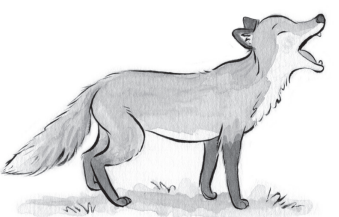
WOODLAND EXPLORERS CLUB

FUJIKO AND THE FOX



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GF: *For Isaac, Meela and Ennis.*

EJ: *For Julia and Magda.*

Also by Ewa Jozefkowicz

Benji's Emerald King

Shyla's Wood Wide Web

Ajay and the Red-winged Prince



WOODLAND EXPLORERS CLUB

FUJIKO AND THE FOX

Ewa Jozefkowicz

illustrated by Gillian Flint

ZEPHYR


TO THE TOWN
FUJIKO'S HOUSE
WILLOW WISH WOODS
TRIX'S HOUSE
WOODLAND PATH
THE EMERALD KING
WILLOW TREES
WHISPERING LAKE
SWALLOW CLEARING
THE TADPOLE RUN
ERIC'S HOUSE
BLUEBELL CLEARING
THE FALLEN LOGS
WILLOW WISH SCHOOL
AJAY'S HOUSE
BENJI'S HOUSE
SHYLA'S HOUSE

THE WOODLAND EXPLORERS CLUB RULES

1) Our mission - to help all birds build clean and safe nests



2) Speak to each other using our secret owl hoot

3) Look out for each other

4) Respect and protect the forest and its animals

5) Discover what Willow Wish Woods was like hundreds of years ago!



CHAPTER 1
FOOTPRINTS IN THE SNOW



The first thing Fujiko noticed when she woke up was the beautiful frost pattern on the window, a delicate dance of ice. The morning sunlight filtered through, turning the swirls into a sparkling mosaic. On the outside windowsill, was a small cushion of white. Had it snowed overnight?

Fujiko sat upright and scrambled out of bed to get a closer look. A sharp pain shot through her arm.

The cast. She kept waking up having completely forgotten about it. The doctor said she wouldn't be able to use her right arm for at least six weeks, which meant no violin or piano until the end of November. It had now been almost four weeks since her accident and she really missed playing her instruments.

Fujiko pushed the sad thought away and walked over to the window.

'Wow!'

The world was covered with a smattering of snow, like icing sugar. It had come early this year. The colourful leaves – yellow, orange and red – peeked through, making the ground look like a speckled blanket. The air was crisp, and some trees still had their pretty leaves, standing out against the soft, grey sky.

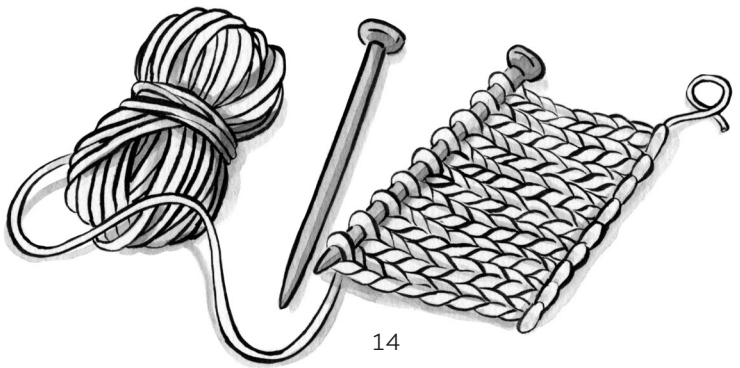




That's when Fujiko spotted the woolly hat on her bedpost. It was a rust orange colour with a white bobble and a zig-zag pattern, exactly like the hats her grandma used to make.

It's from Yuki! thought Fujiko.

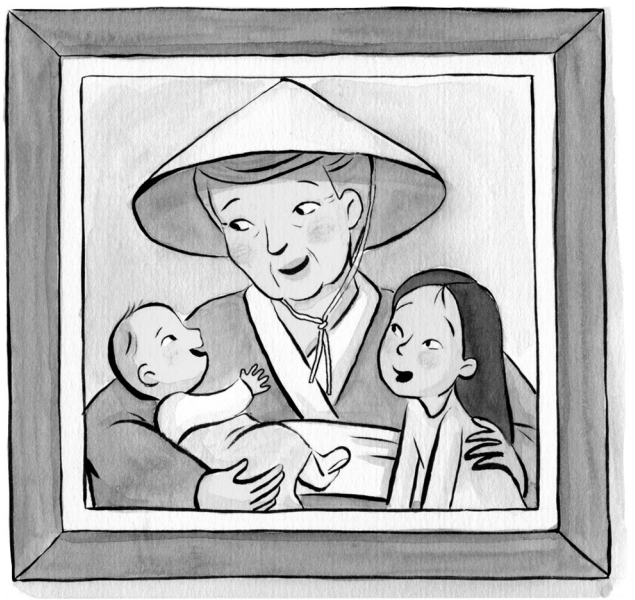
Yuki, her older sister, had found some of their grandma's hats in a box in the attic. They were beautiful, but because the wool was old and partly eaten by moths, they couldn't be worn any more. Yuki loved the patterns and worked hard to copy them. She'd been teaching herself to knit for months now.



Yuki had inherited Grandma's talent for making things, while Fujiko had her musical ear. She wished she could remember her better.

