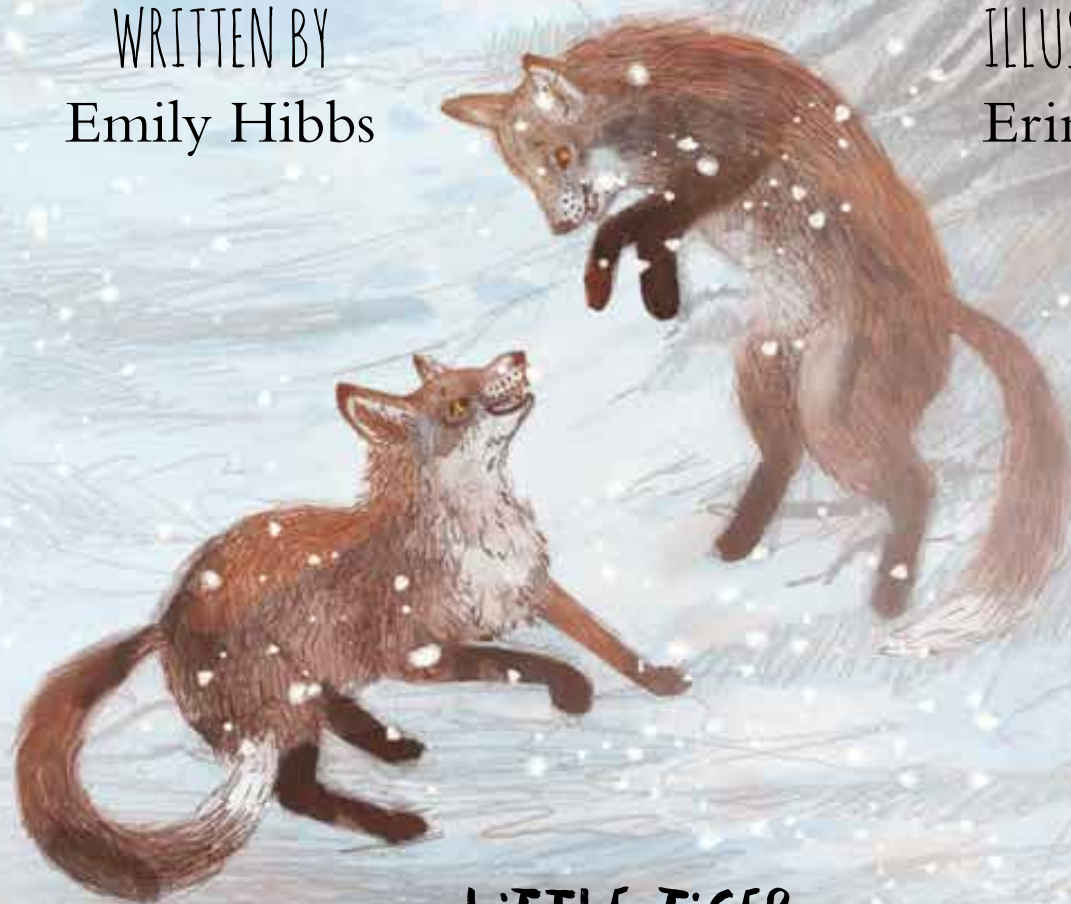


TALES FROM THE FOREST

WRITTEN BY
Emily Hibbs

ILLUSTRATED BY
Erin Brown



LITTLE TIGER

LONDON

FOR ELIORA
~EH

FOR DAVID
~EB



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SPRING







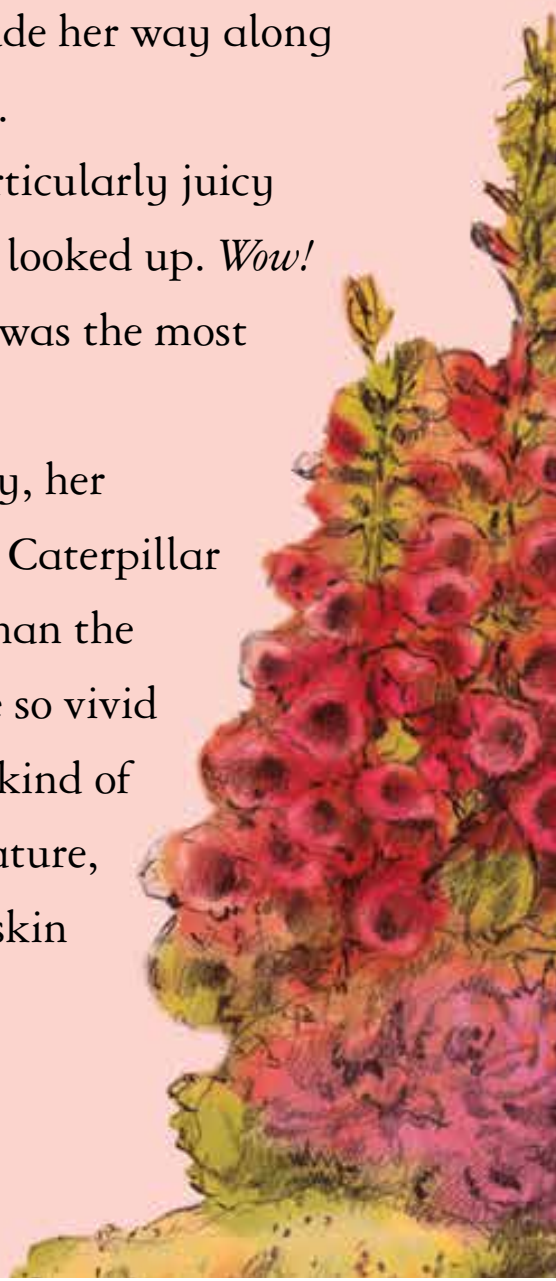
CATERPILLAR AND THE FLYING FLOWER

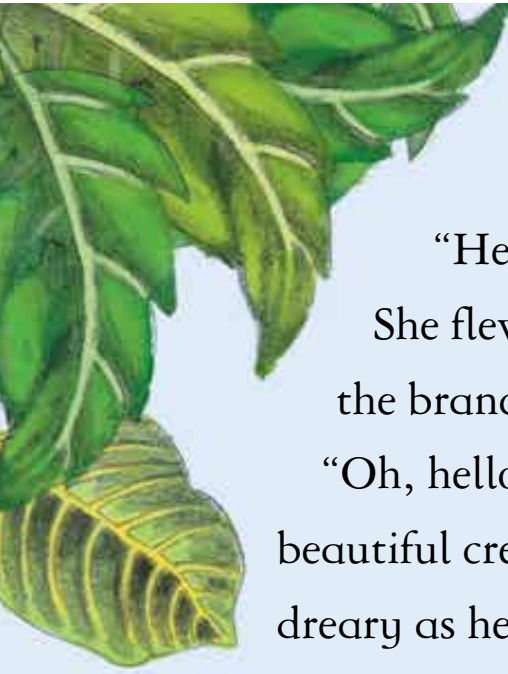


Chomp! Munch! Crunch! Caterpillar had only hatched a few days ago, but ever since she crawled out of her tiny egg she couldn't stop eating. She'd made her way along a bendy branch, nibbling each green shoot.

Just as Caterpillar was chewing on a particularly juicy leaf, she heard the soft flutter of wings and looked up. *Wow!* The colourful creature flitting towards her was the most beautiful thing she'd ever seen!

The creature landed on a foxglove nearby, her yellow-and-black wings folded behind her. Caterpillar admired their blue tips – they were bluer than the sky! – and fiery red spots. Her colours were so vivid that Caterpillar wondered if she was some kind of flying flower. Compared to this special creature, Caterpillar felt dull with her lumpy green skin and black speckles.





“Hello, little one,” said the colourful creature.
She flew upwards and landed gracefully on
the branch.

“Oh, hello!” said Caterpillar, pleased that the
beautiful creature had chosen to greet somebody as
dreary as her. She crawled closer, ashamed of her
slow wriggle.

“I wish I was bright and zippy like you,” said Caterpillar.
“Instead of boring and slow like me.”

