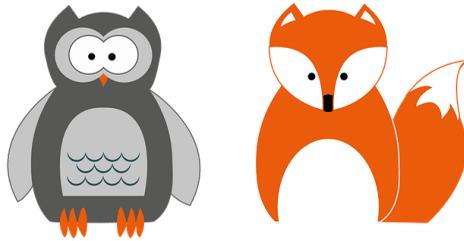


HOW THE FOX AND THE OWL BECAME FRIENDS



BY
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There once was a fox named Nuna. She had a beautiful red coat, sharp teeth and bright green eyes. In winter, she would curl up with her bushy tail draped around her which helped to keep the cold out. It was spring now and the days were getting warmer, though the nights were still cool. Nuna and her husband, Fuhsaz, lived by a very special canal in an area which humans called Princes Parade. The couple had built a beautiful den between the canal and the sea in a small wooded area, sheltered from the wind and hidden from view. They had worked hard, burrowing into the earth to make a cosy den with two bedrooms and had pulled in lots of dry leaves to use as cushions. Nuna was expecting her first litter of cubs and was nervous and excited at the same time.

“You will look after me won’t you husband?” asked Nuna nervously.

“Of course I will,” replied Fuhsaz who could feel his wife’s apprehension. “I will be here for you, please don’t worry.”

The pair smiled at each other, the moonlight glinting off their razor-edged incisors. Nuna snuggled her head into Fuhsaz’s fur and he, in turn, rested his head on hers as they sighed contentedly in unison. The moon shone brightly on the sea, the light shimmering as the gentle waves rippled upon the shingle beach. It was a peaceful night, still, calm and beautiful. On the trees, new leaves had unfurled, the moonlight shining through them to create pretty patterns on the ground. An hour or so passed as the moon made its way slowly across the sky as Nuna fell into a contented dream. Fuhsaz gently unhooked himself from Nuna and stretched quietly, trying not to disturb her. It was time to hunt and Fuhsaz considered it to be an excellent night for a spot of fishing. Leaving Nuna to sleep, he silently sloped out of the den and pushed his way through the grass to the edge of

the canal. Feeling thirsty, he lapped up some water from a puddle before making his way to his favourite fishing spot, a natural bay where the water was shallow enough to stand in. He stood silently in the water and waited patiently for his dinner to swim by. It didn't take long before a small red finned fish swam passed. With lightning speed Fuhsaz caught the fish and quickly gulped it down.

“Not bad as a starter,” thought Fuhsaz licking his lips, “now to catch the bigger fish!” He knew he was lucky to have such well-stocked water so close to home. There was usually an abundance of food and even in winter Princes Parade provided everything to keep a young family going. The foxes shared the area with lots of other animals. There were a variety of birds, from small reed warblers and robins to jackdaws, buzzards and herons. The canal was home to ducks and swans too and soon there would be little grey cygnets and tiny yellow ducklings. As spring sprung, the area became a

hive of activity. The bumble bees emerged from their winter slumber, buzzing up from holes in the ground. Dragonflies with their amazing translucent wings took to the air in search of food and squirrels raced, leaping from branch to branch as they celebrated the end of winter. Naturally, people made use of the area too as it was a pleasant place to walk and provided a welcome respite from their busy lives and busy minds.

Fuhsaz stopped to sniff the air and picked up a familiar scent - badger! In the distance, Fuhsaz spotted the unmistakable black and white striped face of a big badger who Fuhsaz knew as Bombar. Bombar's eyesight wasn't so great and he couldn't smell Fuhsaz as the breeze was flowing in the wrong direction. Fuhsaz watched, laughing to himself as the badger turned right, following the same route he always did, without variation, night after night. Fuhsaz didn't need a watch, he could tell the time by the moon, the stars and the location of Bombar!

After having his fill of fish, the soon to be father fox, took his last catch with him, holding it delicately in his mouth. He made his way along the grassy canal path and up the slope to the den and his waiting wife.

“God I’m starving!” exclaimed Nuna as Fuhsaz approached, her empty belly having woken her from her slumber. She gladly ate the fish, foraged outside for a few earthworms, then once again settled down alongside her husband. The night breeze blew in a sweet smell and the contented couple once again settled down in their den.

“My tummy feels funny.” said Nuna to her husband.

“Too much fish?” laughed Fuhsaz.

