

THE THREE QUESTIONS

Based on a story by Leo Tolstoy

TRANSLATED BY ANNE AND JOHN D. MOORE

SCHOOLS AND COLLEGES

NEW YORK





There once was a boy named Nikolai who sometimes felt uncertain about the right way to act. "I want to be a good person," he told his friends. "But I don't always know the best way to do that."

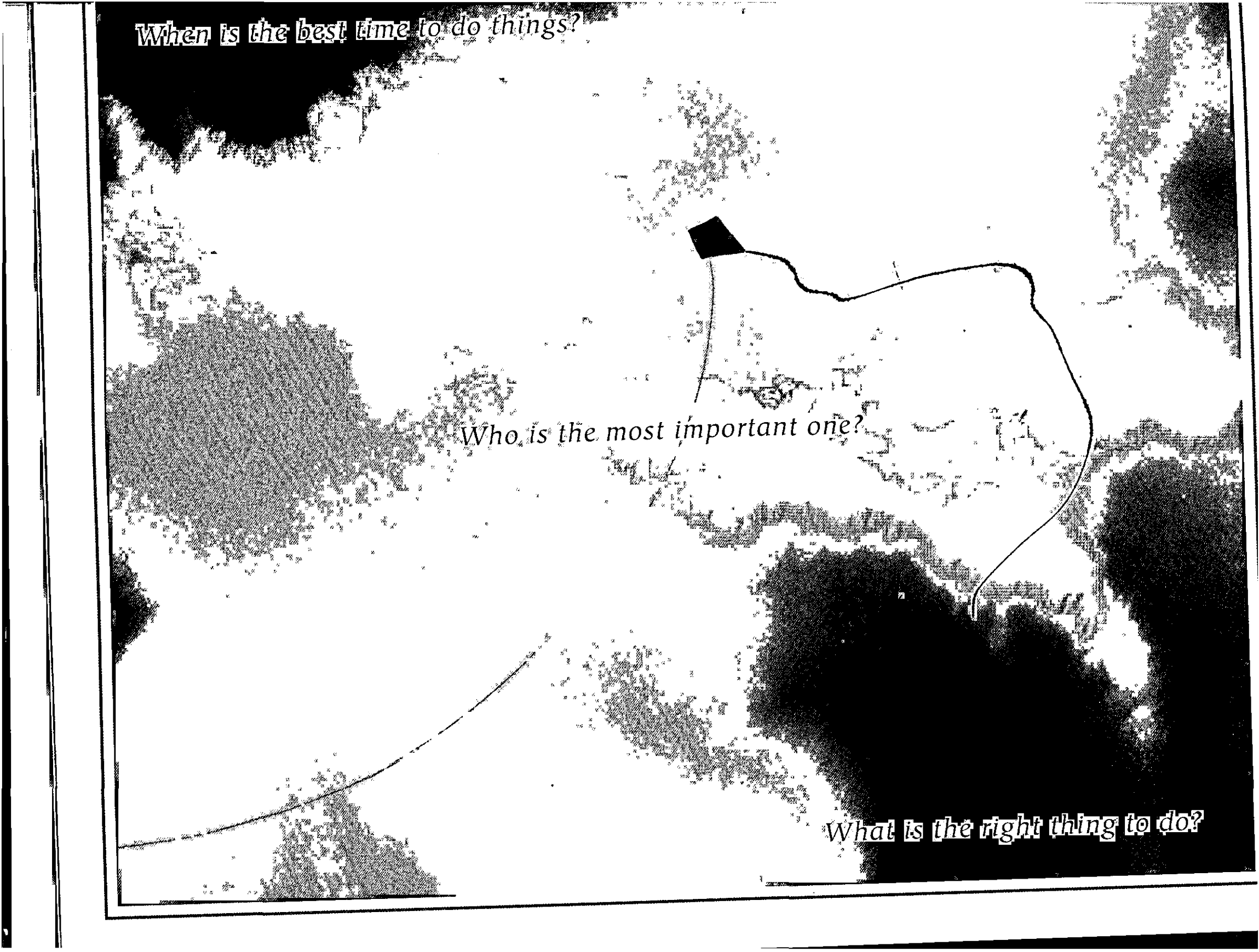
Nikolai's friends understood and they wanted to help him.

