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## Lang lebe König Frosch!

### *Long Live King Frog!*

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### ***Frog or King, that is the question***

Fox and Wild Boar were really expecting the mayfly, but who's this climbing out of the water? A frog, and it actually claims to be a king – or to be exact, their king. King Frog proceeds to demand a palace, freshly grilled flies and absolute obedience. He even makes the pair build a wall to keep out the stork, which, he claims, is a sorcerer. Will the two best friends the forest has ever seen be taken in by this self-crowned king?

- Following the success of his children's book ONLY ONE DAY, Martin Baltscheit has now come up with another masterpiece featuring Wild Boar and Fox
- The subjects of populism, society based on lies, and manipulation are merrily tackled here with charm and humour as well as depth
- Great philosophy for small readers, warm-heartedly illustrated by SaBine Büchner.

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Martin Baltscheit

LONG LIVE KING FROG!

Prologue

“Please may I have another one?” asks the fox. The wild boar passes a slice of bread and jam across to his friend, and the fox gobbles it up as if he’s in love with jam. But that’s what happiness does to you. Nobody ever says no to a second helping. In fact today is a doubly happy day because in addition to the jam they are expecting a visitor.

The fly is coming – the famous mayfly!

You may remember: three years ago, they had this magical encounter with a mayfly, who completely changed the lives of the fox and the boar. And she changed them for the better. The little fly landed on Earth for just that one day, and the fox and the boar made that day as beautiful for her as they possibly could. Well, to tell the truth, it was the other way round, but that’s a long story. At the end of the day the wonderful, enchanting and oh so adorable mayfly laid an egg, and now – after three years – the egg is about to hatch! Here, on the lake. Another mayfly! The next miracle. Oh, life is just great!

### The arrival

“Look, she’s about to hatch!” whispers the wild boar, and the fox answers through a mouthful of bread and jam: “Let’s hope she’ll come out shafe and shound!” The two friends are very excited, and they know exactly what’s going to happen. Out of the water will come a larva, very tired but very determined. She’ll climb up a stalk and dry herself in the morning sun. They’ll both fall in love with her on the spot, losing themselves in the depths of her eyes and the dazzling light of her wings. The fox and the boar are ready to change into devoted parents who, with humour and tender care, will look after the little fly throughout her single day in this world. Because that is what good parents do – they let themselves be guided by love, and they give up their time but never ask for anything in return.

A cake with candles is ready and waiting, together with a bunch of flowers and, of course, the school blackboard. Because a child must learn something or she’ll end up knowing nothing. The fly can come now, and the day can begin. At last!

“But don’t cry when she’s gone,” warns the fox.

“I shan’t cry,” says the boar, and then he says something very important: “Carpe diem.”

That’s Latin, and it means: “use the day”.

“Yes, we must use the day,” agrees the fox, “every hour, every second, today and always.”

“Today and always,” echoes the boar, and the fox bites into his eighth slice of bread and jam while his friend dreams about the future.

“Do you think she’ll be wearing the same pretty dress?”

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“The one with pompoms?”

“She’s sure to have the sunshade with her too.”

“Because she’s sunshine herself.”

“But soooo small!”

“We’ll look after her.”

“You’re a good mother,” says the boar.

“You too,” says the fox, patting the boar’s trotter.

“I’m the father,” growls the boar, pulling his trotter away.

“Whatever you like,” says the fox. “The main thing is that we do whatever I say.”

“Today and always,” say the two friends, leaning back in their chairs, and the morning sun warms their cheeks, which are shining like the waters of the lake.

### **Waiting for happiness**

After half an hour the lake is still shining like the evening dress of a forest queen, and the fox wonders if Joseph and Mary had looked forward as much as him to their second child. The wild boar drinks a mouthful from the bottle, scratches his stomach, drinks again, scratches again, drinks again, and then goes for a pee because he’s drunk too much.

“Taking her time...” says the fox, meaning the visitor they’re waiting for.

“Should I put the radio on?” asks the boar, but the fox waves his paw to say no.

“The birds’ singing is enough for me.”