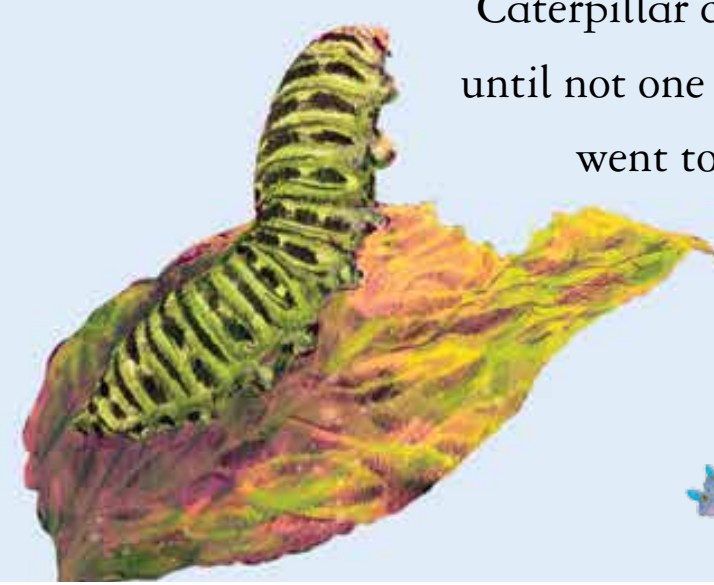
“Well,” said the creature, stretching her wings.
“I’ve got a feeling you won’t be boring and slow for
much longer...”

With that she launched into the air. “Eat up,
little one!” she called back.

The creature darted higher and higher until she was just a
speck of yellow dancing across the sky.

“What could she mean?” Caterpillar asked herself. But
then her tummy rumbled and she started munching on the
juicy leaf again.

Caterpillar crawled and ate, ate and crawled,
until not one leaf was left on the branch. She
went to find another and began making
her way through the shoots
there. The branch sagged



under her weight – she was getting bigger! Days passed and Caterpillar stripped the shrub of almost all its leaves. Finally she didn't feel like eating any more.

“Perhaps this is what that creature meant,” thought Caterpillar. “I do feel like something is about to change...”

She found a sheltered branch and spun a silk thread to hang from. Caterpillar shimmied off her outer layer of skin, revealing a brown case – a special chrysalis. On the outside it was as motionless as a dead leaf, but inside something amazing was happening...

For two weeks, the chrysalis remained quiet and still. Then, one morning, it split apart, like a bud opening its petals. A beautiful creature emerged, flashing with yellow-and-black patterns. Dashes of brilliant blue and vivid red decorated her wing tips. Caterpillar had become Butterfly!

“I'm just as bright as that creature that settled beside me,” she said. “I hope I'm as zippy as her too!”

Butterfly opened up her wonderful wings and set off into the sky. She certainly wasn't slow and boring any more.

*“I crawled around, ate every leaf within range,
Became a chrysalis and started to change.
Now I'm a butterfly, what a sensation –
It's nature's most amazing transformation!”*