"If only I could find the answers to my three questions," Nikolai continued, "then I would always know what to do."

When is the best time to do things?

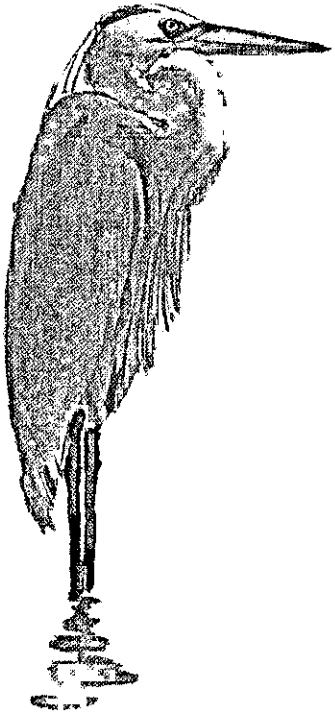
Who is the most important one?

What is the right thing to do?



Nikolai's friends considered his first question.

Then Sonya, the heron, spoke. "To know the best time to do things, one must plan in advance," she said.



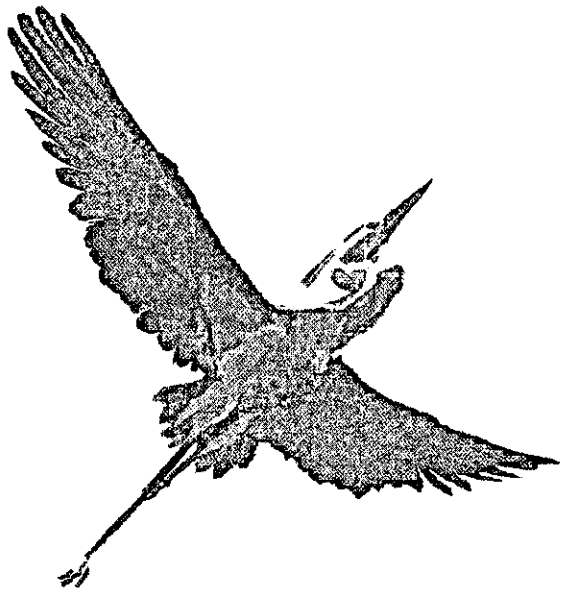
Gogol, the monkey, who had been rooting through some leaves to find something good to eat, said, "You will know when to do things if you watch and pay close attention."



Then Pushkin, the dog, who was just dozing off, rolled over and said, "You can't pay attention to everything yourself. You need a pack to keep watch and help you decide when to do things. For example, Gogol, a coconut is about to fall on your head!"

