

Chapter 3: “A Bear in the Woods”

One day fifteen-year-old Nicholas was hunting in the dense forests of his beloved Isvara. His breath formed clouds of steam in the frosty air. Suddenly he stopped and gasped with surprise. An enormous bear was lumbering toward him! The two forest wanderers eyed each other for a long, tense minute. Miraculously, the bear retreated into the lush pines.

But the chance meeting with the bear had a lasting effect on Nicholas. Heart pounding, he ran home. He caught his breath, calmed his nerves and sat down to write about his encounter.

Nicholas’s dramatic article was published in a hunting magazine. Nicholas continued to write hunting stories, and he illustrated them with sensitive and detailed sketches.

Nicholas had always loved to draw. He had drawn landscapes, portraits, sketches of his archaeological finds, and set designs for school performances. But a breakthrough came when a family friend named Mikhail Mikeshin saw Nicholas’s work in a hunting magazine.

Mr. Mikeshin was a popular artist. His sculptures are still displayed in Russia today. He also illustrated books, published a journal and painted. On a visit to the Roerich household, Mr. Mikeshin had a chance to talk to Nicholas about his drawings.

“You have never had any drawing lessons?” he asked Nicholas in amazement.

“No,” replied Nicholas, “but I want them!” To Nicholas’s delight, Mr. Mikeshin offered to become his teacher.

During his lessons Nicholas made an important discovery. “I want to be an artist,” he told his parents. Konstantin and Maria were more than a little startled. To them, sketching was just another of the many things that Nicholas did well. There was nothing wrong with art—as a hobby. But this was different.

During the nineteenth century, men often followed their father’s profession. Konstantin had expected Nicholas to study law, and he secretly dreamed of the moment when his son would share his practice. Konstantin grumbled about how impractical an artistic career was. “Why shouldn’t Nicholas study law and take over my business? Why does he dream of being an artist and cause such uproar in our household?”

Activity:

1. Make a drawing of yourself doing what you think you want to do when you grow up.