

Nightlights

by Eric Henderson

“**A** HAT?” CRIED MATTHEW in disbelief. He stopped rolling out his sleeping bag. “I have to wear a hat to bed?”

“You don’t have to,” said Dad, turning on the lantern, “but you’ll be cold if you don’t. You have to be flexible when you go camping.”

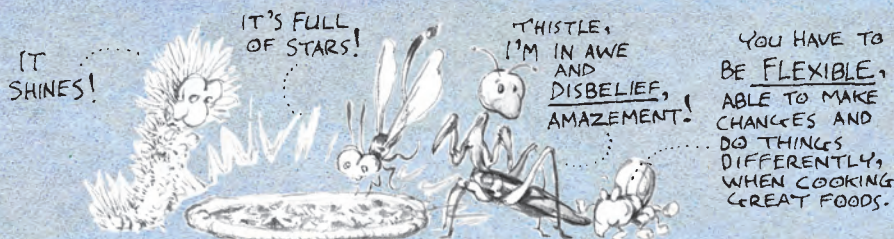
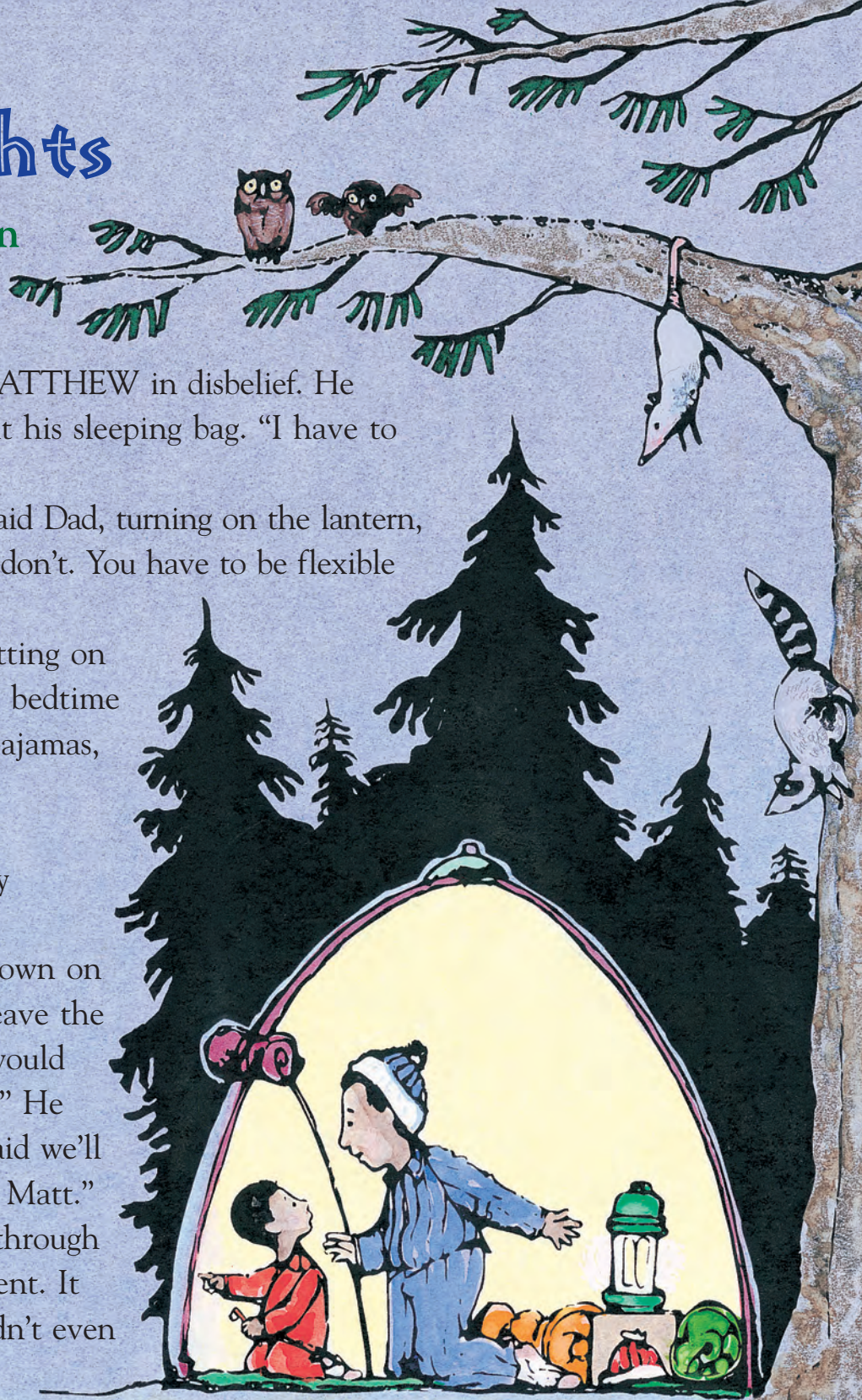
Matthew scowled. Putting on a hat was not part of his bedtime routine: teethbrushing, pajamas, nightlight . . .

Nightlight!