“Don’t joke! I think something’s happening!” shrieked Nuna and with that, she felt the need to lay down. Fuhsaz had a sudden urge to leave and Nuna indicated he should through her gaze. As he walked up the slope and out of the den he knew this was it - he was to become a father! At a loss as to what to do, Fuhsaz decided he should again go hunting, Nuna would need plenty of food to keep her going and he realised that his wife would likely not leave the den until the cubs were ready. His father had told him that when he was born, he was blind and relied on his mother for everything, his mother in turn relying on his Dad. So it would be with Fuhsaz and his offspring. He was ready to fulfil his responsibilities and was excited to welcome new life into the world.

The young fox headed off in search of more food. This time he followed the canal a short way before turning and crossing the bridge which spanned the water. He headed towards the houses of humans, some with big back gardens, others with small front gardens facing the path. In one of the houses, the people who lived there liked to feed the birds and sometimes a big lump of fat could be found on the ground, dislodged from its holder by a jackdaw or a magpie. No hunting required for that kind of prize! He made his way under the hedge into the garden and sure enough, there was a fat ball just lying on the ground. The birds were sleeping although it wasn't long before sunrise when they would start their dawn chorus. Fuhsaz was about to pick up the ball in his mouth when he heard a loud rustling noise from the hedge. He looked up to see the face of badger Bombar pushing through the undergrowth as he made his way on his regular route - in the reverse direction. Unphased by the presence of the fox, Bombar trudged past,

nose to the ground intent on a scent from somewhere else.

“Just passing through,” Bombar muttered in his deep voice as he made his way around the edge of the garden and through the other hedge. Fuhsaz followed him with his eyes and watched as he disappeared into the darkness, clattering through the hedge and bushes beyond.

“Funny creature.” thought Fuhsaz who always wondered how badgers managed to catch anything, being a bit clumsy and less than stealthy.

As Fuhsaz left the garden, he noticed that Bombar had been caught by the security light next door, which detected movement. He didn't like those security lights and tried to avoid them at all costs. He preferred the dark places which didn't blind him or blow his cover. He liked to look up into the dark sky too and see the millions of stars that instantly disappeared

when the lights came on. Sloping off into the shadows Fuhsaz crossed back over the canal, pausing to take a breath on the bridge. He could smell the salty sea nearby, the pine trees by the bridge and the scent of dogs and cats which lived nearby too. Soon he was back outside the den. He sniffed near the entrance - there was a new smell, an unmistakable smell - a fox cub smell!

Inside the den, Nuna had given birth and at her feet were four tiny bundles of fur. Nuna brimmed with pride as she looked at her cubs, two boys and two girls. She nuzzled them into her, guiding them. It would be some time before they could open their eyes and look upon the world for the first time. The cubs huddled together, smelling their surroundings in the cosy earth den under the ground. Then they smelled another smell - a foxy smell - a Dad smell!

Instinct told Fuhsaz that he should not enter the den. It was his job to bring food and protect his family and it was best that he trust Nuna to care for the cubs until they were older. After foraging a little for some earthworms to supplement the fat ball meal, Fuhsaz decided to climb the bank above the den and take a look at the sea once more. As he reached the top, a thin red line appeared on the horizon as the sun returned to signal a new day. The moon was still up too and Fuhsaz wondered at the majesty of the world - it was so beautiful. There were a few tents on the beach, the fishermen had been out overnight and now they slept in the morning sunlight.

“Nocturnal like me.” Fuhsaz thought as he curled himself up under a tree and drifted into a contented fatherly sleep.

Nuna on the other hand, did not sleep peacefully - her little cherubs fidgeted and snuffled as she tried to sleep. Just as she drifted

off, one or other of them would jiffle trying to get the best position next to her. She loved them though and knew she would do anything for them.

Fuhsaz was up early for his nightly activities. He was excited to get hunting for more food for his family. Dusk was fast approaching as the sun made its long descent towards the sea. Clouds were forming and the sun's rays caught them turning the whole sky into a dusky pink pastel. The bats were already zipping about between the trees at lightning speeds using their high pitched calls to find their way. The ultrasonic noises which were silent to human beings were positively loud to Fuhsaz, who had excellent hearing.

Outside the den the air was strong with fox scent, his wife and children were inside but he could not hear them and he presumed they were sleeping. Nuna was very houseproud and kept the den spotless. She knew instinctively that it was best for her cubs for Fuhsaz to remain outside the den, besides, he had hunting

to do and would only get under her feet if he lounged around in the den. Fuhsaz was happy with the arrangement anyway, he preferred being out in the fresh air. He watched as the sun finally slid into the sea as if being extinguished by the water. His keen eyes adjusted to the low light and he felt a sharpening of his senses as his mind began to focus.

