

The Long-Timer Chronicles

Crazy Like the Foxes

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When Charles Met Renee

Outside the Metropolitan Museum of Art a banner announcing a showing of paintings by the 17th century Dutch masters flutters in the wind. A tall, refined woman with dark hair and vibrant green eyes who appears to be no older than her late-thirties enters and heads toward the exhibit room featuring the collection. Her hair is below shoulder length and pulled back into a ponytail and she is wearing a maroon V-neck shirt and jeans and a dark suede bomber jacket. She carries herself with an easy confidence, a slight smile suggesting a sense of satisfaction with who she is and how she got to where she is in life. For the better part of that life, at least among her closest acquaintances, she has been known as Renee, though publicly she has used many names throughout the years.

She enters the exhibit hall and begins scanning the area for a particular painting, the one that brought her here. Seeing the one she wants, she smiles and walks toward a large painting hanging on the far wall. The painting depicts a dark-haired woman with green eyes, dressed in seventeenth century garb, sitting on an elegant chair. In every detail, she has the exact same face and physique as the woman now heading toward her. The date of the painting is the mid-1600s and the artist is Rembrandt van Rijn. The painting is entitled “Madame Renard, seated.” A man stands before it staring intently at the likeness, a look of complete adoration on his face. Renee steps up beside him and also looks at the painting.

Without removing his eyes from the canvas, the man finally says aloud to no one in particular, “Absolutely stunning.”

Renee smiles and looks at the man then says, “Why, thank you.”

The man chuckles then turns to look at Renee as he says, “Oh, I'm sorry, I was talking about—” He stops when he sees her face

Crazy Like the Foxes

then looks at the painting and back to Renee, smiles and says, "Excuse me," then quickly moves on to a different section.

Renee laughs and looks back to the painting. From behind her, a man says, "Still turning heads I see."

Renee excitedly says, "Charlie?" then turns and throws her arms around the man standing there, her husband, Charles Fox. He is a few inches taller than her and has brown hair that's not quite shoulder length. He's wearing jeans and a striped button-down shirt underneath a light brown camel hair blazer. Renee suddenly pulls away and gives him a slight push and says, "How long have you been in town?"

"I came in a few days ago," he says, "but I didn't stay in town. I took a train up to Highland Falls and just got back this morning."

"Well you should have called," she says. Then she laughs and links her arm into his. Looking up at the painting she says, "See? I told you they'd have it."

"So you did," Charles says, "and I knew you'd be here staring wistfully at it."

"It's quite possibly the best painting that's ever been done of me," she says. "Plus Rembrandt was an absolute sweetheart. He said I reminded him of his wife."

They begin strolling around the exhibit room, examining the other paintings.

"Are you staying at the loft?" Charles says.

"Of course," she says. "What's the point of having a loft in the Village for thirty years if you're never going to use it?"

"What did the tenants say?"

"Oh, they moved out months ago," she says. "It's partly what motivated me to come back now. I didn't feel like going through the hassles of screening new people."

"That is why we have the agency you know," Charles says.

"True," she says, "but I've never been here when I wasn't just

The Long-Timer Chronicles

visiting, so I thought I'd see what it was like to live here.”

“And the painting didn't have anything to do with it?” he says jokingly.

She swats his arm. “Don't be silly. It's just a happy accident that it's here when I am. What were you doing in Highland Falls?”

He shrugs. “Do I need a reason? It's beautiful up there — great views of the Hudson. Sometimes I just like to get away from it all and these days it's getting harder and harder to get away.”

“Agreed,” she says.

Charles asks her, “Have you heard from the kids?”

“Katie's in England but is scheduled to open in a play here in a few weeks,” she says. “Nathaniel and Isabella are in Paris and Geneva and according to Katie, Roland is still in Australia.”

“He realizes that sentence was lifted over a hundred years ago, right,” Charles says.

“He knows,” Renee says. “I think he just likes it there.”

“He's always been the homebody,” Charles says.

