

To Katie and Ben.
—D.L.

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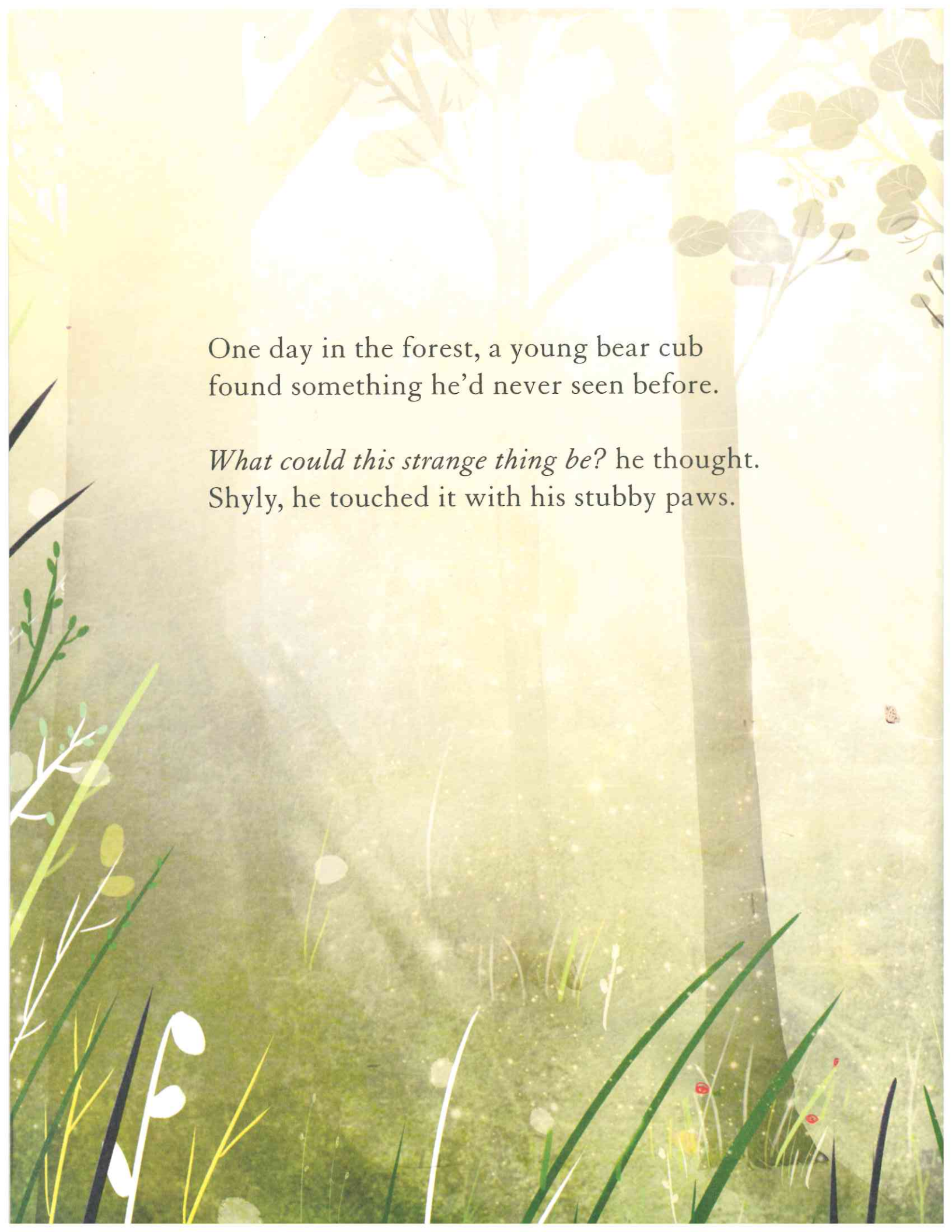
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The Bear and the Piano



BY David Litchfield

CLARION BOOKS



One day in the forest, a young bear cub
found something he'd never seen before.

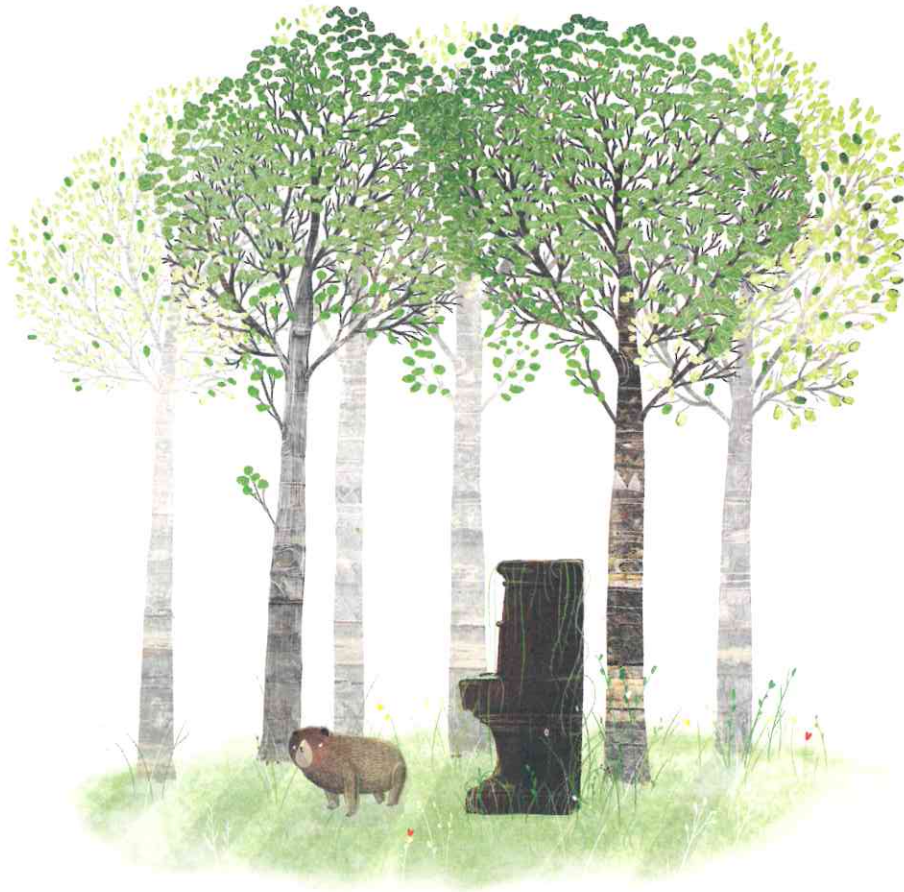
What could this strange thing be? he thought.
Shyly, he touched it with his stubby paws.