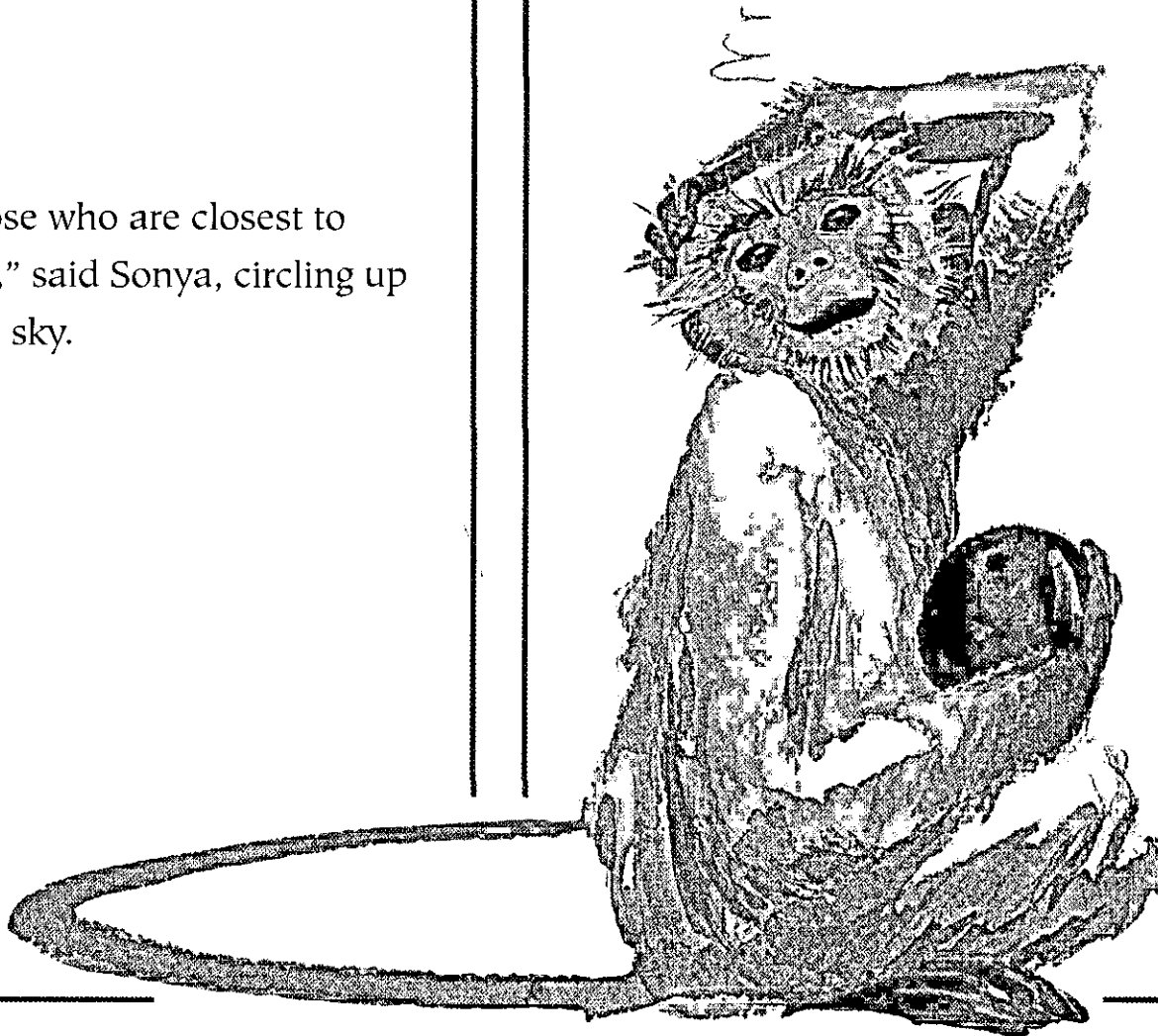
Nikolai thought for a moment. Then he asked his second question. "Who is the most important one?"