Renee stops and jumps in front of him. “Hey, I hear they have a collection of clothing from the Renaissance upstairs. We could go up and make fun of how much they got wrong.”

“Sounds like a plan,” he says. Then, tentatively, “Have you seen anyone?”

“You mean our kind of anyone?”

“Exactly,” he says.

“Not here, but while I was in Paris I ran into Maxine,” she says.

Charles laughs and shakes his head. “Maxine. I've never seen anyone take to a city like she did to Paris.”

“She deserves it,” Renee says.

“Yes she does,” he says. “Has she heard from—?”

“No,” Renee says. “Maxine says she hasn't heard from her

Crazy Like the Foxes

since they were in Paris in the teens.”

“You don't suppose she's still here, do you?” he says.

Renee shrugs. “Anything's possible.”

“She'll turn up,” Charles says. “Victoria knows how to take care of herself. She survived Bergeron after all.”

“That I will never understand,” Renee says. “I could barely stand being in the same city with him let alone the same house.”

“Well, you know my thoughts on the matter,” Charles says.

Patting his stomach, she says, “I certainly do.”

Arriving at the historical clothing section, they stroll along while Renee examines each one closely.

“Someone's been doing his homework,” Renee says. “Not much to complain about.”

Pointing to one, Charles says, “What does that remind you of?”

Renee touches her finger to her chin then, shaking her finger, says, “That party at the de Medici's. We met Leonardo there.”

“Pity he was only there to sketch the partygoers and wasn't allowed to mingle.”

She looks back to the dress and says, “On second glance, it looks like the accessories are all wrong.”

“You're right,” he says.

Renee looks around until she sees an attendant and signals to the woman, saying, “Excuse me, Miss?”

“Yes ma'am,” the attendant says as she approaches.

Pointing at the dress, “The accessories on this dress are wrong.”

“I'm sorry?” the attendant says.

“The accessories,” Renee says. “They're from a different period than the dress.”

“Ma'am, our curator is an expert in Renaissance fashions,” the attendant says.

“I'm not debating your curator's expertise,” Renee says. “I'm

The Long-Timer Chronicles

just saying this setup is wrong.”

“Excuse me a minute,” the attendant says. She steps away from them and gets on her cell phone.

“Oh, oh, you’ve done it now,” Charles says tauntingly. “They’re bringing out the big guns.”

Renee covers her mouth and giggles.

A few minutes later, a bald man with a salt and pepper beard, wearing jeans and a black oxford shirt arrives and speaks to the attendant. She points at Renee and the man steps over to her.

“Ma’am?” he says. “I’m Stanley Maxwell. I designed this display and I understand you have a complaint.”

“Not so much a complaint as an observation,” she says. She steps toward the dress in question and points toward the top. “The stitching and frills on this dress put it clearly within the reign of Lorenzo de Medici. The first one, that is, the one they call the Magnificent. But—” She indicates the jewelry “these accessories are from a much later period, the period of Duke Lorenzo two generations later.” Looking at Charles, she says, “Imagine if I showed up at Duke Lorenzo’s wearing a dress like this.”

Charles nods. “They’d think you were dressed by your grandmother.”

“Ma’am, are you an expert on Renaissance fashion?” Maxwell says.

Renee considers her answer, “In a manner of speaking.”

Maxwell gives her a skeptical look and Renee says, “Don’t believe me. But you must have paintings from the period on hand.

“Yes,” Maxwell says.

“Perfect,” she replies. “Just compare them, but be sure you start with those from the time of Lorenzo the Magnificent because later artists tended to mix them up.” Indicating the broche on the right shoulder, she says “And you’ll also notice that these were always worn over the heart, never on the right side.”

“Alright,” Maxwell says with a smile. “Is there anything else?”

Crazy Like the Foxes

She looks around and focuses on the next dress.

“Oh, those shoes with that dress?”

“Wrong time period,” Maxwell says.

“No, just plain wrong,” Renee says. “Maybe something pointier, with beads perhaps. Charles?”

He shrugs. “You’re the fashionista.”