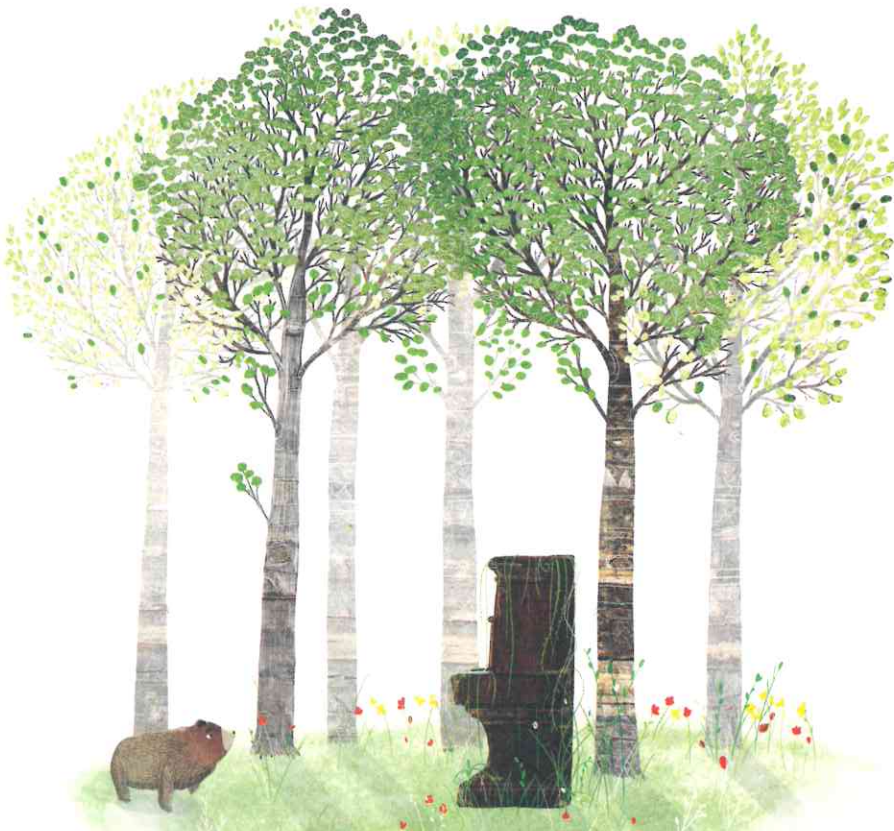
PLONK!

The strange thing made an
awful sound.

So the bear left.



But the next day he came back,



and the day after that, too.



And for days and weeks and months and years,





... the sounds that came from the strange thing were beautiful, and the bear had grown big and strong and grizzly.

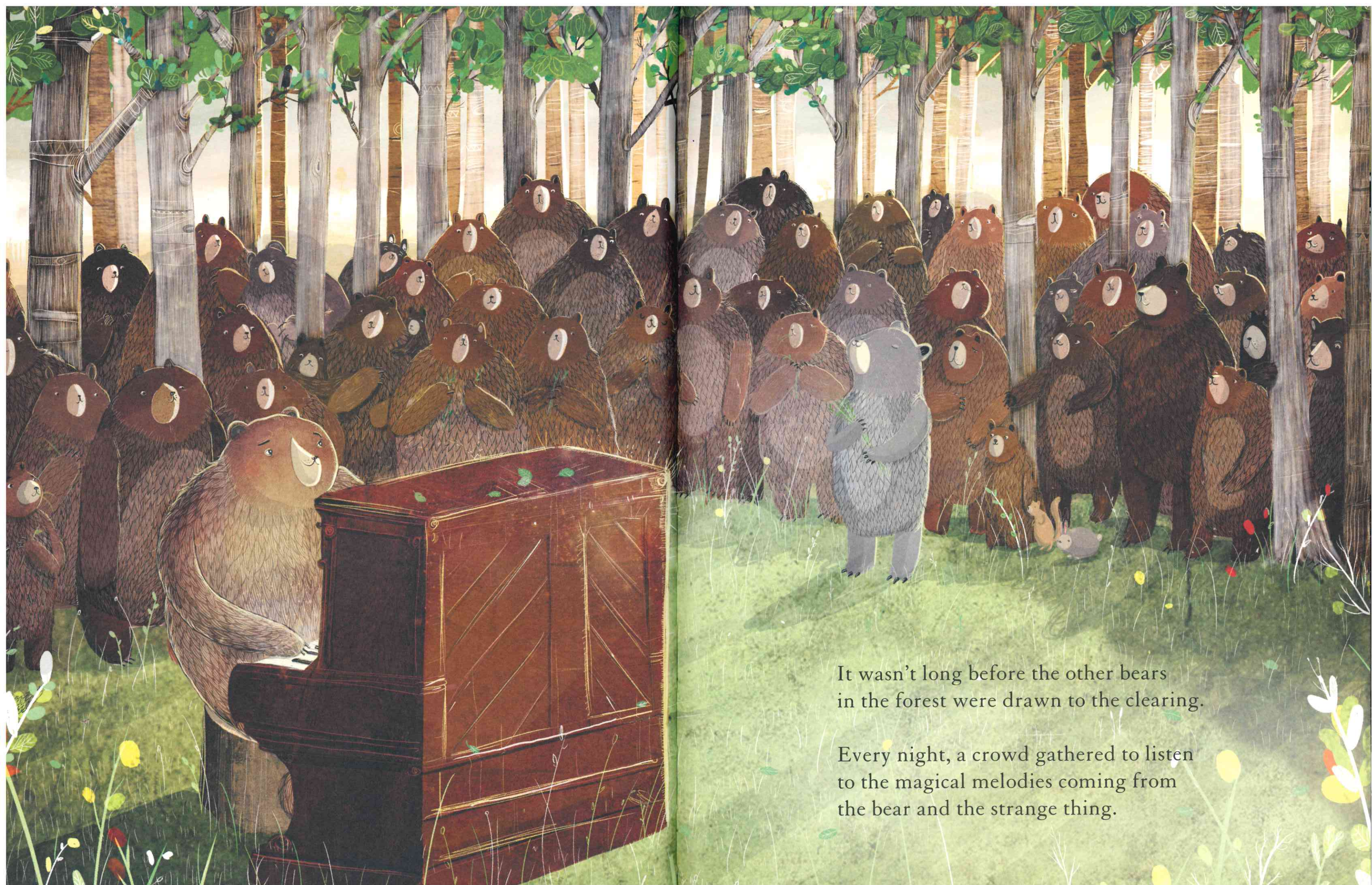


When the bear played, he felt so happy.



The sounds took him away from the forest,





It wasn't long before the other bears
in the forest were drawn to the clearing.

Every night, a crowd gathered to listen
to the magical melodies coming from
the bear and the strange thing.


Then, one night, a girl and her father came across the clearing.