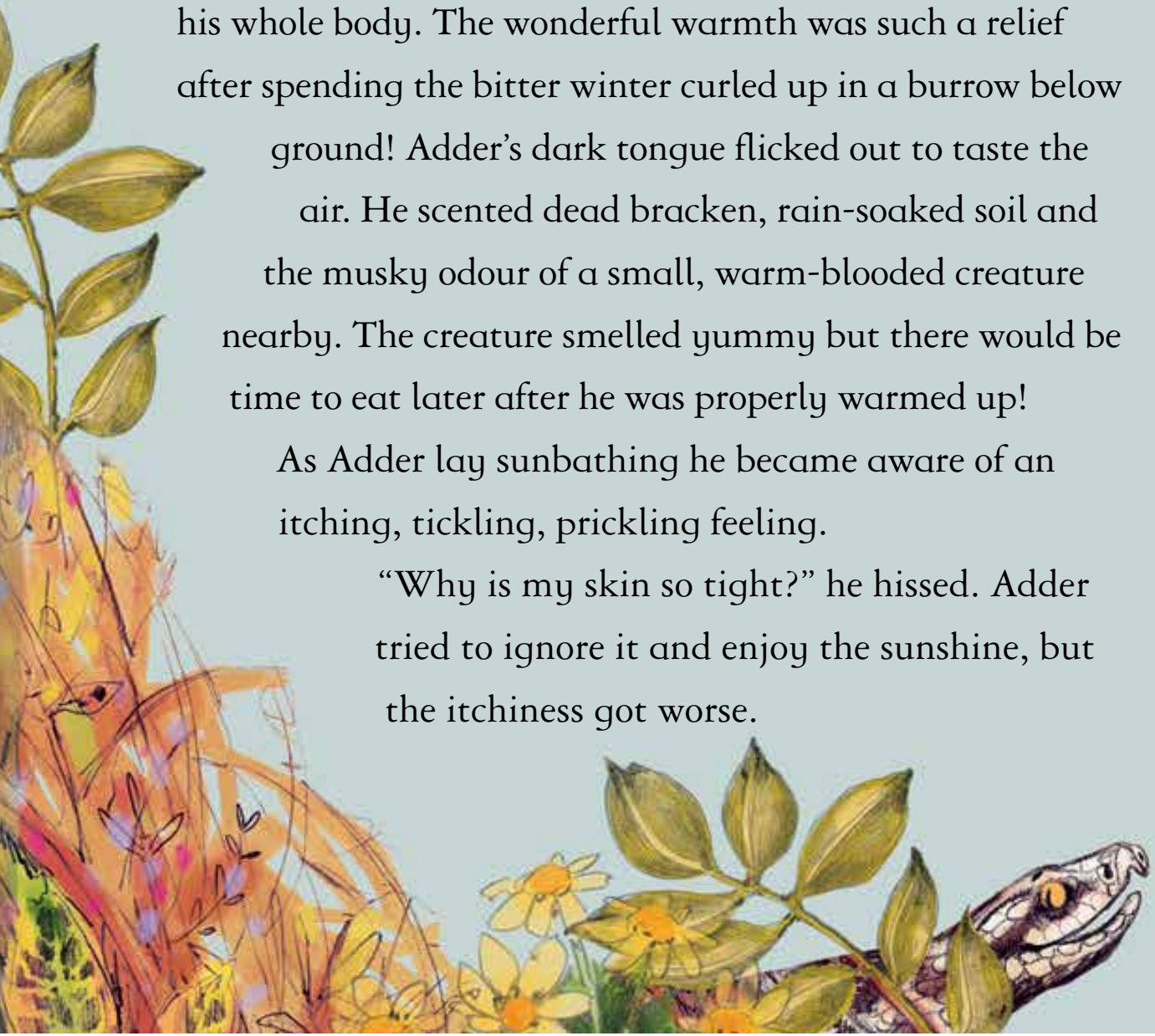
ADDER'S ITCH



The sun slid out from behind the clouds. Slowly, Adder unwound his coils and stretched out on his favourite basking rock. Heat seeped through his skin and spread across his whole body. The wonderful warmth was such a relief after spending the bitter winter curled up in a burrow below ground! Adder's dark tongue flicked out to taste the air. He scented dead bracken, rain-soaked soil and the musky odour of a small, warm-blooded creature nearby. The creature smelled yummy but there would be time to eat later after he was properly warmed up!

As Adder lay sunbathing he became aware of an itching, tickling, prickling feeling.

"Why is my skin so tight?" he hissed. Adder tried to ignore it and enjoy the sunshine, but the itchiness got worse.





“Perhaps my skin has shrunk in the sun,” he said. “I’ll go for a slither and see if it stretches out again.”

Adder slid off the rock into the crackly bracken. His black-and-white zigzags faded into the undergrowth as he wriggled along, trying to stretch his skin.

“Maybe I’ll have a snack,” Adder said. “That’ll take my mind off things.”

He pressed his head to the ground and felt for the vibrations of paws scurrying beneath the soil. Yes! He could sense a little shrew inside a burrow below. But then Adder felt a different sort of vibration – the smooth, slithery movements of a snake... A sleek body slid out from between the branches of bracken. It was another adder!