Maxwell nods. “Thank you for your input Ms.—”

“Fox,” Renee says, reaching into the inside pocket of her jacket then handing him a card. “Renee Fox. That’s my home address and phone number should you want to contact me.”

Maxwell takes the card and holds it up as he says, “Thank you again, Ms. Fox. We’ll certainly take your comments to heart.”

Renee nods then looks at Charles who says, “Lunch at the Tavern?”

Taking his arm, Renee says, “Thought you’d never ask.”

They leave Mr. Maxwell looking after them. He looks at the display then dials a number on his cell phone.

“Dexter?” he says. “Where are we storing the Renaissance paintings that aren’t on display?”

In the words of our people, that have been passed down through many generations, it is told that once, our ancestors wandered in the land of ice where no plants could grow and food was scarce. They had been trapped there for many years and their numbers had dwindled. The will of the people was low. Their leader Kanute stood before the Great Spirit and cried out for a sign from which they could gain inspiration but the Great Spirit was silent.

The next day, Kanute was out hunting when he spotted a fox seated before him. Kanute raised his spear but before he could throw it, the Great Spirit rained down its light, surrounding the fox. Kanute approached and when he was a few steps away, the fox ran away from him. Kanute followed and when the fox was

The Long-Timer Chronicles

many yards away, it stopped and sat again, until Kanute was again just a few feet away. Again it moved many yards away and stopped, waiting for Kanute to follow.

Kanute summoned his brother Filon, who had been hunting with him, and bade Filon to return to the tribe and have them gather all their goods and come to where Kanute was. Filon did as he was told and soon, all the people were with Kanute, who commanded them that no one should raise a weapon to harm the fox. They did as they were told and Kanute bade them to follow as the fox guided him.

For forty days and nights Kanute and the people followed the fox and, at the end, the fox ran ahead over the crest of a hill. Kanute went to the top of the hill and his eyes beheld a wondrous sight. The ice gave way to lush green fields, trees bearing fruit as far as the eye could see and animals of all sizes. Kanute called for the people to join him and when they beheld the sight, they cried out in joy over their blessings. Kanute gave thanks to the Great Spirit for sending his messenger then he walked ahead to find the fox. At the base of the hill, he found the fox, lying dead. He removed the pelt then commanded one of the tribe to wrap the fox in burlap and while this was being done, Kanute constructed a bier then lit a fire under it. He called for the fox's body and placed it on the fire as an offering to the Great Spirit. The pelt he strung up between several poles and carried it as a standard before the tribe.

And to this day the fox remains the guiding spirit of our people.

When she was a small child, Katerina von Sachsen's father took her up onto his horse and rode her around the lands he'd acquired over the years and told her that one day her sons would inherit control over them, provided, of course, that she married and had sons. Nearing sixty, Katerina looks back on that time

Crazy Like the Foxes

with a strong sense of irony. Never having found a suitable match, someone who met with her father's and her approval — and as his only child, her father took her opinion very seriously, unlike many fathers with only daughters — she drifted into late adulthood and beyond alone and with no one to pass on her legacy. Still Katerina doesn't mind. She'd rather die alone than live with someone she despised and most of the suitors she entertained were far more concerned with her property than her person. She has a notable face, but as many would point out, she looks too much like her father, a stern and severe man on all matters not concerning his daughter on whom he doted. The skin on her face is rough and pock-marked and her nose is rather large and bent in the middle. Still, she has a charming smile and blue eyes that sparkle when she's happy and Katerina, educated in Greek and Latin, can converse intelligently on a variety of topics, having learned most at her father's knee.

Well beyond the age when anyone would consider her a suitable match, Katerina spends the majority of her time upstairs, wandering around her chambers, reading volumes from her father's extensive library or writing in her diary, all but completely shunning human contact. The only person who sees her on a regular basis is the servant who brings her meals. The remainder of the staff isn't sure they'd recognize her if they ever saw her.