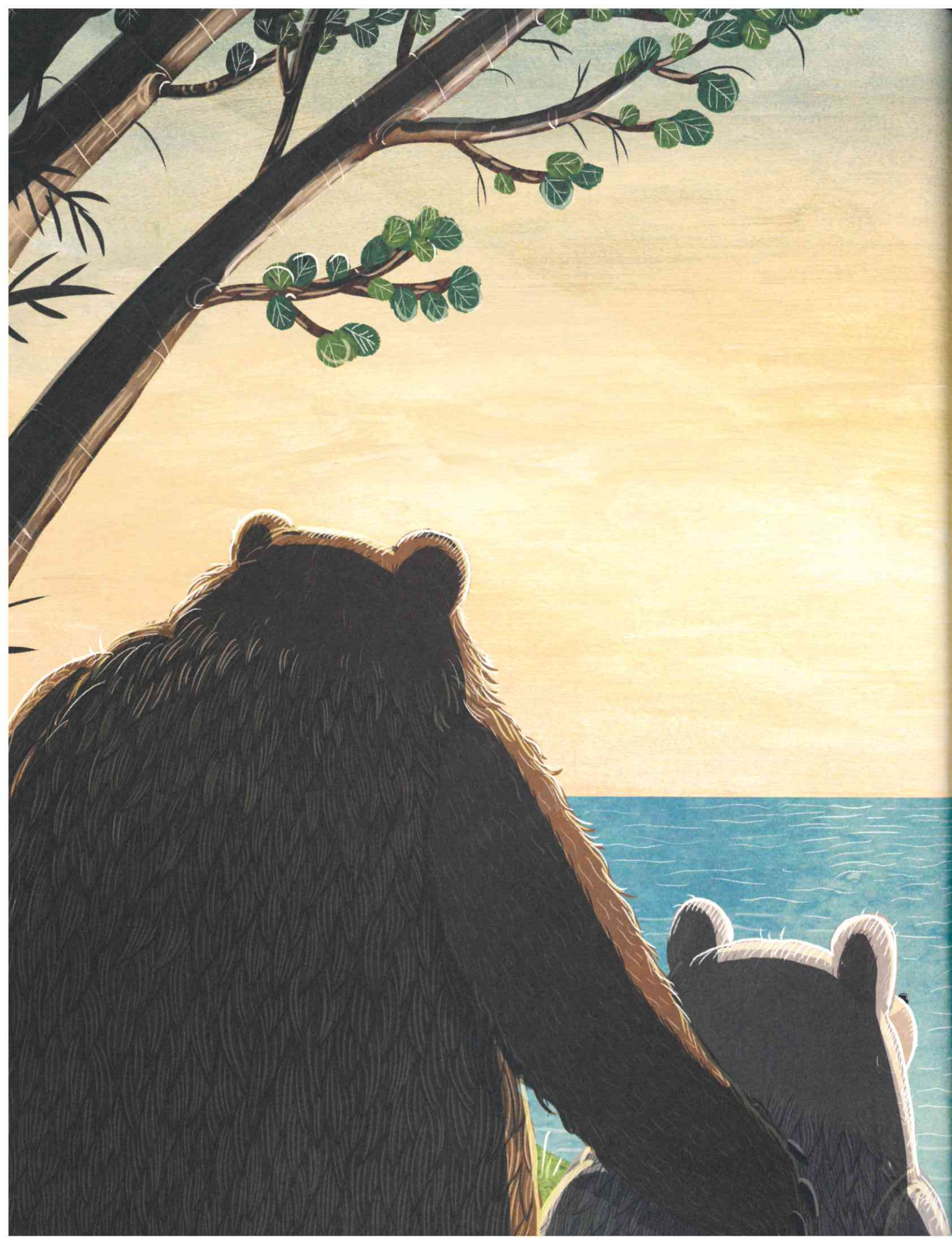
They told the bear that the strange thing was a piano and the sounds it made were music.

“Come to the city with us,” they said. “There is lots of music there. You can play grand pianos in front of hundreds of people and hear sounds so beautiful they will make your fur stand on end.”



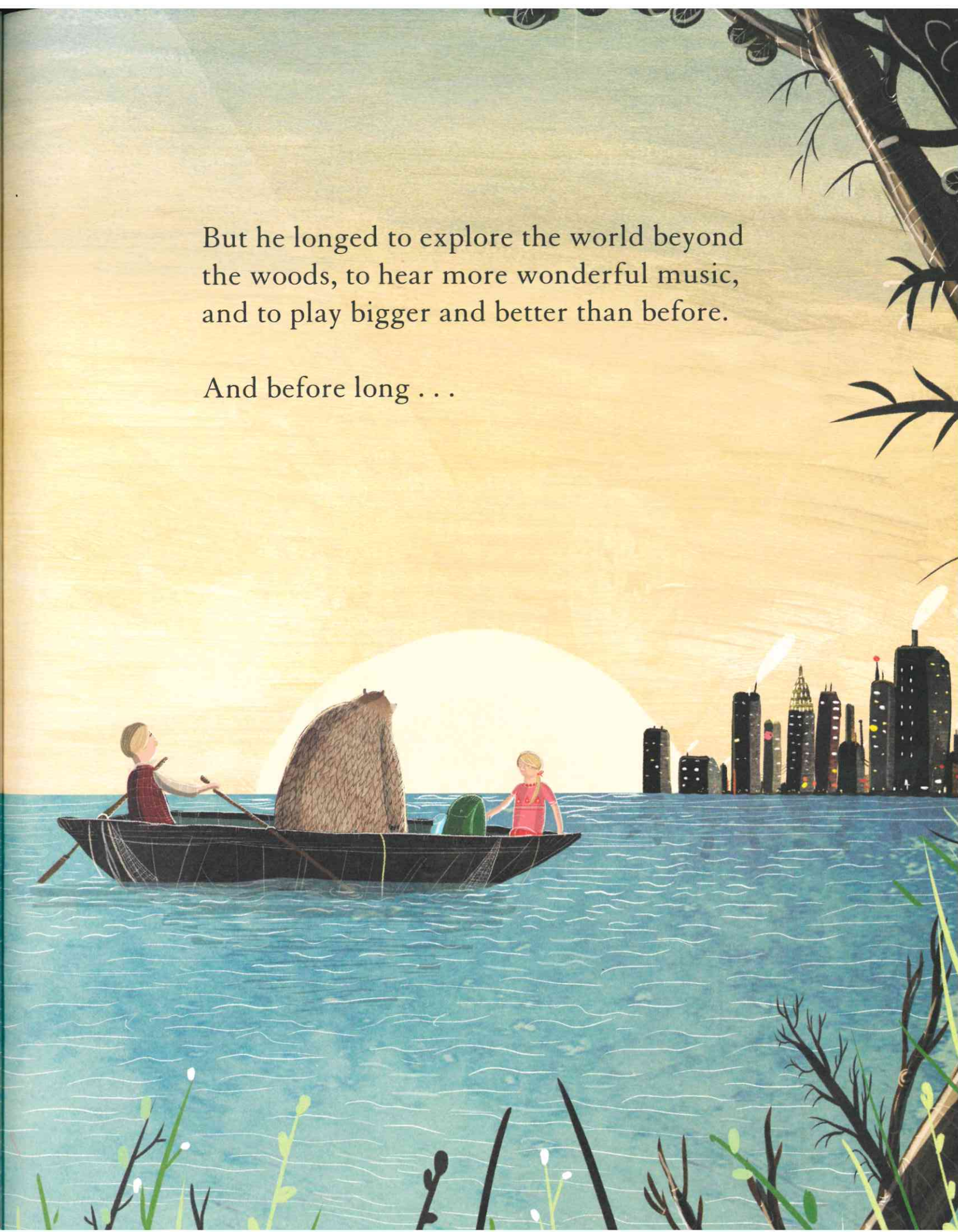


The bear knew
that if he left the
forest, the other
bears would be
very sad.