“That smells tasty,” said the stranger. “I’ll fight you for it!”

Adder hissed. He was already feeling cross about his itchy skin – he didn’t need another snake attempting to steal his snack too! He reared up off the ground so half of his body stood upright. The stranger mirrored him and the two snakes twined together, looping round and round. Their intricate dance moved them across the forest floor, as each adder tried to prove that he was stronger and push the other to the ground. Adder pushed with all his might, forcing the stranger down.



“OK, OK. You win, I’ll go!” said the other snake as he slithered away. Adder had won, and better still...

“My skin doesn’t feel so tight now,” said Adder. He twisted round and saw that the thin, scaly skin of his tail was beginning to lift away from the layer underneath. It must have rubbed off during the dance.

Of course – he needed to shed his skin!

It had been such a long time since he’d last shed – before the winter hibernation – that he’d forgotten that was what the itching, prickling, ticking feeling meant. Adder rubbed his head against a rock. He scraped and he scratched and he scuffed until the skin loosened enough for him to slither out of it completely. Lying in the bracken, the pale husk of his old skin dried out in the sun. Adder slid away, his shiny patterns gleaming brightly.

*“My patterned scales are stretchy and strong,
They’ll grow with me until I get too long.
Then twice a year, in the autumn and spring,
I’ll rub and I’ll scrub and I’ll shed my skin!”*







THE WOODPECKERS' NEW HOME



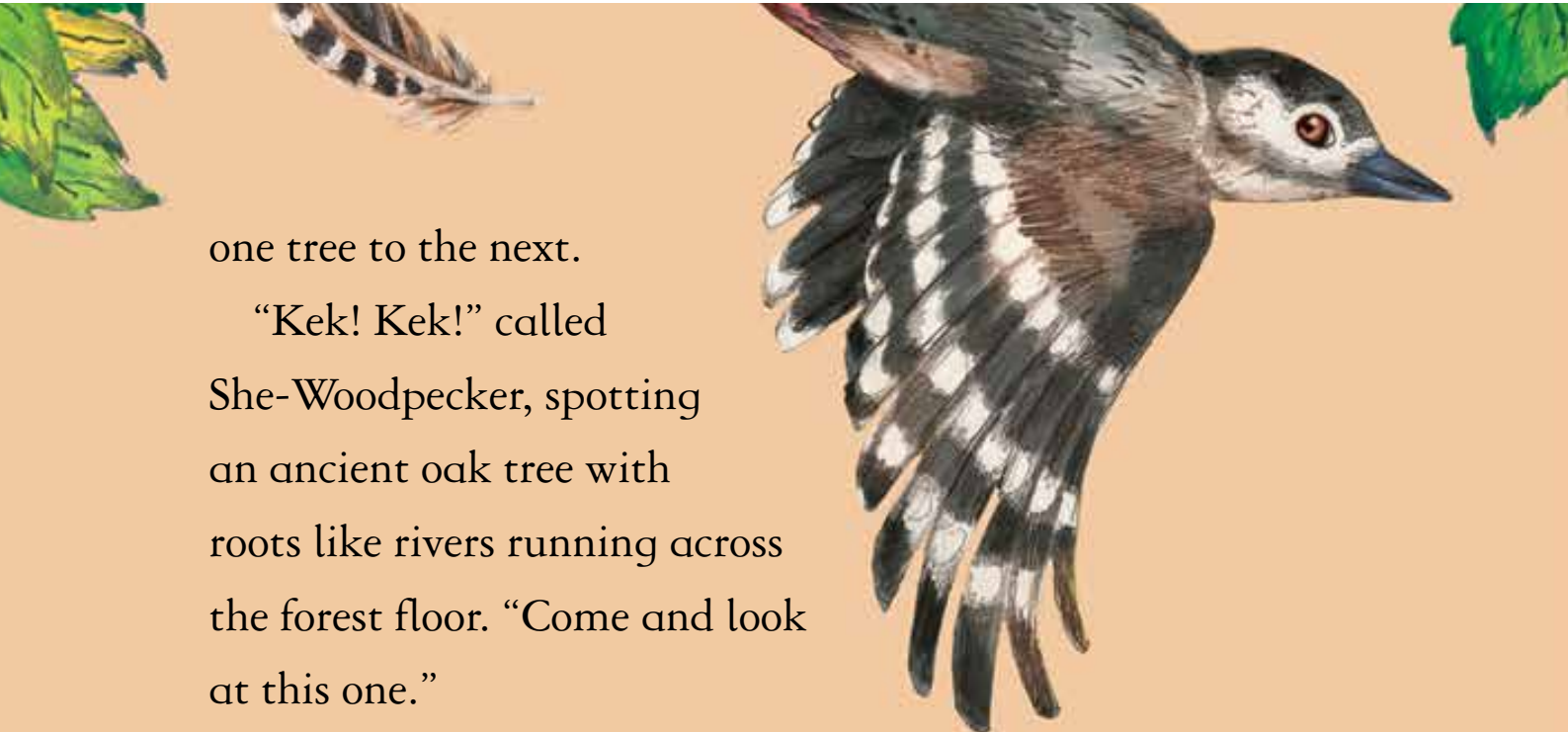
The woodpeckers were worried. It was nearly time for She-Woodpecker to lay her eggs but their neighbourhood was full of dangers. Cunning crows nested next door and crafty foxes had dug a den right at the base of their tree.

