

the snow, sinking almost to his back. He tussled in the soft powder for a moment. The bushy tail appeared and disappeared here and there in the snowy flurry. The girl didn't disturb him; she knew he was feeding in what he called the "psychosphere." The fox followed the trail of emotions as if he were catching and tracking the scent of prey. Finally, he climbed onto a nearby stump, which protruded just above the snow cover, and shook himself off.

"Javla mess," he barked shortly. "I won't lecture you, but honestly, teenagers should direct their feelings a bit more sensibly." He jumped off the stump straight into the snow. "What am I saying," he added after a moment, "I would starve to death if they did."

"You're not helping," the consul's daughter pouted. "I come here for advice, and you give me sermons." "Advice-shmice," the fox sneered. "You know perfectly well that I only offer opinions about the future. And I'm never wrong. That's why you came, right? You want to know if it all makes sense?"

She nodded and stood up. She turned and looked at the fox expectantly.

"No," he said curtly and sank into the snow. For a moment, she could see him burrowing beneath its surface, and then he was gone.

"Fan dig," she said to the air because there was no one around to direct those words to anymore.

Zines are unofficial publications dedicated to topics you find important. They can be about music, hobbies, personal matters, social issues—things no one wants to talk about but should be spoken about loudly. They can include comics, photos, texts, poetry...

Read zines, make zines, support independent, free voices.

Download more zines from gniazdoswiatow.net



Text - July 2022 – May 2023

Zine - March 2025

solid layer of ice.

And the fox waited for her. Sometimes on a stump, sometimes on the ice, other times seeking refuge from the August heat in the shade of a bush.

This time Emma had to wait a while. She sat on the stump and stared at the darkening sky.

"Vart var du?" she asked when he finally appeared, somewhat late. Even after all these years, they still spoke Swedish, unless one of them lacked a word to describe some local phenomenon.

"Why should I hurry? Because you fell in love?" the fox blurted out, as usual, straghtforwardly.

"Oh well, fell in love, big words," she shrugged.

"At your age, it's quite normal for your species, and I wouldn't worry about it," the fox curled up and covered himself with his tail. "Those emotions don't interest me."

The girl laughed loudly. "I know, I know, you prefer fear, anxiety, worries, right?"

"After all, I'm a predator, aren't I?" the fox rolled onto his back and rubbed his head against a stick protruding from the ground. "So, which one?" he added matter-of-factly after a moment.

"None of them," Emma-Ulrika sighed heavily. "It would be like... You know..." "Like incest?"

"Yeah, probably. If that's what it's called. So, it's none of the boys." The fox leaped into the air and landed in



BARTEK BIEDRZYCKI

she reached a small, frozen pond. The surface was covered with a thick layer of snow, but the perfect-ly smooth expanse in the middle of the forest could only be one thing—the pond hidden under a blanket of snow.

"Vi möts igen," she heard a familiar voice behind her. She started, surprised.

"Vad gör du här?" she asked. Her head spun, and she took two steps back and sat down on a stump. The fox stood there, not disturbing the frozen crust that had covered the forest a few nights earlier.

"How did you like the changes that have happened since our last meeting?" he asked bluntly.

"I didn't like them at all," Emma replied. "But it could have been worse," she admitted.

"And I liked it very much. Especially how you pondered over everything," the fox grinned in what was probably meant to be a smile.

The "for a while" they were supposed to move south of the Baltic turned into several years. Emma learned to speak Polish, a bit of Samogitian, and Ukrainian and settled into the mild winters of the Central European plains. But whenever something troubled her, kept her awake, or just occupied her mind too much—she went to the forest. Her legs knew the path to the small pond by heart. In summer covered with a thick layer of duckweed and in winter with a

"I need to go out," Emma didn't care whether anyone in the residence's security staff heard her or not. Everything that happened in the main hall was recorded and monitored live, so someone definitely did. "I'm going to the forest," she added, knowing this would keep them from bothering her. The forest behind the residence was a safe zone. It stretched far from public streets and was surrounded by the protected grounds of the government estate. She needed to get her thoughts together, and the best place to do that was in the forest. Talking to a fox.

They first met by chance, in the forest, by the lake Hårlanda tjärn, when Emma-Ulrika Fredriksson was just six years old. Her father had taken her for a walk by the lake. It was early summer, the nesting season for mallards, abundant in that area. The future consul of the Kingdom of Sweden had returned to the parking lot to make an important phone call from the car, and since she didn't want to follow him all the way back, he allowed her to stay. She knew the path around the lake like the back of her hand, as they had been coming here for weekend walks since she was little. She crouched on a glacial boulder jutting into the lake and watched, fascinated, as a mother mallard led a group of small, yellow-brown ducklings onto the water's surface.

The fox slithered from the forest silently, stopping at

on psychic energy."

"I see," the girl replied, not fully understanding.

"Yes, yes, I know, you don't understand anything," murmured the fox, as if reading her mind. "I'm sure you're in for big changes this year."

"Nej tack," mumbled Emma and ran toward the parking lot along the gravel path between the tall trees.

But as it turned out, the fox was right. First, her mom moved out, and then her dad said he had been appointed consul of the Kingdom and they were moving to the Commonwealth. For a while, anyway.

Then came autumn, different trees, a different forest, a high fence at the residence, and a new school where no one spoke Swedish. Emma forgot about the fox until this moment when she ventured out into the forest behind the consul's residence in winter.

It was dark, but not too dark, because snow covered everything, even under the trees. It was also cold, but cold by Central European standards. For a girl born on the Kattegat shore, the winters of the Internatium were going to be just a shadow of the true Scandinavian ones. She slipped away from the watchful eyes of the bodyguards and disappeared among the trees. She walked slowly, leaving deep, clear tracks behind her, just as her father had taught her. Eventually,

the edge of the gravel path, and crossing a small ditch where water trickled down from the glacial rocks piled up by the shore. He must have stood there for a while before the girl noticed him. Her attention was drawn by the flash of fiery red fur catching the rays of the May sun filtering through the treetops.

"Åk iväg!" she hissed at him, thinking he was after the little ducklings.

"Rödhåriga är elaka," replied the fox. Quietly, but very clearly, although at first, she thought she had misheard. Okay, maybe she was only six, but everyone knew that animals only talked in fairy tales.

"You're a redhead yourself, so don't be so smart," she shot back and stood up from her crouch.

"Why don't you look around for a stick?" the fox mocked, swishing his bushy, summer tail. Well, maybe not that bushy, but still beautifully red. He stepped back and forth a few times, and with one leap, he was right next to Emma.

"Those scraps are of no interest to me," he indicated the ducklings, now hurriedly swimming away into the open water with his triangular snout. The girl involuntarily shivered at the thought of what larger prey the red predator might be after.

"Relax," the fox sat down on the sun-warmed surface of the boulder and began grooming the fur on his head with lazy movements of his front paw.

"I'm not interested in meat at all. To be honest, I'm not interested in what you consider food at all. I feed