

Down

by

Vixxy Fox

Internet Explorer cannot display the webpage

The words shouted at her again and again as she hit the 'X' and then the internet icon over and over and over.

“Dang it!” was one of the least of the expletives she shouted at the computer screen. Anger boiled to the top of everything else and she found herself wanting to throw her huge old monitor out the window.

“Bridget,” came her mother’s voice from downstairs, “You’re going to be late for school. Come and eat your breakfast.”

“I’m not hungry!” she yelled back. The fact of the matter was; she was still in her pajamas and hadn’t so much as brushed her teeth.

Fur Affinity was down again. It was her home... the place where she was alive and able to be who she really was: StarFoxTails. Whenever she logged in, the transformation was like magic. She actually ceased being Bridget Bodget, and became this Fox creature with three beautiful tails. It was magical... she was magical. She became what Japanese folk lore called a Kitsune.

The door to her room opened with a thump and her mother stood there with her arms crossed. “You have to a five count to get your ass out of that chair and moving towards the bathroom or your computer privileges are suspended for an entire week.”

Bridget did the only thing she could, and cold booted the hard drive. She at least had the fore sight to password protect it against prying eyes, and if it was booted back up in her absence she would know as her parents were not all that computer savvy. Wading past all the art pallets stacked not so neatly around her bedroom, she scurried past her mother and began her school day – sans her pre-school fix of being StarFoxTails.

That morning the school bus was late. It wasn’t that she lived so far out in the country that her mother couldn’t have driven her, and she had said so many a time, but her folks both agreed... gas was expensive – the bus was free – deal with it.

Adjusting her backpack, she watched down the road for the big yellow and black slug on wheels. She was not really thinking of anything in particular when she heard someone clear their throat. Turning, she saw the tall weeds behind the glass semi-enclosed waiting station move about. It could have been the wind... except there was none. As she continued to watch, what at first appeared like a small dog, poked its head out of the grass curtain and looked at her.

'Rabies' immediately popped into her head with her mother's voice yelling the word and urging her to run. No sooner had she taken a step backwards in a precursor of flight, she realized the Fox was on the other side of the glass. It was like an observation room at the zoo.

She looked at the little reddish creature and it looked back. Neither of them moved for a moment. That was when Bridget heard the bus coming down the road. The bus driver ground its gears loudly as she hurried the shift trying to make up time. The noise broke the spell and she looked up to see where the bus was. Judging the distance, she figured she had perhaps 30 seconds.

Turning back to the Fox, she smiled and wiggled her fingers at him. Moving out so he could be clearly seen, he sat, adjusted his two tails, and then wiggled his own fingers back at her.

PATCCCHHhhhuuuuu...squeeeeeeee... went the brakes on the bus and Bridget heard the door open. "Let's go!" yelled the bus driver. "We're behind schedule. Bring it in and take a seat!"

Bridget was pulled from her thoughts of the Fox by reality. She turned to look at the impatient lady behind the wheel; frowning her disapproval at being rushed. When she turned back, the Fox was gone.

Opening her school locker, she saw her three tails, albeit paper and done in art class, hanging on the back of the door where they were taped. She smiled. They, at least, were reassuring. No one at school knew anything about her on line fursona... her alternate self. Nor would she ever tell anyone. They wouldn't understand and to be labeled a freak of any kind at school was not a good thing.

Above the tails were the large initials S.F.T. done in Fox colors.

"What's that stand for?" a voice asked from right behind her.

Slamming the door closed, she danced backwards before she even realized what she had done. "Don't ever do that!" she said loudly, and then caught herself as her voice echoed in the near empty hallway.

“Sorry,” the boy told her, opening the locker next to hers. It had been empty the day before, that student transferring out a month ago. “I’ll try to remember not to in the future.” He closed the door again, apparently ready for the morning. “I’m Barney,” he continued, “And no I am not related to the stupid purple dinosaur. What’s your name?”

“Bridget,” she managed, just as the tardy bell rang. “My bus was late.”

“First day for me,” he replied. “I was told to report to room 51A.”

“That’s my homeroom,” she told him. “Follow me.”

Since they both came in late, the homeroom teacher had Barney sit at the empty desk next to Bridget. After examining the schedule handed him by the student as he came in, he looked up, his gaze fixing on her... not him.

“This is some sort of co-incidence,” he said, “Every class you have is exactly that as Bridget.”

“Including girl’s gym?” asked the class smart ass. Everyone except the teacher laughed.

“One more comment Mr. Smith,” the homeroom teacher said addressing the infraction, “And you’ll be staying after school.” Turning back to Bridget, he then told her, “If you would please, kindly see he gets to his classes?”

The bell rang, and the students were off to the hallway races.

First class, and Bridget remembered the Fox at the bus stop. He had two tails. She thought about this, and try as she might, her memory never failed to show her his two tails.