One afternoon, while dozing in her sitting room, Katerina awakens to the most wonderful sound she has ever heard. It is an ancient Saxon tune, sung by what Katerina first imagines is an angel sent to guide her to heaven. She waits a moment then realizes the song is coming from outside her window. She goes to the window and looks down. Seated outside the servant's quarters is a small, dark-haired girl, maybe six or seven years old. As Katerina watches, the girl rises and walks back and forth along the path singing. Katerina puts down her book and hurries out of her chambers and down the stairs. Halfway down she's met by

The Long-Timer Chronicles

the servant bringing her a mid-afternoon snack.

“Lady Katerina?” the servant says and is ignored.

Katerina descends to the bottom floor and hurries back toward the kitchen, the closest entrance to where she'd seen the child. She bursts into the kitchen, taking the servants by complete surprise, and they freeze then bow as the name “Katerina” is whispered among them. Katerina goes to the window and looks out.

“She's gone!” Katerina says, mostly to herself. “Perhaps she was an angel.”

She moves around to the next set of windows then smiles and says, “Aha!”

Katerina rushes out the back door then returns a moment later, holding the frightened little girl by the hand.

“Whose child is this?” Katerina says.

A hush falls across the servants and they look to a woman at the far end of the kitchen. She moves toward Katerina with her head bowed.

“She's mine, Lady Katerina,” the servant says. “Was she disturbing you?”

Katerina laughs and says, “Oh, quite the contrary.”

She lifts the child up and sits her on the table in front of her and immediately takes note of the child's brilliant green eyes. “I was not at all disturbed.”

Patting the little girl's cheek, Katerina says, “Do you realize you have a very special gift?”

“I'm not sure, ma'am,” the girl says. “What kind of gift.”

“You sing like an angel,” Katerina says. She points to the girl's mother. “What's your name?”

“Isabella, ma'am,” she says. “This is my daughter, Renee.”

“Renee,” Katerina says, looking at the girl then pinching her cheek. “Well, Renee, how would you like a job in my house?”

“A job, ma'am,” Renee says.

Crazy Like the Foxes

“Yes, but a fun job,” Katerina says. She looks back to Isabella and says “I would like this child to come to my chambers each day and sing for me.”

“Sing ma'am?” Isabella says. “What would you like her to sing?”

“Anything,” Katerina says. “Whatever she knows, whatever she can learn from among my father's manuscripts.” Turning back to Renee, she says “Think you'd like that?”

“If it's alright with my mother,” Renee says.

Isabella moves to her side and says, “Of course it's alright with me.”

Katerina leans in toward Renee and says, “Why don't you come up and I'll show you where I live.”

From that point on, every day in the afternoon until evening, Renee reports to Katerina's chambers and sings for an hour or more. The remainder of the time she's there, Katerina talks about her family, teaches Renee to read Greek and Latin and permits Renee to read anything from her library. As she grows older, Renee becomes Katerina's closest confidante, eventually becoming her conduit with the rest of the staff as well, accepting Katerina's meals, returning the used plates and issuing orders to the staff on Katerina's behalf. As the household staff changes over time, most of the servants come to recognize Renee more easily than Katerina.

One afternoon while she's singing to Katerina, Renee hears her make a loud gasp and a few moments later, Katerina's hand drops over the side of the chair.

“Lady Katerina?” Renee says. She goes to her and checks to find she's not breathing and her eyes are partially closed and staring downward.

Renee leaves Katerina's chambers and descends to the servant's quarters. Her mother sees her and goes over to her.

“Renee?” she says. “Why aren't you with Lady Katerina?”

The Long-Timer Chronicles

“I think she's dead,” Renee says.

Several servants ascend to Katerina's room to confirm that she is dead. They begin making funeral arrangements while confusion grips the rest of the staff as they now wonder exactly what they're supposed to do, since their employer is out of the picture. Renee is at the center of most of the discussions since she knows the most about how Katerina might have wanted things to be handled. Their talks are curtailed by the announcement by a servant that a contingent of noblemen is approaching quickly. The servants begin to panic, but Renee stops them, saying, “See to their needs and tell them that Lady Katerina will greet them at suppertime.”