And while the birds sing, as if performing an operetta, the new adventure bursts into their lives – but not from the lake. It comes from the other direction, through the early summer foliage of the forest. A smart, long-legged fellow with blond hair and a light and dark green face suddenly appears right in front of them. This noble little gentleman has a bored expression as he chews on something, licks his lips with his tongue, and looks around him like a prince who never pays for anything because everything belongs to him. What he sees is this: the house, the hammock, lots of food, the lake, the landing stage, and the trees round the house. He seems to like it, nods to himself in the fox’s shaving mirror, fiddles with his bow tie and breathes a long “aaah!” as if he now feels perfectly at home.

## Surprise

“*Bonjour*,<sup>1</sup>” says the frog.

“Bless you!” says the fox.

“I didn’t sneeze,” growls the boar, though he approves of the fox’s good manners.

Neither of them takes any notice of the stranger.

“*Bonjour!*” croaks the frog again, and he sticks out a leg and turns his toes sideways as if to flick away a speck of dust. The fox gives the boar a handkerchief.

“What am I supposed to do with this? I’m not crying.”

“You’ve got lots of stuff in your nose.”

“My nose is as empty as your fridge.”

The fox has a look up the boar’s nose, and it really is perfectly clean.

“*Mon dieu, quelle chance, ce sont deux idiots*,<sup>2</sup>” thinks the frog, and then he croaks at the top of his voice: “*BONJOUR!*”

Now the two friends turn and look at the strange green creature.

“I’ve already said ‘bless you’,” says the fox.

“I am ze frog,” says the frog in a French accent, sticking his nose in the air. He has to do that so that he can appear to be looking down on the two much bigger animals. The fox is not impressed.

“Sorry, we don’t need a swimming instructor. We’re expecting a visitor.”

“Maybe I am ze visiteur?”

“You’re a frog and we haven’t invited you. But tell me, have you seen a mayfly anywhere?”

The frog has a think. “A mayfly? Pairhaps. It was five minutes ago. Down in ze watair somesing was trying to come to ze surface – a pretty leettle sing...”

“Get to the point, will you?” The fox is impatient, but the frog stays cool and defiantly looks the fox straight in the eye:

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<sup>1</sup> Good morning. The stranger obviously speaks French, and we shall have to translate what he says if he doesn’t say it in English.

<sup>2</sup> My God, lucky me, they’re two idiots!

“I shall get to ze point when I am ready to get to ze point, and you will speak when I give you ze pairmission to speak!” Then he stretches out his arms. “Becoz I am ze King of ze Forest and rulair over all ze animals.”

“King of the Forest? Where?”

“Here!”

The frog taps his own chest.

“You mean there’s a king inside that jacket? Well, he’s pretty small for a king!”

The fox and the boar burst out laughing.

“I AM ZE KING! Ze great king of ze forest!”

They laugh even louder.

“King of the Forest? You’re just a joke of a croak!” says the fox with a wave of his paw.

“And you’re ruining our carpet with your big wet feet!” says the boar.

They laugh again, but the green fellow in the silk jacket is as stubborn as a summer cold.

*(Illustration caption: I am ze king!)*

“I am ze King of ze Lake!”

“You’re a crazy croaker, and you’re spoiling the view,” growls the boar. “And you’d better get out of the sun or you’ll dry up.”

“Then we’ll have to call you Your Dryness Highness!” laughs the fox, and he reaches for his binoculars to make sure he doesn’t miss the arrival of the real queen. “*Au revoir, chéri!*”<sup>3</sup> he says to the frog, and he and the boar pay no more attention to the uninvited guest. As far as they’re concerned, the stranger is now alone.

That’s how things work here. Normally.

But not this time.

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<sup>3</sup> Goodbye, sweetheart!

The stranger now places himself between the two friends, and suddenly a perfumed scent rises up into the fox's nostrils. The green fellow gazes at the water: "And who is ze wonderfool visiteur you is expecteeng? A eepopotamus? A sea cow? An eel?"

The two friends ignore the sarcastic undertones, because the best way to get rid of someone is to make them disappear. And anyone who is neither seen nor heard disappears. That is a law of nature. And so they don't say a word. But the frog won't give up. He wouldn't still be here if he had given up.

"So, who is comeeng?"

"Nobody," says the wild boar.

"No one is going to tell you," adds the fox with a grin.

But being mocked by two idiots doesn't bother the green king at all, and he's quick to answer: "Do nobody and no one live by ze lake? Zat's good. Becoz a frog will come and spit on zeir silly head." Then he actually spits his spit from down below, and it does a wide circle before falling on their heads! Gold medal for spitting! The fox and the boar clutch their sticky heads, and the frog licks his lips: "Bull's eye! But ze leettle frog, he is lucky. *Nobody* has seen it, and *no one* knows about it."