“What’s the matter?” Barney whispered to her when the teacher’s back was to them.

“I saw a Fox with two tails this morning,” she whispered back, not even thinking to conceal the truth.

“Cool,” he whispered in response.

And then the teacher turned, zeroing right in on Bridget and asking her to come up to the front of the class to work out an impossible looking Algebraic equation. Oddly enough, and to the surprise of the teacher since he’d deliberately used the hardest problem he could; she had no problem getting it right.

Second class and Bridget remembered the Fox wiggled his fingers at her. But that would be impossible... Foxes have paws. Her eyes stared off into space as she tried to tell herself what she saw could not possibly been so; but her memory was very sharp and there could be no mistake.

“What’s the matter?” Barney whispered to her when this teacher’s back was to them.

“That two tailed Fox waved at me... he had hands not paws.”

“Cool,” he replied.

And then the teacher turned and directed his first question to Bridget. It was about ancient Rome, and she not only got the question right, but added further details the teacher was not aware of. This was a little embarrassing for him, so he made sure to cover this fact by giving her extra credit for class participation.

Third class was a study hall. Bridget and Barney scored library passes on the pretext that Barney was new to the school and she wanted to show him where it was.

“So you have a thing for Foxes then?” he asked her as they walked.

“Ummm... I like Foxes a lot, does that count?”

“The Fox has been liked and admired by many many people all through history,” he replied. “They actually have been revered by many societies... and you know what?”

“What?” she asked him.

“I’ve never once heard a story about a stupid Fox.”

They spent their library time looking up things on Foxes and giggling about what they found.

The librarian gave them the evil eye.

Lunch and the bedlam of the lunchroom was not nearly as bad as it might have been... or at least it didn’t seem to be. Their chicken nuggets became that which was stolen from the hen house the night before, and their chocolate pudding became chocolate mouse.

Forth period found them in science and Barney while assisting the teacher in the front of the class, made a ball of flame dance in the air while the man's back was turned. This teacher was only a little curious when he turned around and saw all the wide eyes.

"Certainly," he said, "I was not aware that a practical demonstration of mixing chemicals would be so 'eye opening'." And then he laughed at his own perceived pun.

When Bridget asked Barney how he did it, he just smiled and told her it was magic.

Fifth period was P.E. This rather excluded them from sitting together, but they were sharing a gym... boys on one side and girls on the other.

Look as she might, Bridget did not see Barney among the other boys. He was, however, waiting for her when she walked out of the locker room.

Sixth and last period was art. The art teacher was a kindly lady who, it just so happened, liked Foxes too. Because of this, Bridget was allowed to draw as many as she wished and there were plenty of them on display; all marked with A's.

"You did all of these?" Barney asked her in true admiration.

"Most of them," she replied blushing. "I have a thing for Foxes, but I think you've figured that out."

"Have you ever heard of a Kitsune?" he asked, leaning forward and whispering.

"Yes," she whispered back, "And I think they are the most wonderful of all the Foxes." Opening her art class portfolio she chose a piece of her work and slid it across the table to him. "That's me... or at least the me I would be if I were a Kitsune."

"But you have only three tails," he said quietly, looking at the picture. "I thought a Kitsune had nine tails?"

"They all have different amounts of tails, all the way up to nine," she told him. "Some say the Kitsune are awarded tails for bringing honor to their family, but I have also heard that they gain a tail every one hundred years. I'm not so sure about that one though. I mean... I'm only sixteen, and I have three."

"How did you come by this image of yourself," he pressed, sliding it back to her so she could put it away.

“I don’t know really. One day I set about drawing a Fox and there I was; the Fox in the picture. My parents would think I was crazy if I ever told them it’s what I believed. So would anyone here in the school. It seems the only place I can really be myself in on line in a place called Fur Affinity, but this morning the system was down again... so I didn’t get to be me before I had to run off to school.”

“And your name there is StarFoxTails,” he told her with a smile.

“That’s right!” she gasped. “But how did you know?”

Barney tapped on the table with one finger.

‘taptaptap’

His Fox like smile never changed.

‘taptaptap’

Bridget’s eyes seemed to lose their focus.

‘taptaptap’

Her focus returned and she was staring at her computer screen. Fur Affinity was up and she had at least thirty comments; all on a picture she had apparently posted of herself.

The first comment read, ‘I love the new picture of you... and you gained a tail... four now, that is so wonderful.’

The second read similar, and the third, and the forth, and the fifth...

‘taptaptap’

Bridget jumped slightly when she realized that the tapping sound was coming from her bedroom window. Turning, she saw a small two tailed Fox looking at her. He seemed to be floating in the air. He smiled at her and then wiggled his fingers in a friendly sort of hello.

She wiggled her own fingers back at him... and then he disappeared.

“Bridget,” came her mother’s voice from downstairs, “You’re going to be late for school. Come and eat your breakfast.”