



# GUARDIANS OF THE FOREST

Maša Ogrizek, Slavica Danić

Little Beechnut, Little Acorn, Fir, Pine as well as Cher and Ry all live in the apartments at 7 Oak Way where their mischievous antics annoy their neighbours. But when nearly all the trees in the neighbouring Spruce Grove become ill, they join forces to save them. And they get help from a little boy and girl called Simon and Sonja, respectively.

What adventures await them next?

All we can tell you is that in the third book there are new exciting adventures waiting for them.







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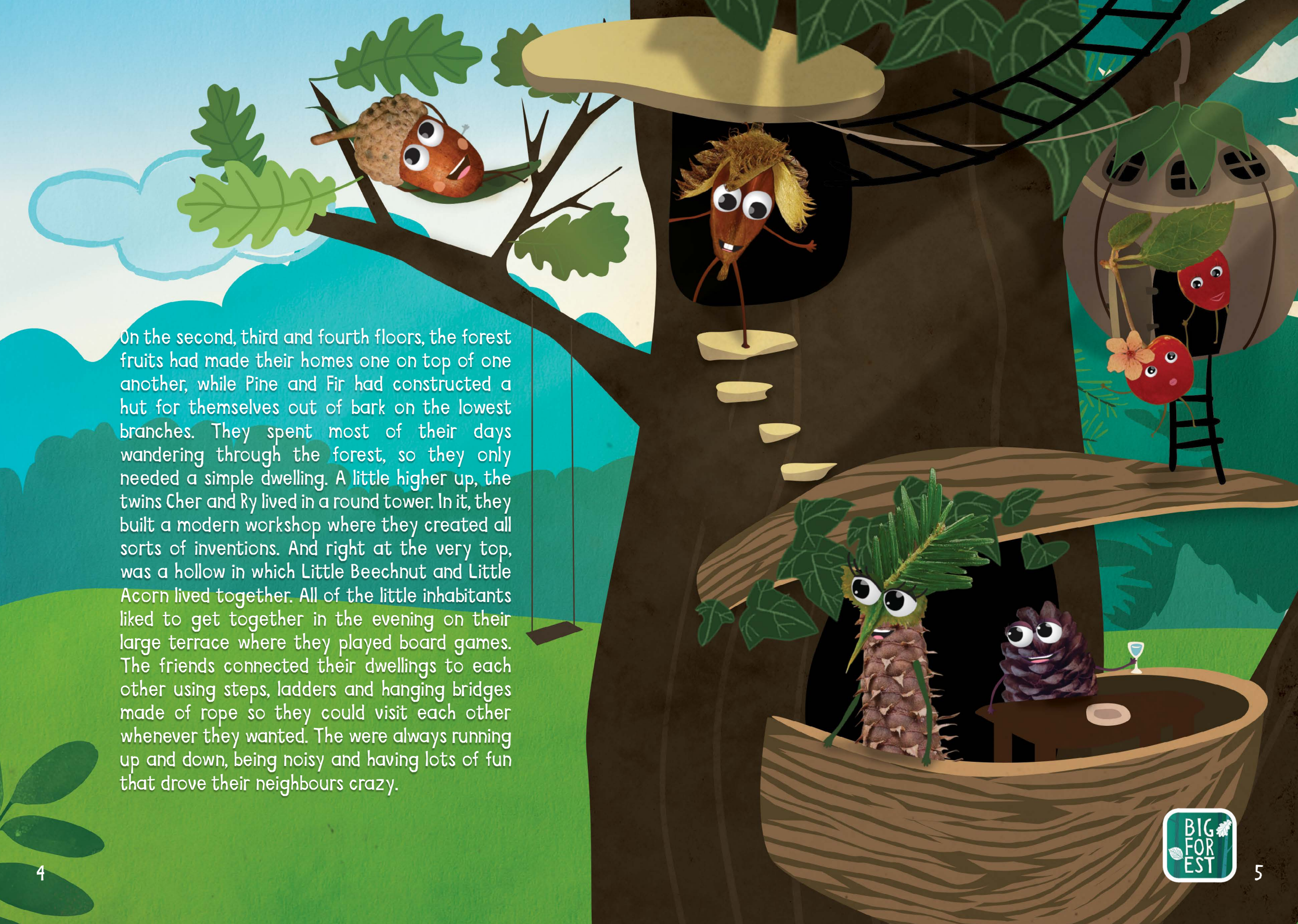
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Spring was awakening in the Big Forest and the apartments at 7 Oak Way were bustling with life. Mr Shroom, the janitor, lived in the cellar with his family. The fungi made sure that the plumbing worked without a hitch and the roots got enough water and nutrients. They were also in charge of the internet connection with the other trees. On the ground floor, lots and lots of large red wood ants lived. Their job was to keep the courtyard in front of the apartments clean and tidy, as well as to make sure the soil was light, airy and fertilized. Beside the Good Ant cleaning service, also the Cocoon Kindergarten was in the front yard. During the day, Mr and Mrs Stag Beetle made a pretty little nest in the decaying wood for their larvae, and in the evening they would take flight, whizzing off to enjoy themselves. The married couple of woodpeckers that lived on the first floor was also happily expecting an addition to their family. They had been getting the last bits and pieces ready in their beautiful home in the tree trunk before the arrival of the baby woodpeckers.