It was too early in the season for Fuhsaz to pursue his preferred diet of fruit and berries, he would have to hunt rather than forage. He set off along the ridge of Princes Parade, keeping the wind to his front so that any would-be prey would not smell his approach. It wasn't long before he heard an unusual sound. It was a kind of squawk and in the distance, he saw a commotion of red and brown feathers flapping awkwardly in the scrub. Keeping his head low and tail lowered, Fuhsaz made his way towards the funny looking bird. It had long tail feathers and a small head and beak. It looked tasty and

would feed his new family well. Stealthily he edged nearer, the bird seemingly unaware of the danger it was in. It pecked the ground steadily, picking out the edible from the inedible. Fuhsaz prepared himself, he had to be quick and accurate. He had never hunted such a thing. It was quite a big bird and could cause him some trouble he thought. Just then something spooked the bird, and with a loud squawk it took off running, right towards Fuhsaz! As it took off into ungainly flight, Fuhsaz saw his chance and leapt up from his hiding place pulling the bird to the ground, quickly and efficiently bringing its life to an end. He was pleased with himself, success on the first try! Taking the bird in his mouth he headed for home along the ridge. He took some for himself but left the majority of the meat for his family, and pushed it a short way into the entrance of the den for Nuna to collect when she was ready. Before venturing off into the darkness again, Fuhsaz made sure no predators had seen him, he did not want anyone to steal his prize. He

hung around a little, washing his fur and letting his meal go down.

Nuna was tired but happy. She was extra happy when the smell of food wafted into the den from the long tunnel that led outside. She made her way up the slope and sure enough, there was a large bird by the entrance. Nuna inspected it and the pretty feathers told her that her husband had brought them a pheasant. She was glad she had picked a good hunter as a mate and wondered if he was still around. She poked her head out of the den just in time to see him disappearing down the slope. “Just as well,” she thought, “I had better get back to the kids.” sad though she was that she hadn’t had the chance to thank her husband.

Fuhsaz thought he would explore a little, there was no great urgency for more food just yet. He made his way down towards the bridge, ducking swiftly into the bushes when he saw a person approach with their dog on a lead. To become

invisible was his greatest skill and from previous experience, he knew dogs were best avoided. Once the coast was clear he made his way along the gravel track which led to the end of the canal. When he reached the end he stopped in the shelter of the trees. He intended to make it across to the garage and investigate the bins - sometimes humans threw out perfectly good food! He sat and waited, watching the passing cars. He was not altogether sure about crossing the road. Sometimes the cars were slow but every now and then one would come out of nowhere and he had already had a few close shaves. Once he had got halfway across, but a car came speeding the other way - only his agility saved him as he turned back in the nick of time. So he decided to make sure this time and looked for patterns as to when a car might come. They were rather random and he soon became impatient and decided to make a dash for it. As he leapt from cover onto the road there was a sudden loud screech as somebody shouted:

“STOP!”

The young fox jumped back just as a motorbike roared past his nose! Fuhsaz shuddered knowing how close a call it had been. He scanned the trees with his eyes, trying to find the owner of the voice. There, high in a tree was an owl! He looked rather regal with long wings that hung like an expensive coat. His big round eyes regarded Fuhsaz dispassionately.

“Thank you” murmured Fuhsaz. “You saved my life.”

The owl didn’t answer but span it’s head around as if someone more important had arrived, then slowly turned back to face Fuhsaz.

“You have to be careful of those.” the owl said. “Your grandmother was killed by one.”

Fuhsaz stood stunned. He was amazed that the owl knew about his grandmother and wondered what else this old owl could tell him.

“I will be sure to look out for them,” replied Fuhsaz. “I didn’t even hear it!”

The owl blinked but remained silent. The fox stood feeling rather awkward.

“Erm, well maybe I will be able to return the favour someday?” Fuhsaz said nervously.

Again the owl didn’t answer. “This is hard work!” thought Fuhsaz. They stood in silence before Fuhsaz said,

“Well I’m pleased to meet you, my name is Fuhsaz, what’s yours?”

“Kajika,” replied the owl. “I must go now. Remember, be careful crossing roads.”

