?" says Rabbit, surprised.

"Haven't you stocked up?"

"Are you crazy?" shouts Fox.

"On the contrary," laughs Bear.

"But what's in your shed then?"

Wild Boar wants to know.

"My garden chair, my pond floatie, my watering can, and my fishing rod," Bear says. "I don't need them in winter. Now there's finally some room in my den."

"Room?" asks Mouse. "What for?"

"For all of you, of course!" laughs Bear.





The other animals look at each other. What a great idea! They all run to their own secret hiding places. Rabbit comes back with a bunch of blankets and pillows. Owl gets her knitting, Mouse grabs a stack of books, and Fox gathers his art supplies. Hamster returns with a bag of grains, Hedgehog holds a box of jam, and Wild Boar brings a basket full of tasty apples. And Squirrel? He gets even more nuts.



Rabbit hands out the blankets and pillows, and the den becomes very cozy. Hamster grinds his grains into flour and stirs the pancake batter, while Squirrel prepares nut pudding. There's room for everyone and their secret stashes in Bear's den!

A detailed illustration of a cozy winter scene inside a cave. A large brown bear sits on the left, wearing a yellow shirt and red collar, reading a book. A small mouse sits next to him, also reading. A squirrel sits on a blue cushion, holding a blue cup. A fox stands on the right, holding a green book. An owl sits on a blue cushion, knitting. A rabbit sits on a pink blanket, holding a blue cup. A large fire burns in the center. The cave has a green kitchenette with a stove and a window showing snow outside. The floor is covered with a green and yellow patterned rug. The walls are made of brown stone. The scene is warm and inviting, with soft lighting from the fire and the window.

While the snowflakes dance in the air outside, the friends spend a cozy winter day in Bear's warm den. And Squirrel? He's delighted to have finally found his super-secret hiding place.

Soon, the friends are feasting on pancakes with jam, nut pudding, and baked apples. Mouse reads an exciting story, and Fox makes beautiful drawings that go with it. Owl's knitting needles tap against each other as she knits scarves, hats, and gloves for everyone.

A detailed illustration of a cozy winter scene inside a cave. A large brown bear sits on the left, wearing a red collar. A small mouse sits on a pink cushion, reading a book. A squirrel sits on a blue cushion, holding a blue cup. An owl sits on a purple checkered tablecloth, knitting. A fox sits on a green cushion, holding a book. A rabbit sits on a pink cushion, holding a book. A small fire burns in the center. The cave has a green kitchenette with a stove and a window. Snowflakes are visible outside the cave entrance. The scene is warm and inviting, with soft lighting from the fire and the window.

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