On the second, third and fourth floors, the forest fruits had made their homes one on top of one another, while Pine and Fir had constructed a hut for themselves out of bark on the lowest branches. They spent most of their days wandering through the forest, so they only needed a simple dwelling. A little higher up, the twins Cher and Ry lived in a round tower. In it, they built a modern workshop where they created all sorts of inventions. And right at the very top, was a hollow in which Little Beechnut and Little Acorn lived together. All of the little inhabitants liked to get together in the evening on their large terrace where they played board games. The friends connected their dwellings to each other using steps, ladders and hanging bridges made of rope so they could visit each other whenever they wanted. They were always running up and down, being noisy and having lots of fun that drove their neighbours crazy.





"Don't dig the tunnels too deep into the ground, you'll damage the wiring!" Mr Shroom would bellow out in an annoyed voice when the forest fruits played hide-and-seek underground.

"Don't litter!" shouted the aggravated ants when they dropped something off the terrace.

Mrs Woodpecker would warn Little Beechnut and Little Acorn several times a day, "Boys, don't slide about on the fence, it's much too dangerous!"

"Cher and Ry, you two had better not be jumping through the window after eight o'clock at night," Mr Woodpecker would add in a strict voice.

"Oh, Mr Drilly is getting riled up again," the twins would giggle. "Don't think that I can't hear you two!" said the expectant father Mr Woodpecker, shaking his head and hastily drawing the curtains.

"Don't worry dear, they will be hatching soon. Look, the eggshell is already cracking!" said his caring wife, trying to calm him down. But it didn't help one bit, and the father-to-be nervously gobbled up a cup full of roasted insects in excitement.



Janitor  
Shroom

Cocoon  
Kindergarten

"The Good Ant"







Speedy the squirrel who lived at the very top of the oak tree in its own little apartment defended the mischievous little kids, "Dear neighbours, don't get angry at them - they're only children!"

"Miss Speedy, that may be easy for you to say since they are not running around above your head," said Mr Woodpecker in an overly polite voice.

"Well, we also had to grin and bear it when you were making lots of noise renovating your children's room," the squirrel answered back. "You'll soon get to know for yourselves just how lively children are," she added in a kinder tone.

