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Erick's Hungry Winter

Lois L. Sando
Tammie Lane, illustrator
Coventry Press (January 1999)
Unknown $18.95 (32pp)
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A young elk learns what it means to go hungry during a particularly harsh winter. While he waits for his father to find food, he meets up with other forest animals and is told about their methods of survival—from the porcupine that eats pine bark to the owl that silently hunts hare. While these animals make due in the wild, Erick's family jumps the fence to Rancher Tom's farm to share in the horse's hay, an abrupt and dissatisfying end.

This story is simplistic and hollow. Erick's meanderings seem artificial, an excuse to teach the reader about the ways of certain wildlife rather than to tell a good story. The tension of hunger is a starting point and yet it feels like cheating to have the Elk family eat the farm animal's food (even if this is what really may happen); it's not enough of a climax to have Erick successfully clear the fence.

Detailed, richly colored illustrations do generate interest, drawing the reader's attention away from the rudimentary text. Reminiscent of the popular work of Jan Brett, attractive borders frame each realistic double-page spread, adding elements of their own. The bottom frame on each page features a different forest creature and the tracks it makes in the snow. A final open page collects these animals in chart form with a few bits of added information included.

Overall, this is an attractive book, which serves a purpose. Whether young readers will be moved to ask for the story over and over again is uncertain.

MARTHA TOPOL (January / February 1999)

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