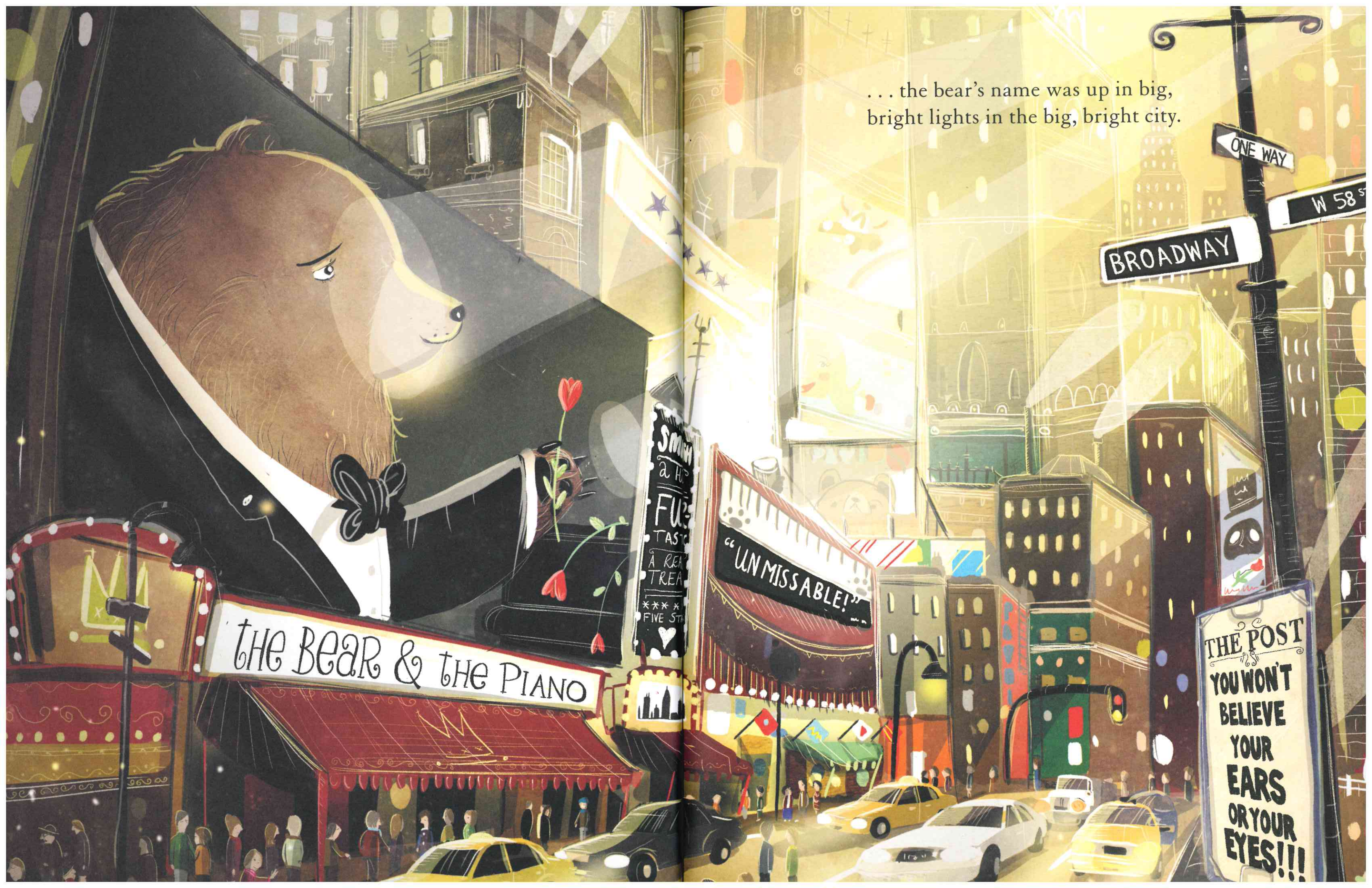


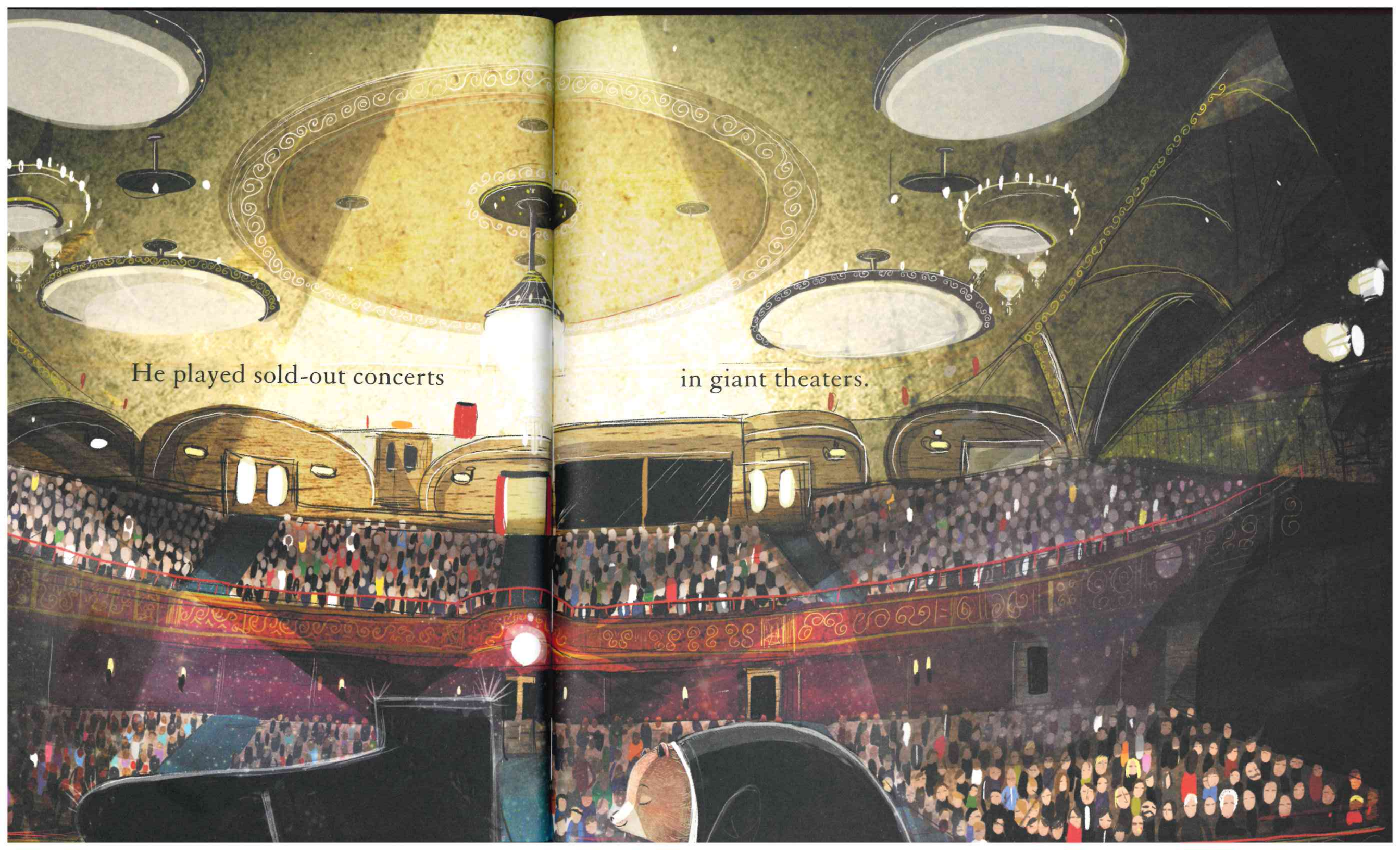
But he longed to explore the world beyond
the woods, to hear more wonderful music,
and to play bigger and better than before.