Fuhsaz nodded he would and watched as Kajika flew silently and gracefully away across the road into the nearby woods. Fuhsaz once again prepared to cross the road, this time being extra careful and using all his senses to make sure the coast was clear. He crossed over safely and headed towards the local pub. Although it was busy outside the pub, Fuhsaz knew a secret way into the back yard. Sometimes the chef left him some tasty food by the back door which was very kind of him. He made his way along the side of the pub garden, unnoticed by a few people who were talking loudly by the back door. He jumped onto a wooden box and from there climbed over the wooden gate and into the yard. Through the window, he spied the chef who was singing loudly to himself, while frying something up in the pan. There was no food left outside but he watched the chef finish his smokey frying and tip the contents of the pan onto a plate right next to the open window. Then somebody else appeared in the kitchen and the chef turned away. Fuhsaz's mouth

began to water with the smell of food and he licked his lips. He tried to resist his temptation but it was no good, he was compelled to edge ever closer. He could hear the chef talking and guessed he would be able to swipe the food without him noticing. He was just about to jump onto the window ledge when all of a sudden the back door flew open casting bright light into the yard. Fuhsaz was caught like a rabbit in headlights and had to act quickly.

“Hey! What’s going on here,” said a gruff voice silhouetted by the blinding kitchen lights.

Fuhsaz made a run for it, scrambling up over the gate before the man could catch him. Breathing heavy, Fuhsaz ran back around the garden and into the safety of the woods.

“Phew! That was close he thought and decided it was time to head back to the den. He’d had enough excitement for one night!

Not every night was so exciting - if you call being frightened witless exciting! Often Fuhsaz would have peaceful nights amongst the trees or down by the canal drinking cool water and fishing. He couldn't wait to be reunited with Nuna and to finally see his cubs. He wondered about them and what they would be like. Then one night, while leaving food at the den, he smelled the fresh scent of Nuna wafting from inside. He stood and breathed in deeply, eyes closed. He felt something touch his face. He grinned as he realised it was the soft gorgeous fur of Nuna who had silently crept up to him. She kissed him sweetly.

"I've missed you," said Nuna looking into her husband's eyes with pure love.

"We'll be together soon." comforted Fuhsaz.

"How are they doing?" he asked, excited to hear all about the cubs.

“They are fine husband. You’ll be so proud.”

“What about names?” quizzed Fuhsaz.

“Well, two of them are your choices, Reef and Raud and the two girls I named Lara and Mela.”

“Perfect,” said Fuhsaz who rolled the names around his tongue a few times. “Have they opened their eyes yet?”

“No, not yet, but they are getting bigger.”
comforted Nuna.

The two foxes didn’t need to talk much, but they said lots of things with their eyes. Before long Nuna said she had to return to the cubs.

“It won’t be long husband and the cubs will be out of the den and relying on you to show them the ropes,” said Nuna enthusiastically.

“I look forward to it,” said Fuhsaz winking. With a flick of her tail, Nuna was gone and Fuhsaz reluctantly made his way back up the tunnel.

As he poked his head out of the den, he spied Bombar and another badger. The badgers' sett

was very close to the den and in general, they lived in harmony. Bombar was one of a large family and the only trouble they had ever had was when Bombar extended the sett a bit too far and ended up tunnelling into the foxes den! Luckily it didn't take long to patch up the hole and all was well again.

A few days later Fuhsaz was out hunting as usual. It was midnight and a cloudy, moonless night. Looking out to sea he saw a bright flash in the sky. Next, a great rumble of thunder shook the ground and a few moments after that it began to rain, softly at first but getting harder all the time. Another rumble, another flash and then BANG! A huge clap of thunder sounded overhead and Fuhsaz took shelter under a tree.

In the den, Nuna felt the earth shake but felt safe below ground. She comforted the cubs who had never experienced weather like this. But this was no ordinary storm. The rain pelted down and the lightening came thick and fast.