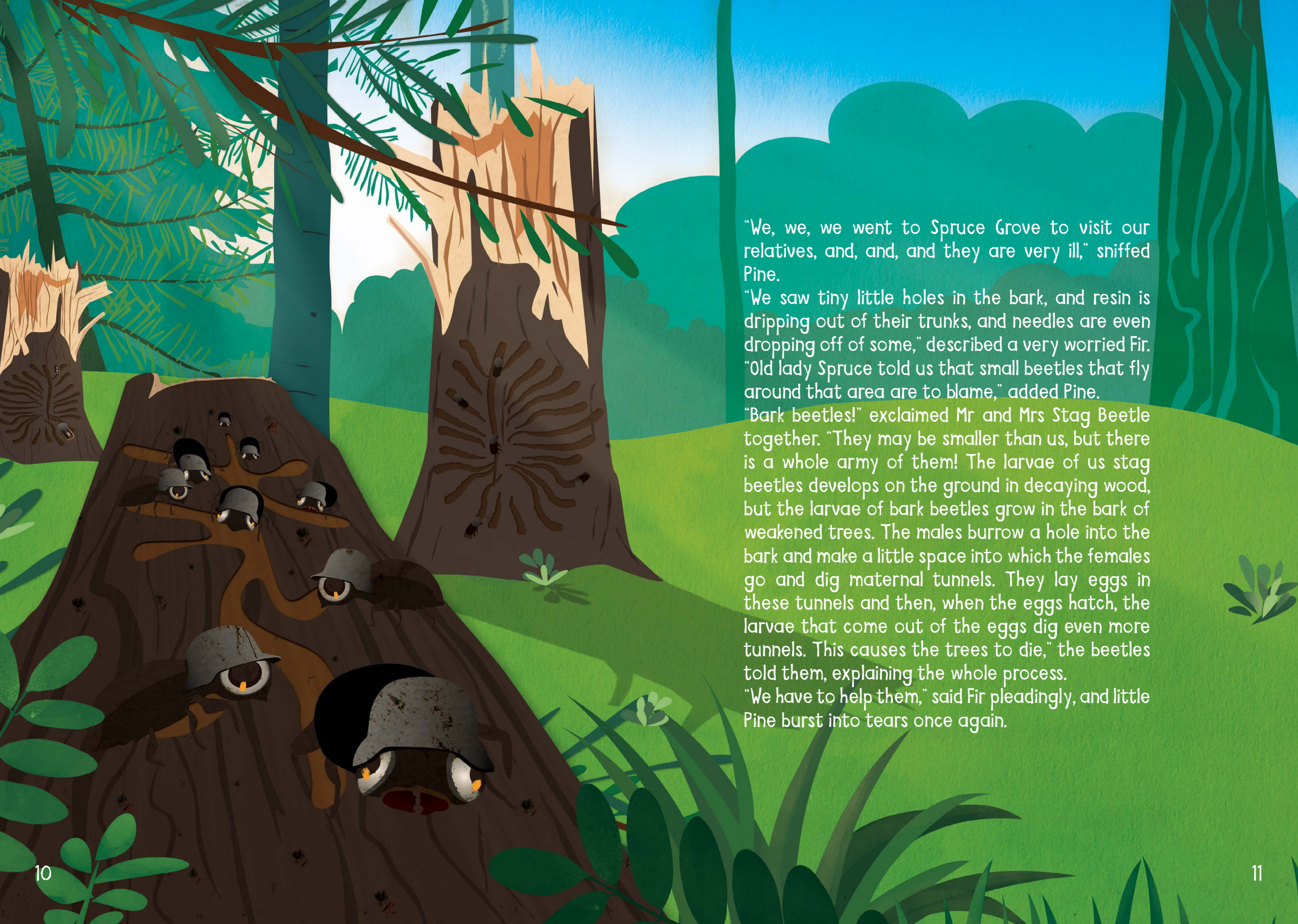
The new parents really did have their beaks full of work, feeding and looking after their three babies, so they no longer poked their beaks into the lives of other people's children.

Although it was still spring, it felt as hot as summer. Mr Shroom the janitor made a little pool for the children to play in and they splished and splashed from morning to night.

But their happy smiles disappeared when one day, Pine and Fir returned home from wandering in the forest with tears streaming down their faces.







"We, we, we went to Spruce Grove to visit our relatives, and, and, and they are very ill," sniffed Pine.