And before long . . .



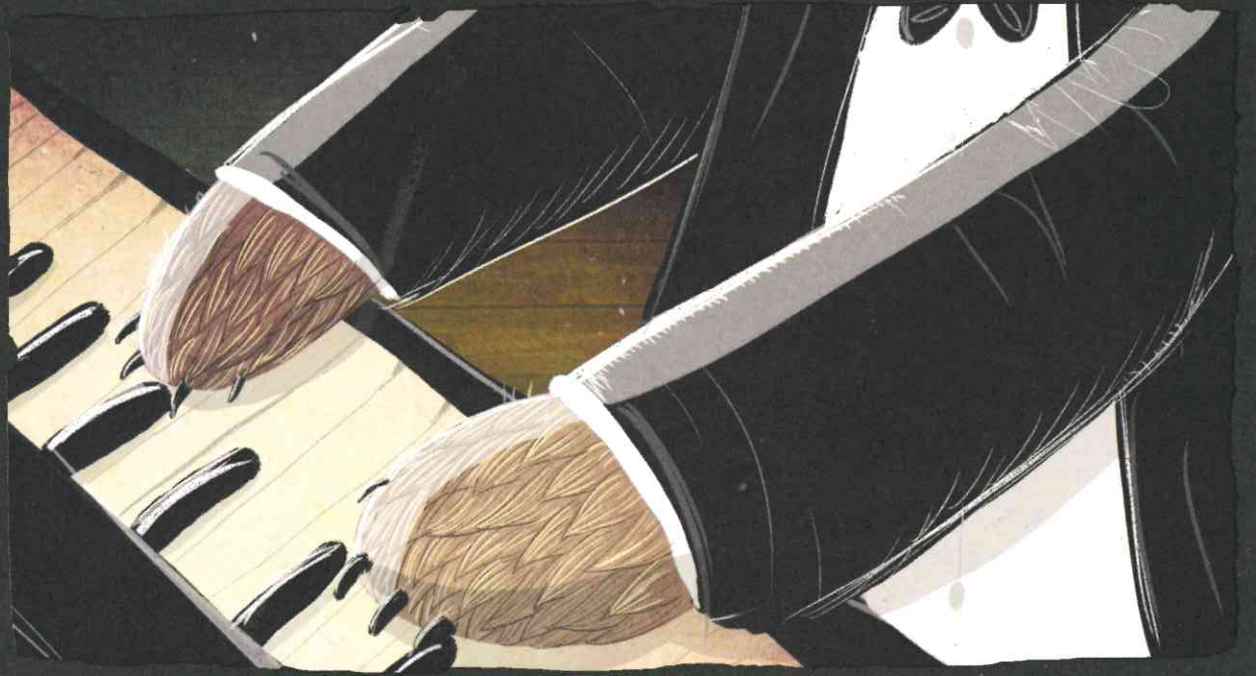
... the bear's name was up in big, bright lights in the big, bright city.





He played sold-out concerts

in giant theaters.



Every night, he performed



with such passion





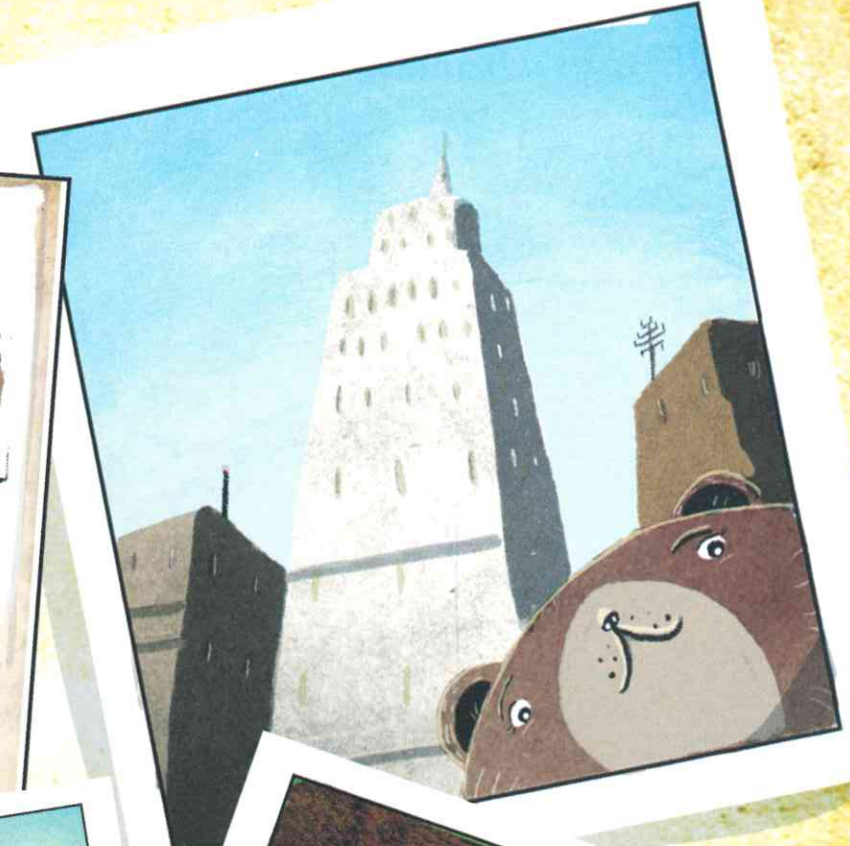
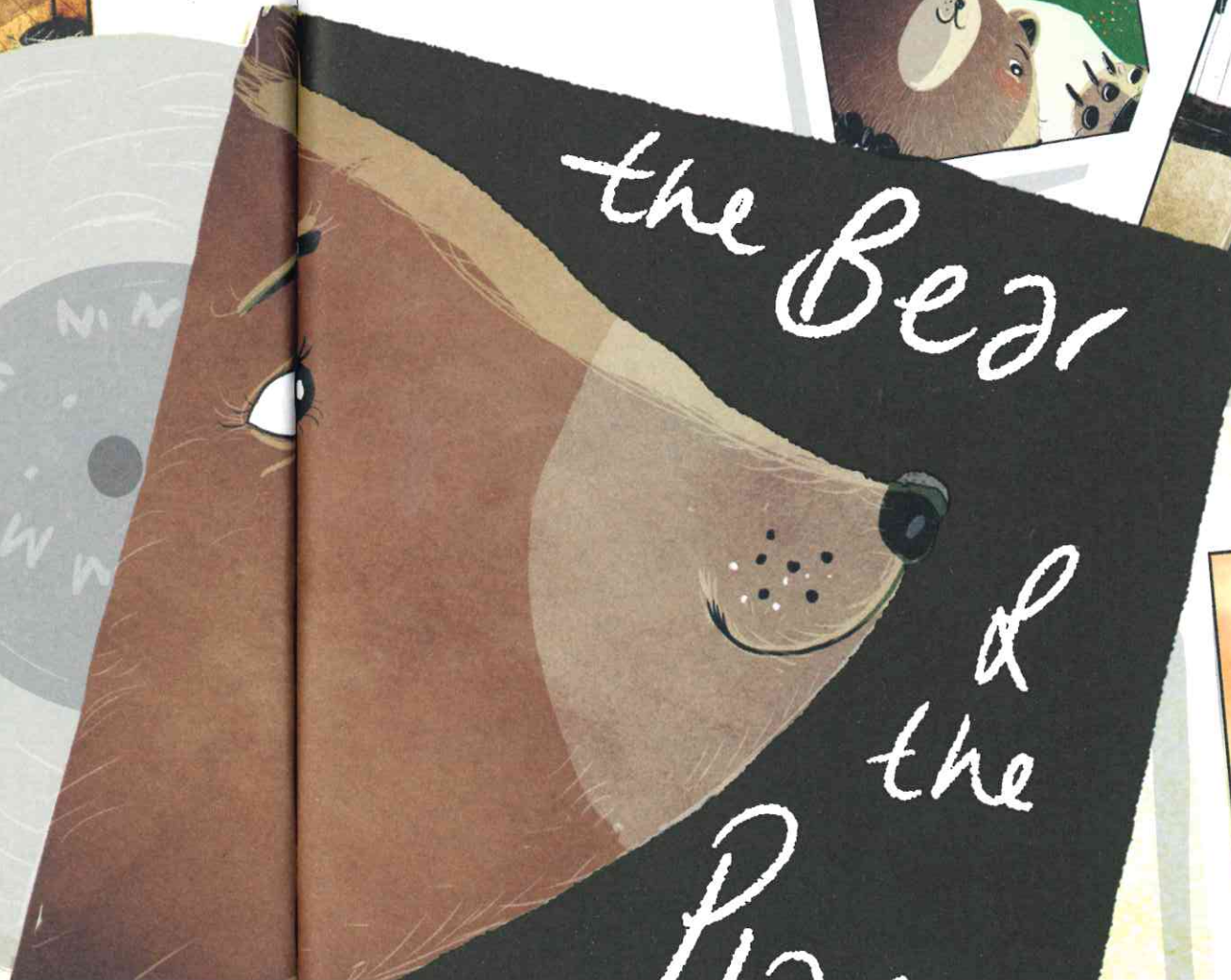
to wild applause