Crows and foxes didn't frighten the woodpeckers – but they weren't the sorts of beady-eyed creatures they wanted nearby when their little ones were learning to fly. If a fledgling took a tumble to the forest floor, they might... The woodpeckers didn't want to think about it!

“We're going to have to move,” said She-Woodpecker one spring morning. “This is not the right place to bring up our chicks – there are too many dangers.”

He-Woodpecker agreed and they set off in search of a new tree to call home. They flew through the forest, looking from






one tree to the next.

“Kek! Kek!” called She-Woodpecker, spotting an ancient oak tree with roots like rivers running across the forest floor. “Come and look at this one.”

He-Woodpecker flew over and landed on a branch. He gave the trunk a few sharp pecks, but even his chisel-like beak couldn’t break through the tough bark.

“No good,” he said. “The wood is too hard. We’ll have to keep looking.”


The pair set off once more, searching high and low for the perfect place to peck a new nest.



“This one looks softer,” called He-Woodpecker. He landed on the trunk of a younger oak, its wibbly leaves fresh and green. Toes spread to keep him steady, He-Woodpecker gave the bark a sharp peck. He drilled through the wood straight away.

“This is the one!” he said.

“I’m not so sure...” said She-Woodpecker. She landed on a higher branch and peered into a hollow on the side of the tree.



There was a shrill squeak. A flurry of red fur. And the whip of a big, bushy tail.

Uh-oh!

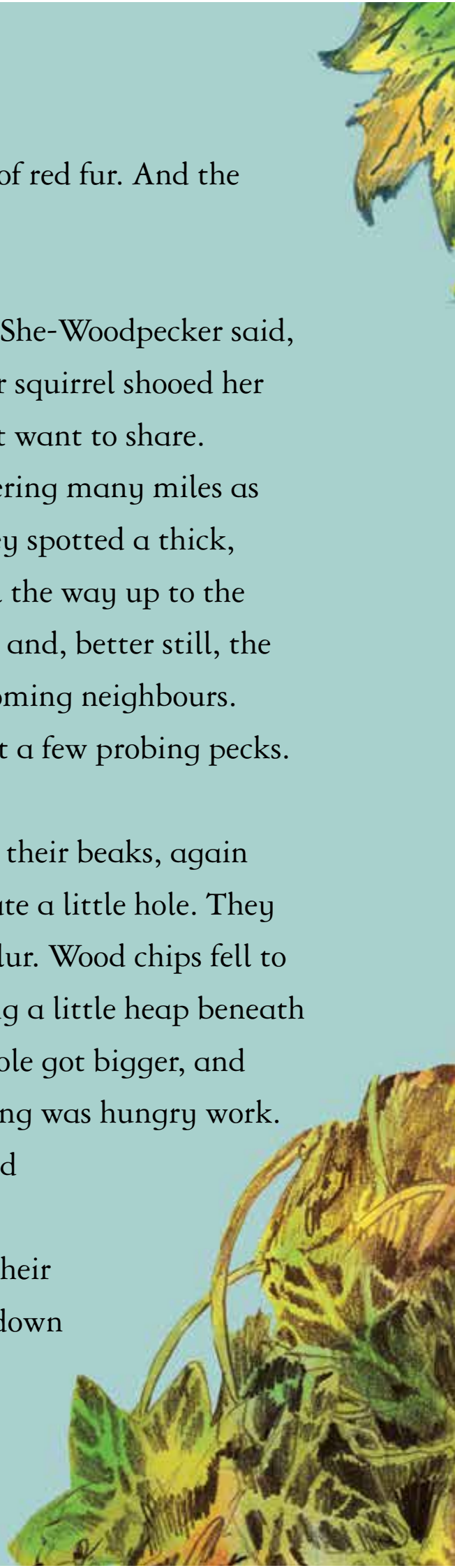
“I think this tree is already taken,” She-Woodpecker said, flapping backwards as a fierce mother squirrel shooed her away from her drey. She clearly didn’t want to share.