"Are you tired of living, or what?" The fox jumps to his feet. "Get out of here. *Nobody* wants you."

"And *no one*?"

The boar grabs the frog by the collar of his jacket.

"Hokay, hokay, *je m'en vais*.<sup>4</sup> All I wanted to know was who is comeeng. I'm goeeng. Back into ze watair, where my dear mozair give me birth..."

The frog strolls with exaggerated slowness down to the shore. And now the boar thinks once more about the mayfly. She hasn't reached land yet, and supposing the frog has no manners and no scruples about what he eats?"

"Wait! If I tell you who's coming. Will you go back to the forest?"

"*Bien sûr!*"<sup>5</sup> says the frog, and he sits down on a rock by the shore.

"A lady friend is coming to see us, a princess, but she's not for you."

"I am ze King."

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<sup>4</sup> I'm going.

<sup>5</sup> Of course.

“Now look here, you flat-headed fathead...”

The fox has had enough of all the nonsense and would like to throw the royal pest into the lake, but the boar tries to solve the problem with the truth, because the truth often works wonders.

“Listen, little frog. Today is mayfly hatching day. A sweet little girl laid an egg three years ago and asked us to watch over it. We’ve looked after it and today’s the day! The birthday! We’re going to have a child. And that’s why we want to be alone.”

“Ze mayfly?”

“Exactly.”

“And you have been waiteeng for sree years?”

The fox points to the table: cake, candles, flowers. “And after the birthday we shall play going to school, then she’ll learn a profession, get married, grow old with us, and in the evening she’ll fly into the swarms of men and lay an egg. OK? So now you know. Goodbye.”

This time the frog is impressed.

“She only has zis one day, and you is makeeng ze day as beautifool as possible?”

“Yes, because she’s our queen,” says the boar.

“Our one and only queen,” says the fox. “And it will be a wonderful day.”

“But also sad,” says the boar.

“But also wonderful,” says the fox.

“And aftairwards, you will wait for anoizzer sree years?” asks the frog.

“That’s how it is,” say the two friends. “Today and always.” They know it’s all going to be wonderful, but only if this green thing disappears.

“Wiz so much happiness I do not want to stand in ze way. A man knows when it is ze time for him to *disparaître*.<sup>6</sup> *Au revoir!*” he says, and he actually leaves, waving his hand as kings do to their subjects.

“*Au revoir, Froggy!*” shout his subjects. “Have a good life!”

And the fox and the wild boar think to themselves that a bit of tough talk and a bit of truth is all you need to stop a frog’s crazy croaking.

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<sup>6</sup> Disappear.

The self-styled King of the Forest and of the Lake hops into the shadows of the trees, and the green foliage soon makes him completely invisible.

The sun heats up the cake. Another hour passes, but still there is no mayfly sitting at the table. The fox would like a slice of the cake, but the boar slaps his paw.

“Ouch!”

“That’s on behalf of the mayfly!”

“She won’t eat it anyway.”

“She should be the one to cut it. It’s a symbol.”

“Symbols don’t fill empty stomachs.”

The boar points at the water. There’s a movement. Something is climbing out. Tiny waves. Dancing bubbles. Then two bulging pearls come up from the deep to the surface.

“She’s coming...” whispers the fox, and the two friends sit bolt upright. The bulging eyes come closer and closer, and now at last the dream comes true. After three long years, the beautiful little fly has arrived!

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### **Bonjour, ze fly has come!**

It’s obvious that this fly is not a fly but a bigger creature, even though she’s wearing a dress with pompoms and carrying a sunshade. The newborn hops ashore as if she has a pair of springs for legs. The fox and the boar are impressed by her perfect jump onto the landing stage. And now, instead of flying, she comes running with outstretched arms towards her parents.

“Mummy! Daddy! Mummy! Daddy!”

“What’s going on?” asks the fox, turning up his nose.

“I am ze leettle mayfly!” says the big mayfly, and strangely enough, she says it in a French accent. “I have just hatched and am very wet from ze watair. Sree years in ze cold lake, and I have been lookeeng forward to ze life.”

The mayfly is out of breath, but hops directly towards the birthday cake and blows out the candle.