and standing ovations



The bear recorded albums that went platinum.
He was interviewed for magazines.
He won awards.
He met new people every day.
And created headlines everywhere he went.



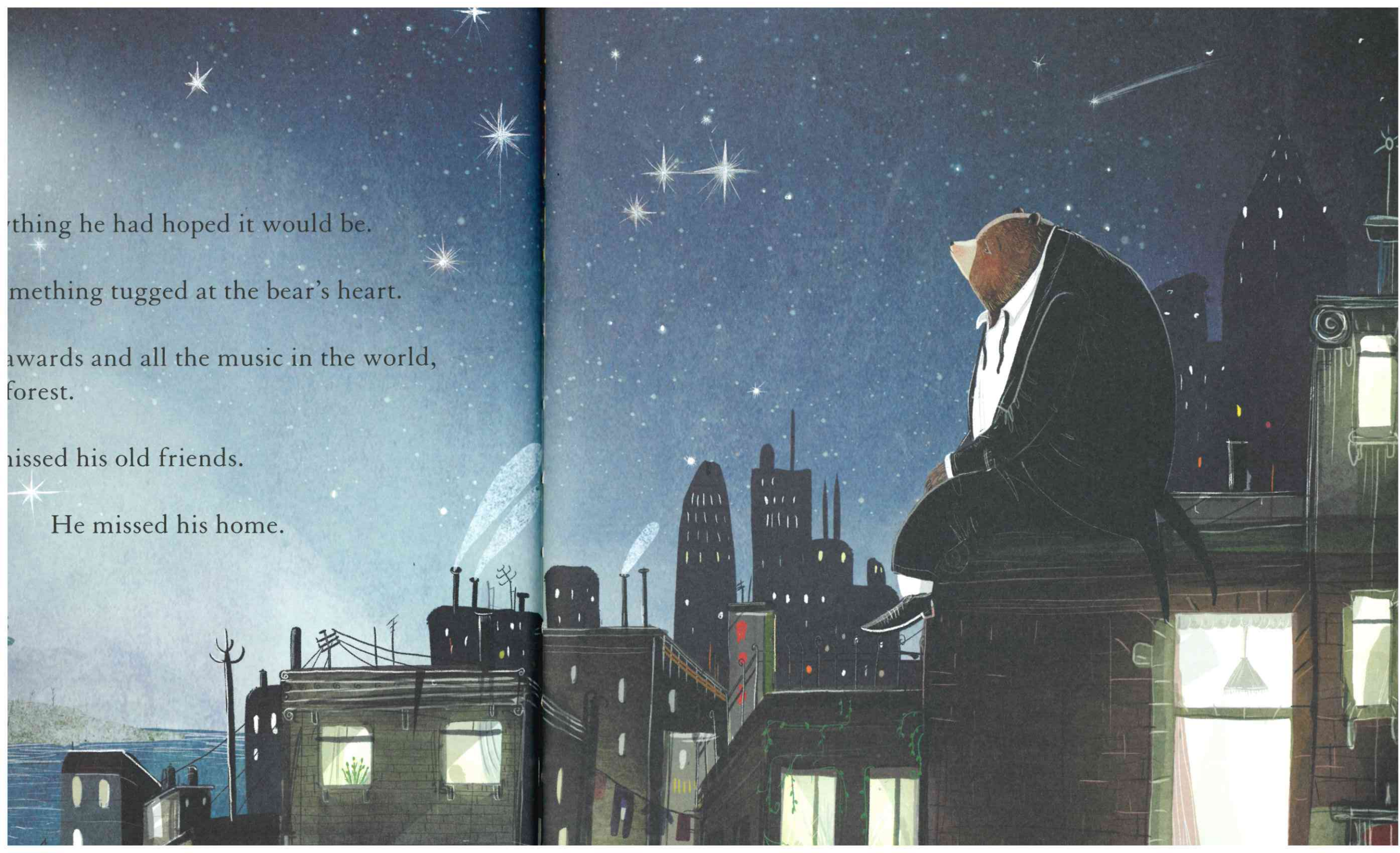
thing he had hoped it would be.

Something tugged at the bear's heart.

Towards and all the music in the world,
Forest.

Missed his old friends.