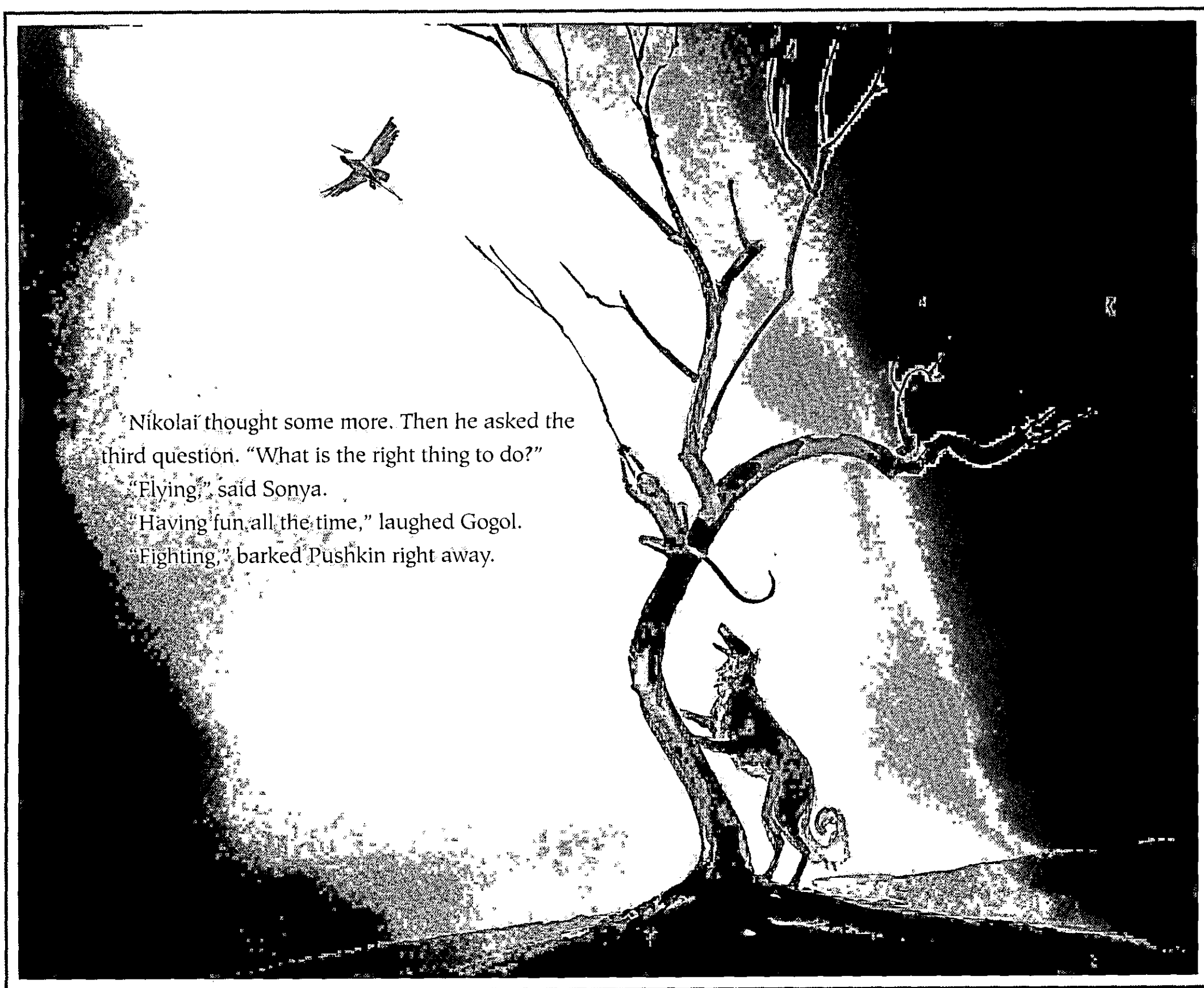
“Those who are closest to heaven,” said Sonya, circling up into the sky.

“Those who know how to heal the sick,” said Gogol, stroking his bruised noggin.



“Those who make the rules,” growled Pushkin.





Nikolai thought some more. Then he asked the third question. "What is the right thing to do?"

"Flying," said Sonya.

"Having fun all the time," laughed Gogol.

