



Sliding Stories

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Picturebook, fiction
Age: 6+

All five stories in the book are based on real events and are tied to animals slipping and sliding in one way or another. Elephants slide on a muddy hillside at the zoo while mice do it between the layers of insulation under a new roof, a crow does somersaults on the hood of a snowy car, bear cubs have fun the same way that shepherd boys did long ago – sliding down a hill on a young birch branch, and wolf pups on a frozen puddle act like leaves blowing in the wind. The descriptions of animals entertaining themselves give the impression of being simultaneously realistic and make-believe. Püttsepp, a biologist, has the special ability to don the skins of both forest animals and humans. He skilfully balances himself on the line between the two worlds, and suspense develops in the stories from the brief contact between them. At the same time, the author maintains the gaze of a friendly observer and does not tend to anthropomorphise the animals' thoughts or behaviours. Katrin Erlich's enchanting illustrations electrify the reader's imagination and add a good dose of fairy tale to the stories.

Awards:

2015 Nominee of the Tartu Prize for Children's Literature (Childhood Prize)

2014 5 Best-Designed Children's Books, special prize of the Estonian Children's Literature Centre



The Wolf Pups Go Skating

One November afternoon, two wolf pups who lived on the edge of a big bog went walking down a road through the woods. You might think that wolves only walk through tall fir trees and crackling brush, but that isn't true. If wolves have the chance, then they take roads, too. Roads are easier to pad along, and their tails don't get caught in burdock burrs.

Even so, the wolf pups stayed alert the whole time they were trotting down the road, because the road was built by humans, not by wolves. They never know what to expect from humans – sometimes, people carry guns and might even shoot. The wolf pups had already gotten their fear of gunshots and hunters through their mother's milk.

The wolf family moved around the woods it called home quite a lot. All the edges of the bog and every corner of the woods was to be checked, sniffed, and marked as their territory. The wolves had to reach every corner of their big green backyard.

When children walk to kindergarten a mile away from their home, then they might get tired from crossing even that short distance, and ask their parents to pick them up. Wolf pups walk distances ten times as far, and they might feel a tiny bit tired only after that.

Big mud puddles spread and stretched across the road. The wolves didn't walk through the puddles. You might have if you happened to be wearing boots. Maybe you would have even jumped in the mud puddles. However, the wolves didn't have boots, and as you yourself know, walking with wet feet doesn't feel all that nice. So, the wolves walked a big circle around the puddle, leaving two rows of paw-tracks along the edge. The November afternoon quickly turned into a November evening. The air got colder and a sharp wind sprung up.

Someone poured dusk and then darkness onto the Earth from the pitch-black sky above, but the wolf pups were not afraid. Darkness was their friend, and was all the better for hiding. Someone's raspy cry rang out – the wolf pups pricked their ears, but padded bravely on as if nothing had happened, because the sound seemed familiar. It was a barn owl getting ready for its night-time mouse hunt, passing the time away on a branch.

Then the wolf pups heard some kind of a scratching noise. They stopped immediately, because it was something completely new. Stretching out in front of them was a big puddle, and something was scratching its way along the surface. It wasn't a mouse, but rather a leaf that the breeze was

blowing across the ice. The young wolves watched it in amazement.

Every day brought something new for the pups. In April, when they were born, the ground had already melted. Now, they were seeing ice for the first time in their lives. The frosty evening had formed the first crust of ice on the puddles. The wind blew the dried leaves around and around on the ice.

The bravest of the pups couldn't stand the temptation anymore, and pounced on the leaf. His paws splayed out on the young ice and he landed on his side, sliding along the surface of the puddle. Surprisingly, it felt great. He forgot about the leaf in an instant – no doubt the wind was taking care of it, carrying it onward over the forest floor.

The wolf pup leapt onto the iced-over puddle again, and – he slipped again. Now, the other pup worked up the courage to jump onto the puddle, too – and she took a fun slide across it. And so, the wolf pups played there until the sound of an engine began to rumble in the distance and a yellow beam of light cut through the darkness.

The wolf pups leapt to their paws as well as they could manage, because the puddle was quite slippery. The sound they heard was familiar and meant one thing: humans. As quick as lightning, the young pups scampered off the road.

A car approached and stopped where the wolf pups had been skating. Two men got out. They inspected the tracks on the road and on the big puddle.

"You know, those were young wolves. Look – they were playing here," one of the men said.

"What are you talking about? Wolves don't play – they're not like human kids!" the other one laughed.

"Why do you think that?" said the first man. "How else can you explain these tracks? Look carefully – in my opinion, they were dancing here, or maybe even skating."

"You just might be right," the second man agreed, looking closely at the ice. Then, they climbed back into their car and drove on.

Silence settled onto the road through the woods once again. The next day was warmer, and signs of the wolf pups skating on the big puddle melted into water. That evening, the air turned cold and the puddle froze once more, but there was no more trace of the wolves' tracks. The wolf pups themselves were still running through the darkness, but somewhere else. Somewhere far, far away.