"We saw tiny little holes in the bark, and resin is dripping out of their trunks, and needles are even dropping off of some," described a very worried Fir. "Old lady Spruce told us that small beetles that fly around that area are to blame," added Pine.

"Bark beetles!" exclaimed Mr and Mrs Stag Beetle together. "They may be smaller than us, but there is a whole army of them! The larvae of us stag beetles develops on the ground in decaying wood, but the larvae of bark beetles grow in the bark of weakened trees. The males burrow a hole into the bark and make a little space into which the females go and dig maternal tunnels. They lay eggs in these tunnels and then, when the eggs hatch, the larvae that come out of the eggs dig even more tunnels. This causes the trees to die," the beetles told them, explaining the whole process.

"We have to help them," said Fir pleadingly, and little Pine burst into tears once again.



Speedy tried to calm them down by saying, "Not to fear, I'm sure we can come up with something!" Without wasting even a second she shouted out, "Do any of the grown-ups know anyone from Spruce Grove?"

"I've got a friend there who used to go to bird school with me," announced Mrs Woodpecker.

"Great!" replied the squirrel excitedly. "Then today your husband will look after the baby birds by himself and you can come and help us with our mission to save the spruces!" Speedy quickly decided.

She then began describing her plan to the residents of 7 Oak Way who listened on closely. "Little Beechnut, Little Acorn, Cher and Ry, you all get on my back. Let's go and look for your friend Simon! He'll know what to do. Pine and Fir, you two climb onto Mrs Woodpecker and go and find her old school friend. Maybe she knows what's going on in Spruce Grove."

As good as done! She flew off in such a hurry that the group could barely keep from falling off. After that, Mrs Woodpecker flew a little more carefully so she didn't lose them.





Not long after, the woodpecker joyfully chirped and landed on a nearby tree.

She called out to her dear friend that she had not seen for a long time, "Hoo-Hoo!"

"Who dares awaken me in the middle of the day?!" the owl cried out angrily, only just having fallen asleep after a long night of hunting.

"We're so sorry, my dear, but we really need your wisdom right now. Do you know why nearly all the trees in Spruce Grove fell ill this spring?"

Now fully awake and hearing the kind words, Hoo-Hoo the owl calmed down and decided to explain what was happening. "Ever since spring and summer have become so hot and dry, the spruce bark beetle has spread tremendously. And it is even worse if there are a lot of one type of trees in the same place, as this makes them even more vulnerable to pests. Forests where many different types of trees grow are much healthier. In Spruce Grove, there are only spruces that were planted there by people," wisely spoke Hoo-Hoo the owl.







"I would be glad to help!" said Mrs Woodpecker, her tongue darting out of her beak as she began to poke out bark beetles from under the bark. "My children love to eat them! And me and my husband can store some away for the long winter."

"But there are too many! Even a whole flock of birds could not eat them all up. I'm afraid that it is too late for the old spruces. However, we can still save the young ones!"

"But how?" asked Pine and Fir, chiming into the conversation. "I don't know, but I do know someone that can find the solution to any problem," answered the clever Hoo-Hoo and beckoned them to follow her. They flew across the vast forest of only spruce trees until they caught sight of a small wooden cabin in a field.

"We're here" declared the owl, skillfully landing on the roof and hooting loudly, "Soonjaaa!"





Out of the house came a freckly girl with long, messy hair. Around her waist were little canvas bags tied at top with a string, and she had a slingshot tucked into her pocket. "Hoo-Hoo! What brought you here?" she asked, smiling happily at the visitor.

"Unfortunately nothing good," replied the owl with a serious expression. "My friends want to know how to save the spruces that have been attacked by the bark beetle."

"Oh, me and Grandma saw the poor trees. It is so very bad this year. Grandma says that the foresters will have to cut down more than half of Spruce Grove and take the sick trees away," the girl told in a sad voice.

Upon hearing this, Pine and Fir trembled in horror.

"But what can WE do?!" said Pine stomping his feet on the ground.

"We can take the young trees and the seeds from the cones and transplant them higher up in the forest where the temperature is cooler," replied Sonja after thinking it over for a while.