The wind grew stronger and the sea turned angry. Great swells picked up the stones from the beach, throwing them up and onto the concrete seaside road. Fuhsaz took cover in the entrance to his den and watched the rain hammer onto the iron bridge. An hour passed and there was no letup. Another hour and yet another hour went by before finally the wind eased a little and the rumblings became less frequent and more distant. He ventured out of the den onto the wet soil. Rainwater poured down the bankside, creating streams everywhere which fed into the canal. A large tree had blown over, its roots now exposed, its branches broken and cracked. Fuhsaz walked over the mound towards the sea. The road was covered in shingle and the waves still lapped high against the sea wall. "What a night," he thought to himself. He made his way down to the road, somebody had unluckily parked their car along the seafront. Now shards of glass lay everywhere from the smashed windows and stones covered the car. Fuhsaz looked up and

there high above him was a large seagull, braced against the wind. Only the gulls were strong enough to keep flying in such winds, but even they had taken cover this time. Fuhsaz walked by the roadside, taking stock of the carnage that lay before him. At the end of the road, he heard a distressed wail. The wail belonged to a kitten that had got itself stuck in a tree. One of the branches had cracked and left the poor lad with no way down. As he approached, Fuhsaz noticed the wind rise again and the tree began to rock to an fro.

“Just stay there!” shouted Fuhsaz reassuringly, “I’ll come and get you.”

The kitten was wide-eyed and scared witless, clinging to the branch. Fuhsaz hoiked himself up onto a lower branch then leapt up higher within reach of the kitten. He tried coaxing the kitten with soft words but it was too scared to relinquish its grip on the bark.

BOOM! Here came the thunder again, louder than before and accompanied by bright flashes all around. BOOM! Another one and this time the lightning that followed struck the tree with such force that it cracked the trunk. Fuhsaz and the kitten fell to the ground so hard that the fox knocked himself out! The kitten wailed again and it's tears mingled with the torrential rain that started to teem down. Things looked rather desperate, but that wasn't even the worst of it. Back at the den, Nuna thought she had felt the earth move. Her children were nervous and she tried to calm them although she didn't feel at all calm herself. Then some mud fell from the wall in the hallway. Normally dry and firm, the wall now was damp and crumbly. Nuna wished Fuhsaz was with her.

"Quickly," she said to the cubs as she ushered them into the entrance tunnel. Still unable to see and completely dependant, the cubs were terrified. From above ground came another

rumble of thunder and water now poured into the den.

Back at the tree, the kitten ran for home leaving a dazed Fuhsaz lying on the ground. Rain splashed on his face and slowly he regained consciousness. He opened his eyes, and there above him was Kajika!

“Fuhsaz, your family are in peril.” announced the fox calmly, “You must get back to the den urgently.” Fuhsaz picked himself up, still half dazed, and set off for the den in the wind and rain.

“Come *on* kids!” urged Nuna as she pushed them up the slope. Behind her, the den was falling in on itself and she knew she had to get them all out as quickly as possible. As they reached the top she again felt the earth move beneath her and suddenly the five of them began to fall in a giant landslide. Fuhsaz began to run when he saw what was happening but he

kept slipping himself. Kajika was above battling through the howling wind. Then they spotted Nuna and the cubs! They were careering out of control in the mudslide towards the canal! Everything seemed to happen in slow motion, as Fuhsaz dug his claws in to grip the earth. He leapt over rocks and branches and flung himself towards Nuna, trying to stop her from falling further. They were getting dangerously close to the water but Fuhsaz caught hold of Nuna and gripped her tightly. The cubs clung on for dear life and Fuhsaz managed to grab onto a sturdy tree. BANG! Another clap of thunder. The ground shook and little Mela helplessly slipped from her mothers grasp. The little cub fell but the foxes could do nothing but watch as the tiny cub slipped down the bank. Down and down she tumbled gathering speed all the way. Then, just when it seemed all was lost, Kajika appeared tenaciously fighting his way through the wind and rain. He swooped down like an angel to rescue the tiny cub and carried her over the canal and away to safety. He had been

followed by some strong seagulls who, like well-drilled pilots under Kajika's command, helped the rest of the family to escape the storm. A short time later the family were reunited and in the relatively safe haven of the woods. Nuna & Fuhsaz cried with joy at their narrow escape and thanked the owl and the seagulls for rescuing them. They hugged each other and at that moment, the little cubs opened their eyes to see the world for the very first time.

From that day on, Kajika was a true fox friend and stories of his and the seagulls' bravery spread amongst the animal families of Seabrook. And that is how the fox and the owl became friends.

THE END

This book was inspired by the beautiful Prince's Parade - a wonderful area of natural beauty near Hythe in Kent, UK. It is distributed free as a forerunner to my new book,

“The Prince's Parade”

a novel featuring Nuna & Kajika from this tale. All the profits from this book will be donated to the campaign to save the area from urbanisation. Please visit the website for more information. www.saveprincesparade.org