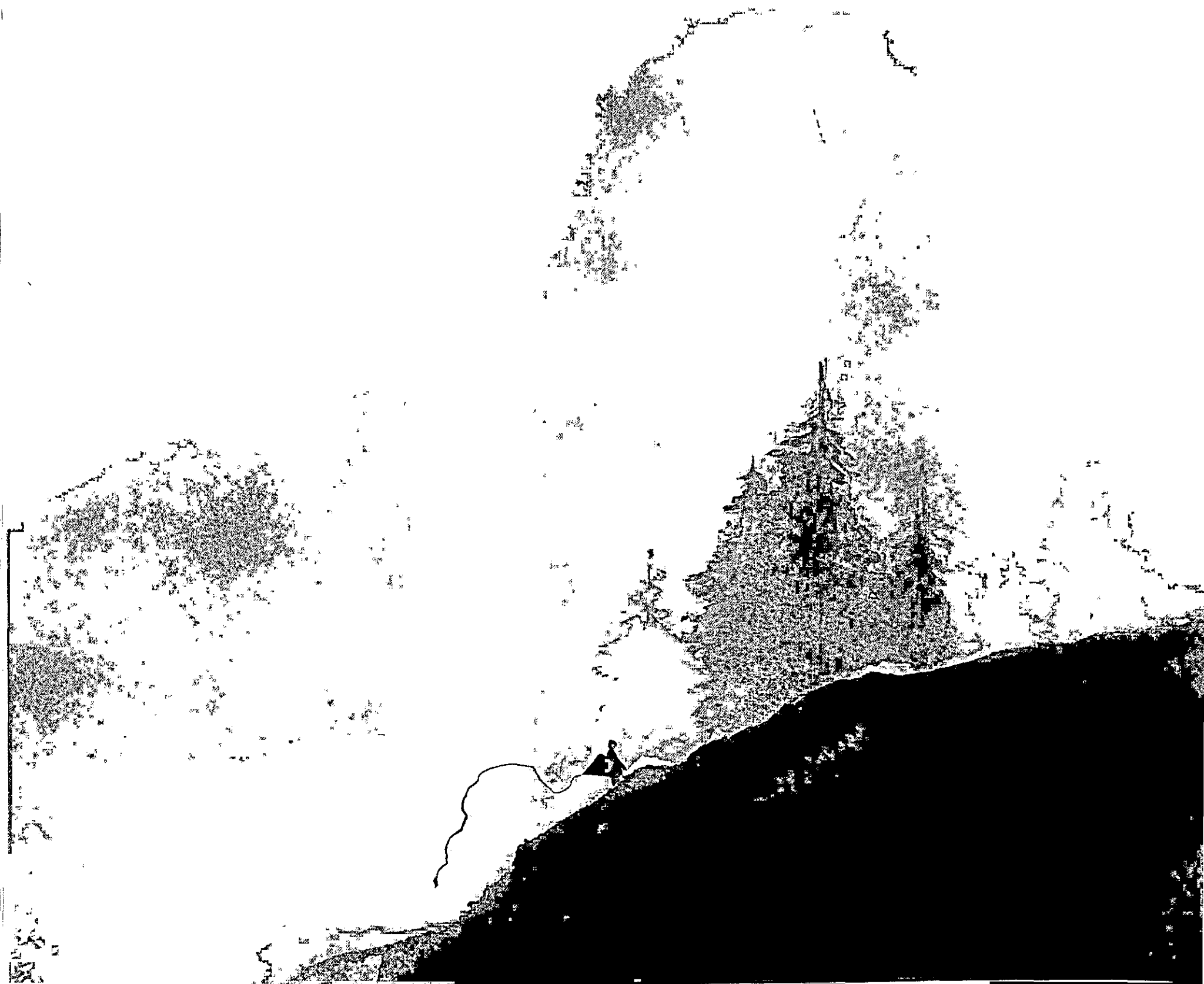
"Fighting," barked Pushkin right away.

Then the boy thought for a long while. He loved his friends. He knew they were all trying their best to help him answer his questions. But their answers didn't seem quite right.

Then, an idea came to him. *I know!* he thought. *I will ask Leo, the turtle. He has lived a very long time. Surely he will know the answers I am looking for.*



Nikolai hiked high up into the mountains where the old turtle lived all alone.





When Nikolai arrived, he found Leo digging a garden. The turtle was old, and digging was hard for him.

“I have three questions and I came to ask your help,” Nikolai said.
“When is the best time to do things? Who is the most important one? What is the right thing to do?”



Leo listened carefully, but he only smiled.

Then he went on with his digging.

“You must be tired,” Nikolai said at last. “Let me help you.” The turtle gave him his shovel and thanked him.