“*Bon anniversaire!*”<sup>7</sup> she croaks as she dips her slippery fingers in the cream.

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<sup>7</sup> Happy birthday.

“She’d hideous!” whispers the fox, and wishes he hadn’t bothered to wait all that time. But the boar’s reaction is milder:

“You can’t choose your children.”

“I think she takes after you,” says the fox, but he’s surprised that the fly’s skin is so smooth. No fur, no bristles – this is ridiculous. She hasn’t even got any wings!

“What a deeeeeecious cake! *Incroyable!*”<sup>8</sup>

The mayfly’s eyelids flutter. “A bit like wings,” thinks the fox, and then he sees the green creature scoffing the cake as hungrily as if she’s been starving for the last three years.

“Actually the cake is just a symbol, because mayflies don’t eat anything.”

“But I do. I am a new species. We also live longair.”

“Is that so?”

“One week or two – it depends on how good is ze food. Who made zis cake?”

“Your father here is the cakemaker.”

The fly hops up to the boar and throws her arms round his neck.

“Oh, Daddy Boar, you are ze god of ze kitchen.”

“Thank you,” mumbles the boar, and he would have dearly loved to taste the cake, but the whole lot has disappeared into the fly in almost a single gulp. The fox and the boar whisper to each other.

“What a plonker!”

“But the child likes my cooking.”

“She’s a bit fat for a fly, don’t you think?”

“You’re right. It’s going to be a tough day.”

Still chewing, the fly goes to the blackboard. Now that her tummy has taken care of the cake, it’s time for minds to have some nourishment. She grabs hold of the chalk, points to the fox and says:

“Arithmetique: how high can I jump wiz two legs one metre long?”

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<sup>8</sup> Incredible!

“Why do you speak in such a funny way?” asks the fox.

“I am a new species.”

“Are you really a girl?”

“A girl, as surely as ze sun shines. How high?”

“Two metres,” says the boar, “but why jump? You can fly. You’re a mayfly.”

The fly doesn’t answer, and the fox shouts:

“Mayfly! That means: only a day. Fly!”

“But I cannot fly.”

“Why not?”

“Becoz I am a new species.”

“Pretty crazy species,” whispers the fox, and the boar gives him a clip round the ear.

“We love you all the same, my child. It doesn’t matter what you can do or what you are, so long as we can all have a lovely day together. Let’s go on.”

The fly looks triumphant.

“How high can I jump wiz two legs two metres long?”

“A very long way,” says the fox. “And I wish it was so far that I couldn’t see you.”

“I’d say four metres,” says the bear, thus making himself even more loved.

“Bravo! You is ze best daddy in ze whole world!”

“You *are* the best,” says the fox. “Not you *is*. Even if he isn’t.” But the fly takes no notice.

“Oh, dear Daddy, zis will be ze most beautifool day of my life.”

“And I hope it’ll soon be over,” mutters the fox, and tries to help it go faster. “End of maths. Next lesson: what do you want to be when you grow up, my fat green horrible daughter?”

“A flycatcher.”

“Flycatcher?! Don’t talk nonsense! That’s something for frogs! Study something useful. Like chicken farming!”

Now the fly’s eyes fill with tears.

The boar has seen this coming. Chicken farming is a nasty business when there are foxes around, and mayflies shouldn’t have to look into such dark and dismal depths.

“Only cruel mothers think of themselves before they think of others,” he says with a schoolmasterly wag of his paw, and then he comforts his weeping daughter. “If our baby wants to be a flycatcher, then that’s what she’ll be. Good parents make wishes come true.”

“Life’s not a bed of roses,” moans the fox.

“I want a bed of roses!” sighs the fly, and the fox has had enough.

“I’ve had enough!” he says, and turns to go to his hammock, but the boar holds onto him. “You stay here. There’s going to be a wedding.”

“I don’t want to marry ze silly fox,” says the fly. “I only want to marry Daddy.”

Once again she hugs the boar. Her father is happy, even though her long arms feel like two cold hosepipes.

“Oh well, congratulations.” The fox glances at the clock and sighs. That’s only taken twenty minutes off the rest of the day.

“And so we are ze husband and wife, until ze stork do us part.”

“What stork?”

“Is just a sayeeng.”