The girl invited her companion Hoo-Hoo and her new friends into the little house to have some homemade herbal tea and biscuits. Pine and Fir could not take their eyes of the many clay pots that were carefully arranged on wooden shelves and had old writing on them with words they had never heard of: *Pinus sylvestris*, *Picea abies*, *Larix decidua*...

"That is our seed bank!" Sonja exclaimed proudly, noticing what the curious little ones were looking at. "Grandma says that it's worth more than all the money in the world."

"Where did you get all these seeds from?" asked Mrs Woodpecker, interested in finding out more.

"Well, Grandma worked at a botanical garden where she took care of the trees. And she got some from there. But since she has retired, she has lived here in the forest and collected them. When I visit her, I help too!" she replied cheerily and pointed to the bags tied to her belt.







"But how will we know which seeds to plant in the forest?" asked Fir.

"That's a good question!" said Sonja, praising her. "Grandma will choose the most suitable ones. Some will be of the most beautiful and most healthy spruces from Spruce Grove, and others will come from similar forests from far and wide. Grandma likes to joke that it is not good for all of the trees to be related," excitedly retold the girl.

"We'll all meet tomorrow morning at your place at 7 Oak Way. Grandma and I will choose the young spruces to replant in Shady Pasture. Then we will make up a few bags of seeds to plant next to the trees," planned Sonja.

"It would be good if someone went with us. You are too little to carry the trees," she thought out loud.

The two little conifers, Pine and Fir, were insulted at first, looking at each other with an injured look, but then they suddenly called out together, "Simon!"



"Who is Simon?" asked Sonja.

"A boy that lives in a house near the park..." they began to explain hurriedly, but Sonja interrupted them.

"Oh, but he is a city boy! They charge through the forest on their bikes and scare the animals. That's why I always keep my slingshot with me, so I can hurl an acorn or mast after them to teach them a lesson." Sonja had a mischievous smirk on her face. Pine and Fir chuckled, as they could imagine Little Beechnut and Little Acorn hurtling through the air.

"What's so funny?" said Sonja, a little offended.

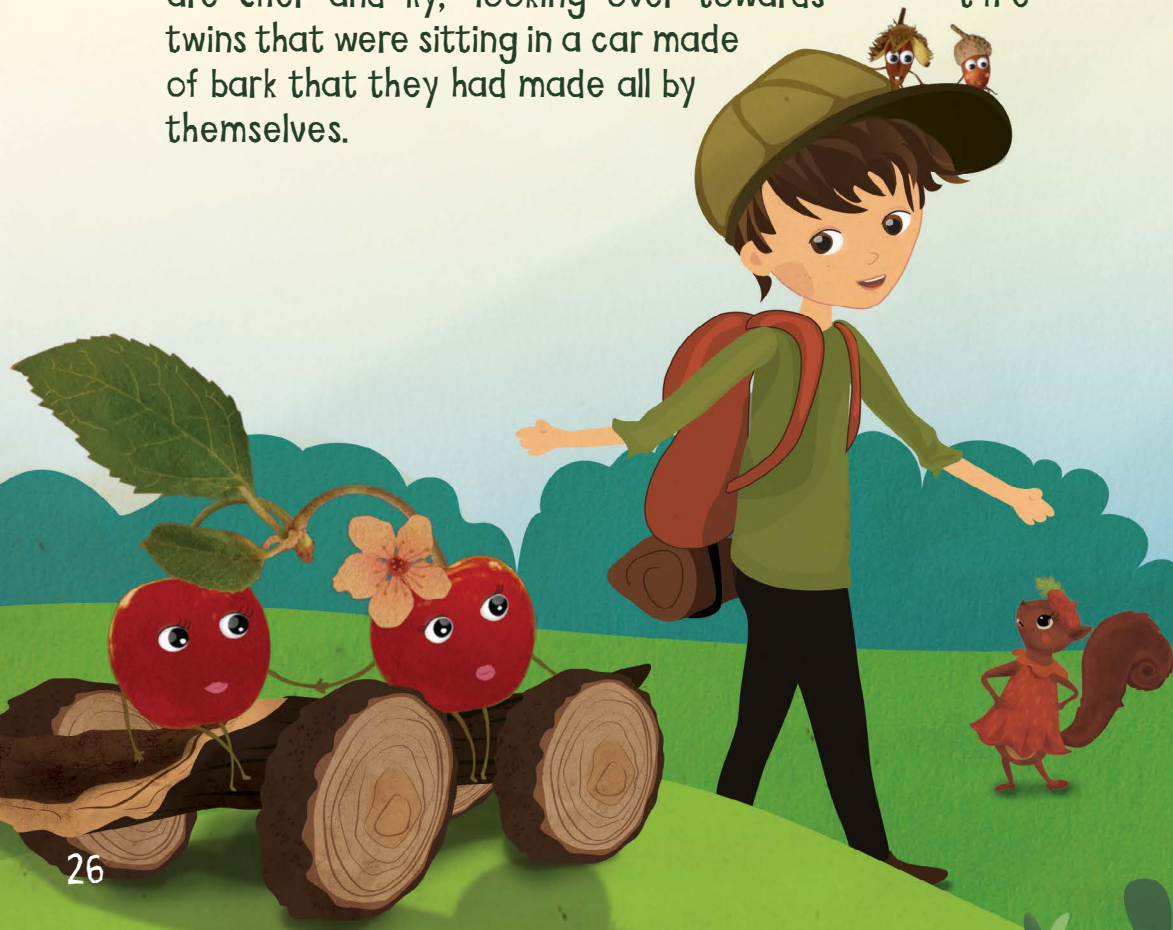
"Oh, nothing, nothing. But Simon really isn't like that, he loves the forest," they tried to convince her. "It was him that brought Little Beechnut, Little Acorn, Cher and Ry to the Big Forest last spring. They went to fetch him this morning, so he can help us."