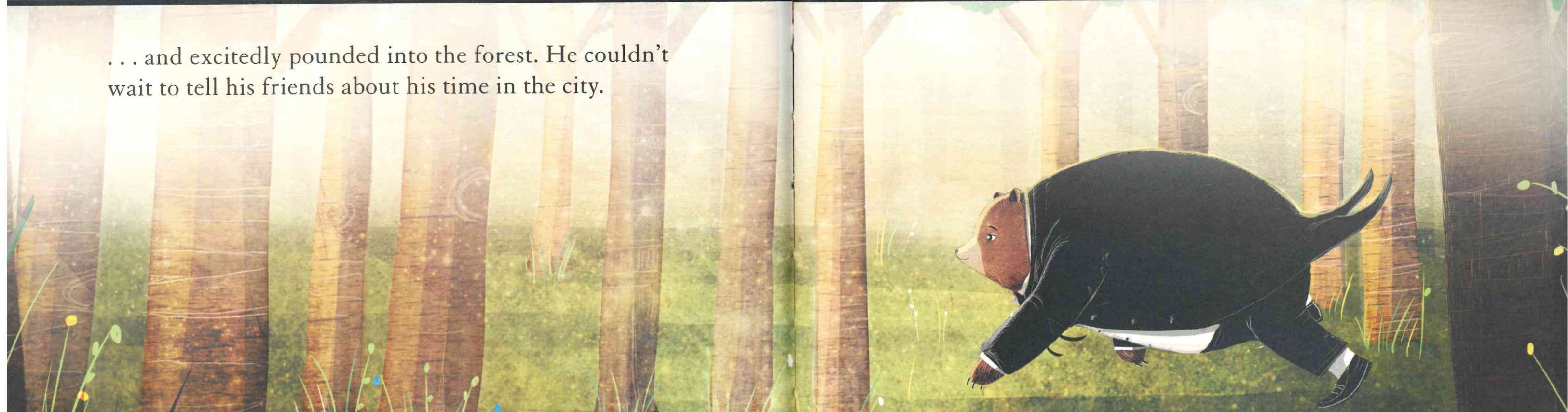
He missed his home.

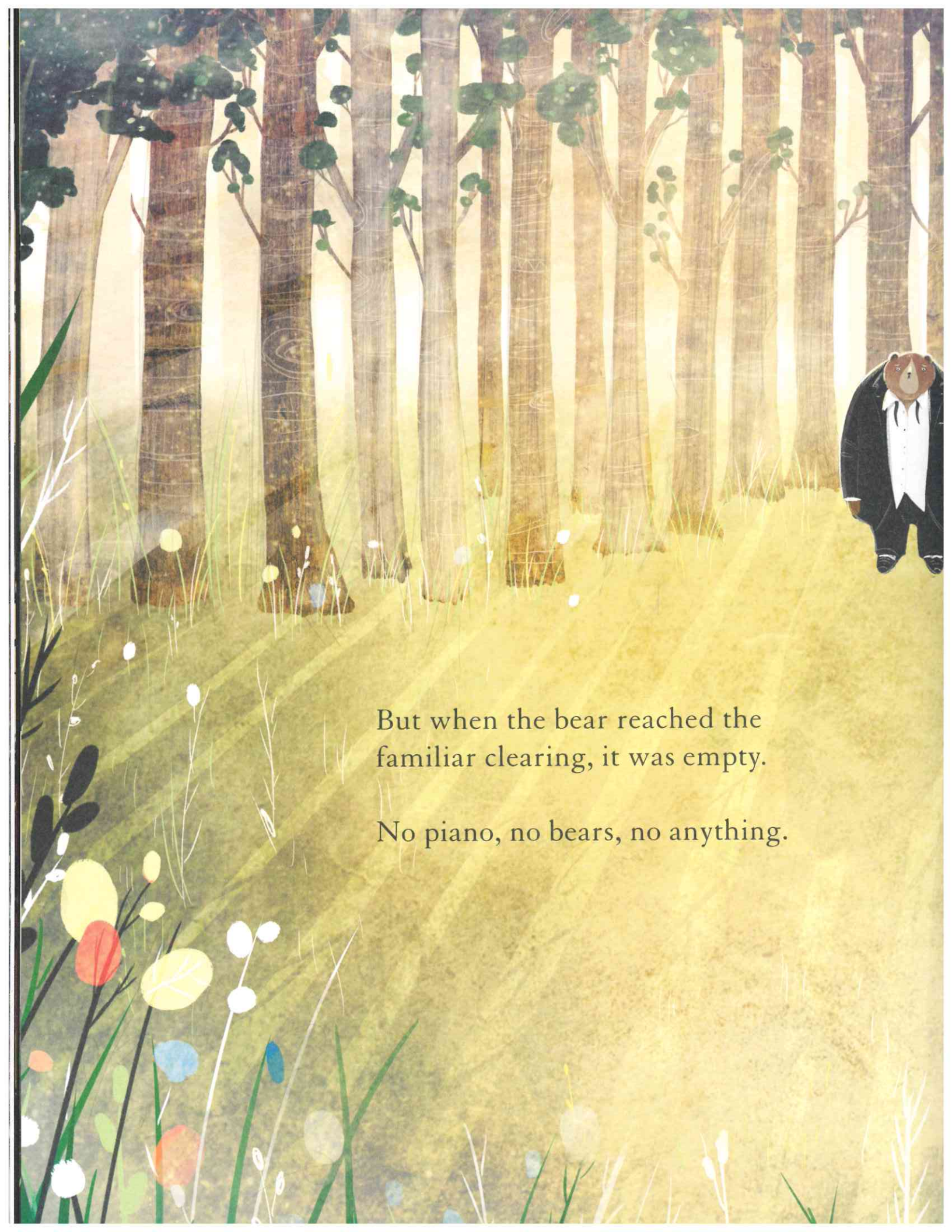


So the bear decided to go back.
He speedily crossed the river . . .