“Oh well, please yourself. You may now kiss the bride,” says the fox to the bear, but it is the fly who kisses the boar on the nose. The “bridegroom” shudders, but only for a moment as he doesn’t want to hurt the feelings of the fly. The boar is a good father and wishes *his* father could see how tenderly he’s playing with his child.

“Next item on the agenda!” announces the fox, once again anxious to keep things moving. At top speed he now plays the game they had played three years ago. “You’re about to have a child. Wait, I’ll do it.” He stuffs a jacket under the boar’s shirt and shouts: “Oh, how lovely and pregnant you are! What’s it going to be? Well, who cares, so long as it isn’t a dog!” Then he pulls the jacket out again, puts it on himself, and pretends to be the baby, sits on the ground and sticks his thumb in his mouth.

“Waaah! Waaah! Waaah!”

“What’s the matter wiz him?” asks the fly, and the boar knows exactly what it is.

“He’s hungry,” says the father, and the fox goes on howling.

“Waaah! Waaah! Waaah!”

“*Mon dieu*, when will it stop?”

“When it’s full.”

“What does it eat?”

“Preferably chicken,” says the fox, and gets another clip round the ear from the boar.

“Oh dear, what is you doeeing?”

“I’m teaching him how to behave.”

“Wiz a clip round ze ear?”

The fox rubs his ear. “I’ll pretend I’m behaving and well fed,” he says, and yawns.

“What is he doeeing now?”

“He needs to sleep,” says the boar, and the baby yawns again.

“I think the two of you should sing me a lullaby.”

The fly nods and starts croaking:

“Ze frog in ze moon is haveeng a peep

At ze tiny tadpoles fast asleep.

If zey can sleep ze whole night srough.

Zen, leettle baby, so can you.”

“Heavens above,” thinks the fox. “She can’t even sing!”

“Unbelievable,” thinks the boar. “Not a single note right!”

The fox falls into a deep sleep, or maybe a coma – he himself doesn’t know which – and the fly looks at her baby.

“But he should not be sleepeeng. I only have one day and he has to make me happy. Open ze eyes, baby!”

“I think I’ll just lie here all day,” thinks the fox.

“Open ze eyes!”

“Maybe a clip round the ear?” suggests the boar.

The fox hears “clip round the ear”, jumps up in alarm, and bangs his nose on the deckchair.

“Ooowww!”

“Ze baby is awake!”

“And you’ll soon sleep for ever,” whispers the fox. “I think I’ve broken my tooth.” He wants to look in the mirror, but he doesn’t get very far because now the fly is giving all the orders.

“I’m going to play ze child now. I grow up and I am ze world famous flycatcher. And you is old and feeble and at ze end you is dead as a dead tree. End of ze game. You can go now. *Au revoir.*”

The fox taps his forehead. “You’re crazy. Where are we supposed to go? We live here.”

“No, no, my child,” the boar explains patiently to the fly. “That’s not how it is. You’re the one who must go, because when the day ends, you must fly into a swarm of men, lay an egg, and die. And we have to grieve for you.”

“I don’t know about the grieving,” says the fox. Now he does stand in front of the mirror, and his canine tooth really is broken.

“That’s how it is,” says the boar. “And we wait for three years...”

“Don’t you have anysing bettair to do?” The fly rolls her eyes. “Sree years for just one day of ze fun? What kind of useless species is you?”

“Ha! And what miserable kind of fly are you?”

The fox now hunts for the missing piece of his tooth.

“I am ze beautifool mayfly, and wizout you silly men I would nevaire have known how unjust is ze life. You have ze most beautifool place in ze world, and you is ze most useless animals in ze world. Now give your life some meaneeng and bring me someseeng to eat. I am hungry. *Vite, vite!*”<sup>9</sup>

There are moments in life when it pays to have close friends. You don’t need any words, and so now four fists find their target as if they had spent all their lives training just for this. The two friends leap on the green creature and leave no doubt as to their intentions. But the strangest of all mayflies gets away, hops into the water, and disappears.

Plop! And gone!

The fox and the boar stand on the shore and shout a few choice words after their unwelcome guest:

“I’ll gobble you up even without any teeth!”

“Go lay your egg and die!”

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<sup>9</sup> Quickly, quickly.

Then the two of them watch the waves forming circles in the lake, and the fox wonders how such a horrible creature can make such gentle circles, while the boar wonders why the green girl was so totally different from her adorable mayfly mother.

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