'Music followed your grandma around,' Dad would say. 'She used to joke that she carried a tune in her hat.'

Fujiko turned to the wall where there was a family photo of her as a baby, and Yuki as a mischievous-looking seven-year-old. Her grandma was wearing her traditional Japanese straw hat, shaped a bit like a cone.



‘That was your music hat,’ said Fujiko to the photo, ‘and this one could be mine.’

She put on Yuki’s woolly creation, got dressed, wincing a tiny bit at the pain in her arm, and walked carefully downstairs.



‘Come on, slow coach! You’ll be late for school!’ called Yuki from the breakfast table. ‘I made you pancakes. Eat up quickly, put on your wellies and let’s go, go, go!’

‘Thank you for the hat!’ said Fujiko.



‘Suits you!’

When Fujiko stepped outside, the sounds around her seemed to have changed. As she and Yuki walked down Woodland Path which wound along the edge of the woods, the usual hum of traffic was loud inside her head and she could barely hear the music of the forest, the songs of the birds and the sound of the Emerald King, their favourite, very special tree.

‘Hey, I never told you that I saw a stoat in the woods yesterday,’ said Yuki.

‘A stoat? Are you sure?’

‘I’m pretty sure. Although if it snows any more, it’ll be difficult to spot. You know their coats can turn white in the late autumn? This one was already quite mottled with a mix of brown and lots of white fur.’

‘Woah, no, I didn’t. But it’s amazing that you saw one. Maybe it means that more woodland creatures are coming back.’

The idea made Fujiko’s heart burst with joy. The Woodland Explorers’ mission was to bring back as many animals as possible to Willow Wish Woods, by making it a clean and safe habitat.

Usually, when she had a happy thought, Fujiko’s head would fill with music. She closed her eyes, waiting for it to start, but nothing happened.

‘I hope I see the stoat again,’ said Yuki. ‘Imagine how incredible it would be to get a photo of it in the snow.’

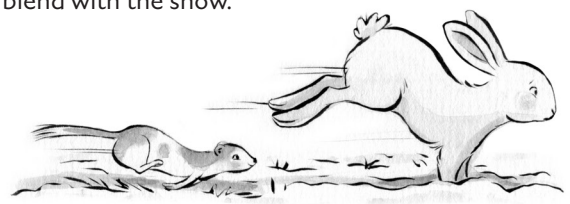


Super Woodland Fact:

The woodland stoat



Camouflage champs – woodland stoats who live in colder climates change fur colour from brown in summer to white in the late autumn, helping them blend with the snow.



Impressive hunters – these little animals can tackle much bigger prey. They hunt and eat rabbits, which are five times their size!

Acrobatic predators – stoats are amazing jumpers and can even climb trees! They use this skill to surprise prey from above, helping them catch their food.





At the school gates Fujiko bumped into Trix, who gave Fujiko a huge smile, and the seed of worry about not being able to hear her usual music disappeared.

'Hey, nice hat!' said Trix. 'You'll need that for our outside lesson today. It's going to be freezing.' She pretended to shiver and chatter her teeth.

'Maybe we'll have to stay inside because it's so cold,' said Fujiko.

'No way,' said Miss Swift, overhearing the girls talking. 'We can't miss a brilliant day like this! We just need to make sure we're wrapped up warm enough.' She was wearing a thick multi-coloured scarf. 'I'm going to check everybody has gloves, and then we are going to head into the woods.'



Fujiko and Trix joined the rest of the Woodland Explorers who were sitting on the logs.

'I found out more about the history of our woods!' said Ajay. He looked up to see Miss Swift approaching. 'But I'll have to tell you at lunchtime.'

Miss Swift clapped her hands. 'We have a special lesson today! I was super excited to wake up to the snow this morning, as I'm sure many of you were. But I was even more excited to see a hedgehog on my way into school and the tiny footprints it left behind in the snow. I haven't seen a hedgehog in Willow Wish Woods before. So today I thought that we might look out for further signs of animals in our woods. And I'd like us to think about how particular creatures survive the winter.'

'Awesome!' said Ajay. 'This is linked to what I have to tell you!'

'What's that?' asked Shyla.

Miss Swift looked at them. 'Let's not have too much talking on our walk over. I want everyone to keep their eyes out for signs of animals. Follow me to the Whispering Lake!'

'Ooh, a different gathering spot,' said Trix quietly. 'I wonder why.'



‘I love the Whispering Lake,’ said Benji. ‘In the early mornings, it looks magical. We always go there with Gramp to walk Nelson.’

Fujiko felt the chill in the air as they followed Miss Swift. In places, the ground felt a little icy underfoot. But the short walk was worth it. The lake shimmered, reflecting the soft, grey sky. Willow trees surrounded the water, their branches dipping down and lightly dusted with snow.

‘Now, I’d like you to get into pairs to see if you can find any forest creatures or signs of them,’ said Miss Swift. ‘I’d then like you to make a poster about that animal when you get back to class. If you don’t find anything of interest, let me know and I’ll help you look. I know a few good spots around here. If we’re lucky, we might find some of our woodland friends preparing for the winter.’

‘Right,’ said Benji, who had started bouncing up and down on the spot to keep warm. ‘Want to pair up with me, Fujiko? I’m pretty sure I saw some footprints in the snow between the willow trees over there.’

‘OK. Let’s do this!’