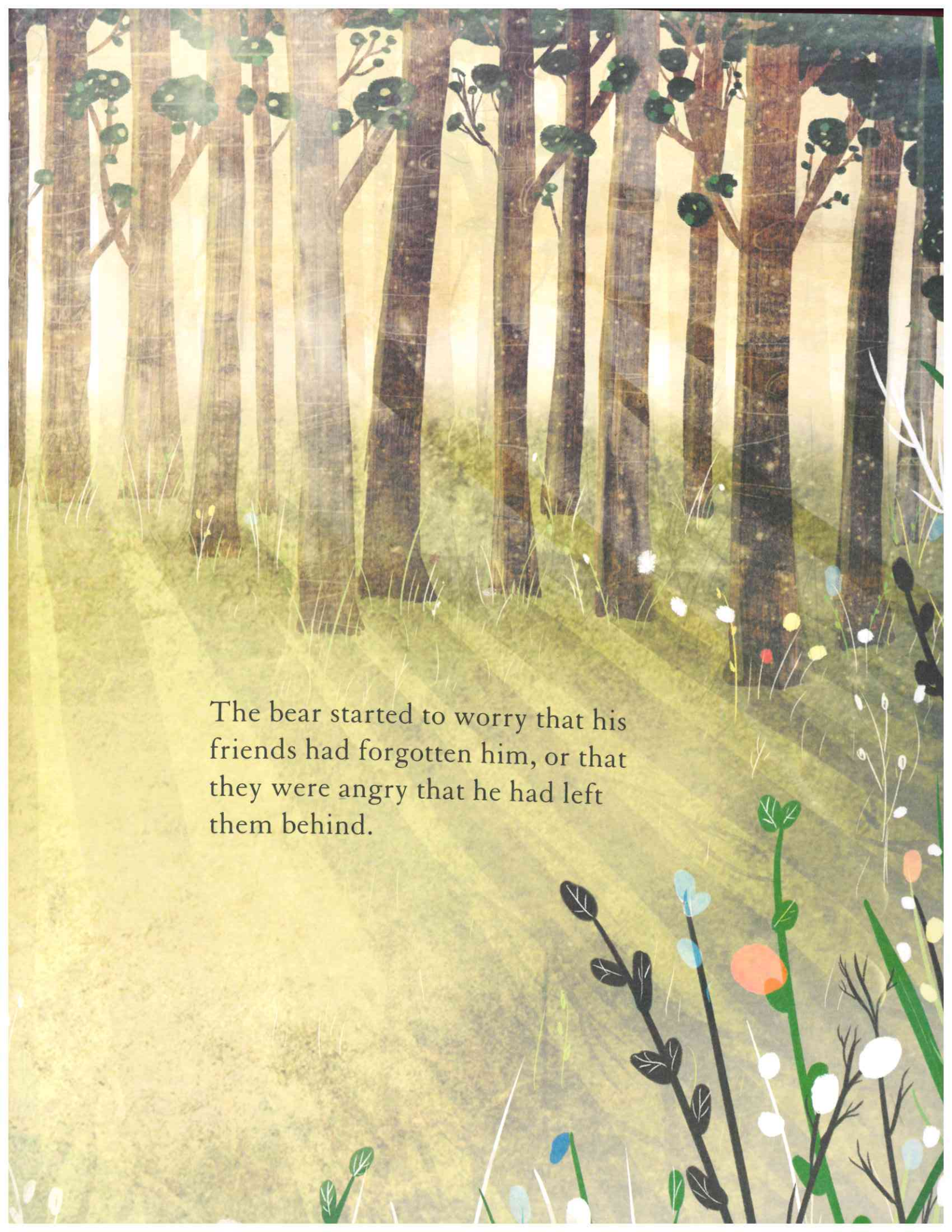
. . . and excitedly pounded into the forest. He couldn't
wait to tell his friends about his time in the city.



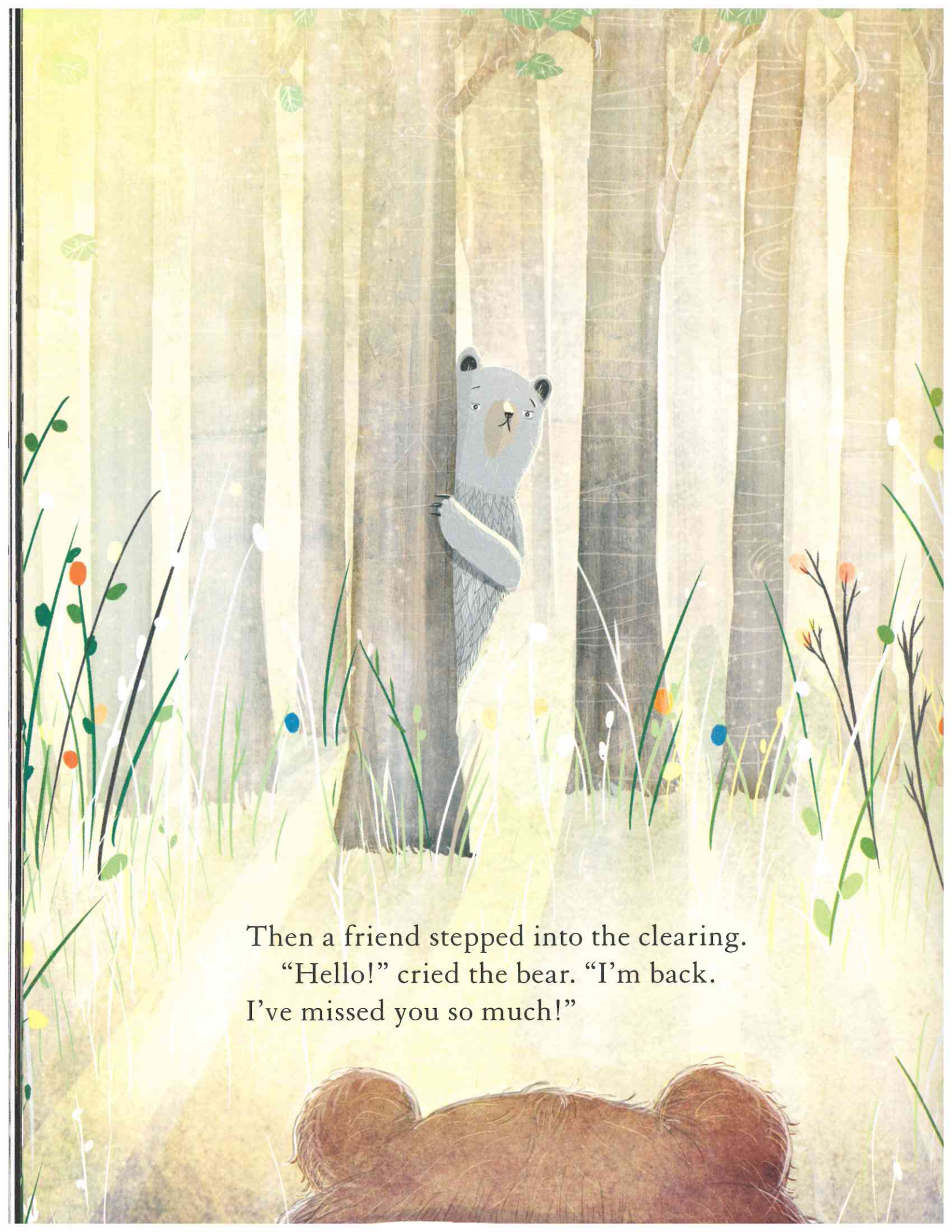


But when the bear reached the familiar clearing, it was empty.

No piano, no bears, no anything.



The bear started to worry that his friends had forgotten him, or that they were angry that he had left them behind.



Then a friend stepped into the clearing.
“Hello!” cried the bear. “I’m back.
I’ve missed you so much!”

Without saying a word, the gray bear ran back into the trees.
“Wait!” called the bear. “I’m sorry I left. Please stop!”
But his friend just kept running.



The bear stumbled after him, moving deeper
and deeper into the forest,






For the bear had not been forgotten.
His friends weren't angry, but proud.



The bear realized that no matter where he went, or what he did,
they would always be there, watching from afar.



They had even kept the piano safe
in the shade, ready for his return.



So after the bear had told his friends about his life in the city, and the many concerts he had played, he sat down to play once more.

This time, for the most important audience of all.