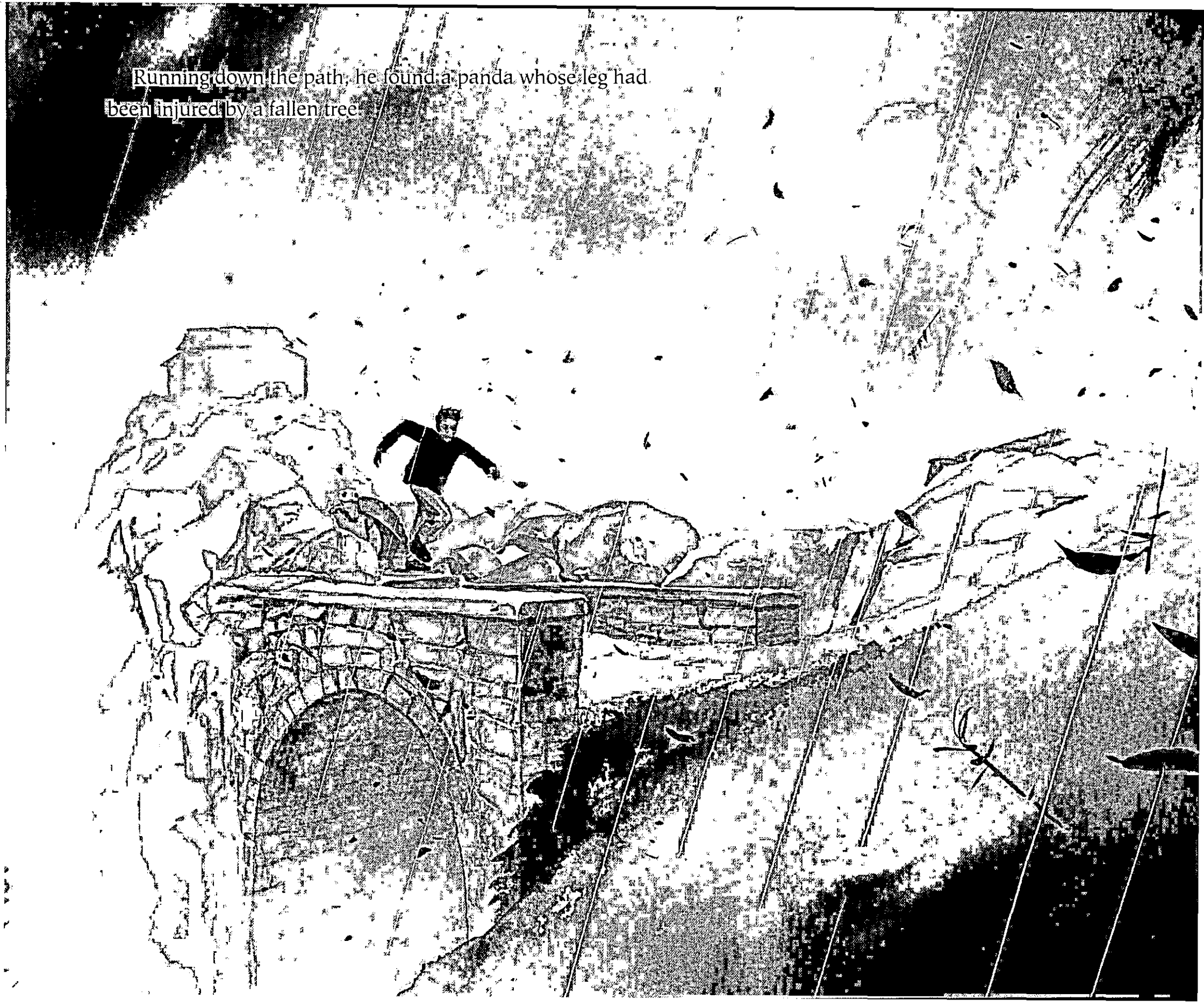
And because it was easier for a young boy to dig than it was for an old turtle, Nikolai kept on digging until the rows were finished.

But just as he finished, the wind blew wildly
and rain burst from darkened clouds.

As they moved toward the cottage for shelter,
Nikolai suddenly heard a cry for help.



Running down the path, he found a panda whose leg had
been injured by a fallen tree.







Carefully, Nikolai carried her into Leo's house and made a splint for her leg with a stick of bamboo.



The storm raged on, banging at the doors and windows.

The panda woke up.

"Where am I?" she said. "And where is my child?"