Sonja gave in and said, "I suppose the more the merrier, it will surely make our task easier!"





Mrs Woodpecker, Pine and Fir got back home just as night was falling. All the residents were gathered in front of the apartment building, eagerly waiting to hear the news. Simon was also there and did not need much convincing to join them in their task to save the forest. The little conifers carefully explained the plan they made with Sonja to everyone. Simon thought the plan was brilliant. He ran home to collect all the equipment he needed: a shovel, rope, a big backpack and a sleeping bag, as he would be staying the night in the forest. Early the next morning, Sonja and Hoo-Hoo joined them. "So you're Simon!" the girl said, looking at him curiously. "Yes. These are Little Beechnut and Little Acorn" he said, pointing to where his little friends were sitting. "And there are Cher and Ry," looking over towards the twins that were sitting in a car made of bark that they had made all by themselves.







"Oh, there are so many of you!" happily exclaimed Sonja, as each apartment resident came out to introduce themselves.

"Simon and I will carry the young spruces and the rest of you can carry the seeds."

The large red wood ants each carried a single seed on their backs. The rest of the group each picked up a bag that Sonja and her Grandma so carefully prepared the night before. The expedition wiled away the time by singing songs about the forest. They also took a break and refreshed themselves in the nearby stream.

They arrived at Shady Pasture just in time for lunch, so they sat down in the shade of a mighty larch and enjoyed the light breeze that flowed down through its branches. The next step was to dig deep holes in the black forest soil and plant the first five little spruces and a few handfuls of seeds.





"There we go, that'll be enough for today," agreed Sonja and Simon.

"But we can continue tomorrow!" said Sonja, tirelessly.

"Yes, there is still a lot of space in the field," agreed Simon.

"Yay!" they all cheered together.

Simon, Sonja, Little Beechnut, Little Acorn, Cher and Ry, Pine and Fir, as well as the others really did get together the very next day. And many times after that. That is how the secret gang of the Guardians of the Forest was created. Together they play and have fun. And when they are needed, they join forces to make sure new trees pop up all over the Big Forest.





## GUARDIANS OF THE FOREST



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