The tired woodpeckers flew on, covering many miles as the sun slid across the sky. Finally they spotted a thick, gnarled tree that seemed to stretch all the way up to the clouds. Its bark was broken and flaky and, better still, the woodpeckers couldn’t see any unwelcoming neighbours. They perched on the trunk and gave it a few probing pecks. It was perfect!

Together they struck the wood with their beaks, again and again and again, working to create a little hole. They pecked so fast their beaks became a blur. Wood chips fell to the forest floor like snowflakes, making a little heap beneath the new hollow. As they pecked, the hole got bigger, and bigger, and BIGGER. But nest-building was hungry work.

“I’ll see if I can find us a snack,” said She-Woodpecker after a few hours.

While He-Woodpecker worked on their new home, She-Woodpecker shuffled down the trunk, tapping here and there.







Beneath the bark, the tree was teeming with wood-boring beetles. Delicious! Her long tongue licked up a few tasty creatures. She collected a few more in her beak and flew back up to share them with He-Woodpecker.

“We’ve chosen a top spot,” she said with a mouthful of yummy bugs.



Over the next few days, the woodpeckers pecked away until their hollow was ready. The round opening was just about big enough for them to squeeze through one at a time. Inside was a deep and cosy cavity, lined with wood chippings. There was plenty of room for a new family.

“Before we settle in, I’ll let everyone know that this is *our* spot,” said He-Woodpecker.

He flapped out on to a dead branch, half-snapped and hanging low to the ground, and began hammering the wood with his beak. The red nape of his neck bobbed backwards and forwards as he pecked.

Tòk, tok, tok, tok, tok! Tòk, tok, tok, tok, tok!

The loud drumming echoed around the forest. Now all the animals knew that this was the woodpeckers’ tree.



A few days later, She-Woodpecker laid six smooth, shiny eggs. They sat at the bottom of the nest cavity.

“They’re beautiful,” said He-Woodpecker.

She-Woodpecker nestled on top of them, so the eggs would stay snug. “It won’t be long before they hatch...”

Every day the woodpeckers took it in turns looking after the eggs and searching for food, swapping roles as the sun set and rose. After a few weeks, their teamwork paid off.

One morning, a crack as thin as a spider’s silk thread appeared on the surface of the biggest egg. Soon the crack grew to the width of a blade of grass and, not long after, a tiny, hungry beak appeared. By the end of the day, there were five more mini mouths to feed.

“Hello, little ones,” said She-Woodpecker as the chicks chirruped.

He-Woodpecker arrived back at the nest with a beakful of worms to share with his new family.

“Welcome to the world,” he said proudly. “Now, eat up. You’ve got a lot of growing to do!”

*“We searched the forest for the perfect tree,
Then pecked a new home for our family.
Now our tiny chicks can grow, feed and rest,
Until, feathered and fledged, they fly the nest.”*