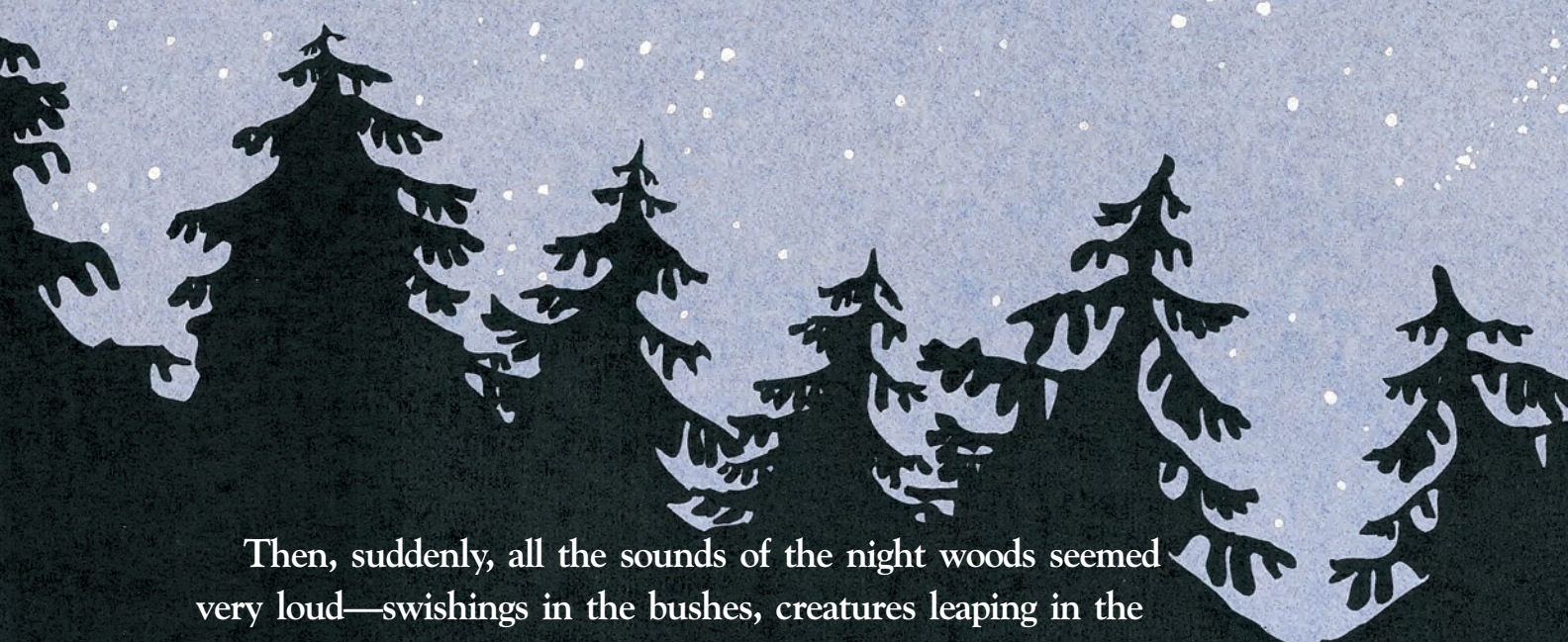
“Dad! What about my nightlight?”

Dad set the lantern down on a box. “Well, we can’t leave the lantern on all night; it would wear down the batteries.” He looked doubtful. “I’m afraid we’ll have to do without one, Matt.”

Matthew looked out through the front screen of the tent. It was so dark that he couldn’t even see the car.



Art by Will Hillenbrand



Then, suddenly, all the sounds of the night woods seemed very loud—swishings in the bushes, creatures leaping in the trees, birds and insects screeching and calling.

Matthew clutched his sleeping bag.

“A little scary?” asked Dad, putting his hand on Matthew’s shoulder.

Matthew swallowed and nodded.

“I have an idea,” said Dad. “Let’s go outside.”

“Outside?” asked Matthew.

Dad smiled. “Outside.”

They sat at the picnic table.

“Why didn’t we bring a light?” Matthew asked.

“It would spoil the effect,” replied Dad.

“Of what?”

“Of the nightlight. Or rather the *nightlights*.”

“What do you mean?” asked Matthew.

“Just wait,” said Dad. “You’ll see.”

Matthew waited, but he didn’t see. “I can’t see anything,” he complained.

“Let your eyes get used to the dark.”

Matthew waited some more. It wasn’t long, though, before he could see the car plainly. And the pine branches overhead. And the stars!

“Dad, look at the stars! There are so many more than at home.”

I DON'T THINK
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Dad chuckled. “No, there aren’t really any more stars than at home. They just show up better when no city lights are around.”

Matthew could hardly believe his eyes. The sky was full of stars—dim ones, bright ones, pairs, and clusters.

“Nightlights!” he cried.

Dad laughed. “I thought you’d never get it!”

Back in the tent, Dad opened the window flap.

“Can you see them?” he asked.

From his sleeping bag, Matthew looked out the window and smiled. “Yes,” he said.

“And are you snug as a bug in a rug?” Dad asked.

It was what he always said. It was routine.

“Yes,” said Matthew.

Dad turned off the lantern.

“Oops!” said Matthew. “I almost forgot.” He felt around on the floor of the tent until he found what he wanted.

“What is it?” asked Dad.

“My hat,” replied Matthew. “I think I’ll wear it after all.” ✨