“Lady Katerina?” the lead servant says.

“Lady Katerina,” Renee assures him.

The servants do as they're told. As dinner is being served, the nobles suddenly look around at one another then rise with a spirited cheer. The servants look to see Renee, dressed in Katerina's clothing and wearing her signet ring, entering the dining hall. She looks stunning and more regal than the actual Katerina had ever looked.

“Gentlemen we are honored by your presence,” she says.

The men bow and pay their respects.

“You may remain with us as long as need be and while you are here you will want for nothing,” she says. “If there's anything you lack, let us know and we'll do our best to fulfill it.”

She moves toward the door then stops and turns back to the guests. “There is a custom in our family to leave our guests with a pleasant memory. If you'll indulge me, I'd like to sing a song for you.”

She sings a traditional Saxon tune to the delight of her guests then ascends back up to Katerina's chambers. The next morning, after the nobles depart, Renee descends again to the servants' quarters. As she enters all inside turn toward her and bow.

Crazy Like the Foxes

“What are you doing?” she says.

“We await your orders, Lady Katerina,” the lead servant says with a smile.

She looks around at them in bewilderment. Then a smile comes to her face and she says, “Isabella?”

“Yes ma'am,” her mother says, approaching her.

“Please attend to me in my chambers,” Renee says.

“Of course, ma'am,” Isabella says with a wink.

“I wish to dine at sundown,” Renee says to the rest of the servants. “And other than that, you may spend your time however you choose, so long as it's productive.”

“Yes, my lady,” the main servant says.

From that point on, the same custom is followed whenever guests arrive. Word begins to spread of the hospitality of the Lady Katerina and of her custom of singing to her guests. It is not for many years that the servants begin to notice that Katerina doesn't seem to age. The servants who still remember the original take this to be a sign that Renee was truly meant to take her place.

For the better part of two hundred years, whenever Charles and Renee Fox were in New York, they were visiting, usually for a very short stay. Their trips to the United States were often as part of traveling variety shows with a heavy emphasis on travel. Renee estimated that by the turn of the twentieth century, she had seen every inch of the country, including parts most citizens had not and most likely never would see. For years she and Charles had talked about buying property in Manhattan so they'd have some semblance of a home whenever they were in the States. So it came as no surprise to Charles when he received the telegram from Renee while he was in London. It read, “Just bought the most charming loft space in Soho. Can't wait for you to see it.”

The Long-Timer Chronicles

This had been in 1975 and since that time, neither he nor Renee have spent more than a month's time in the space usually while storing away some of their possessions. When it became evident they weren't going to be making as much use of it as they initially thought, they hired a management firm to rent it out to respectable tenants. At last, in the spring of 2004, Renee received word from the management company that the current tenants were moving out and the company needed instructions on what to do next. Renee contacted them to request that the loft be taken off the rental market as she would be moving in over the summer. It took her several months longer than she had anticipated to make all her arrangements. Finally, a few weeks shy of New Year's Eve, she took possession of the space.

For the first several weeks, she did nothing but clean. She hired a couple of professional cleaners to help her and between them they scrubbed the walls, the floors, the appliances, the cabinets, and every tile they could find. They ripped out carpeting, tore down drapes, took doors off their hinges or runners. Then when Renee felt she had done as much destruction as she could with a limited staff, she brought in a general contractor to help her plan out how best to remodel the entire space. Over the years, the tenants had made modifications to the space, adding dividers and putting in wainscoting. Renee had no problem with wainscoting in general but whoever had done this had done a horrible job. For the next four months, the entire space was a hard-hat area.

Finished with the remodeling, Renee set about decorating the place. She spent hours in front of the television watching home remodeling shows until she felt confident she knew enough to strike out on her own. Only she had no limit to her budget and unlimited time to get things right. By the time she shows Charles the space late-Summer of 2005, it's a showplace to rival the most expensive designer spaces. The area from the front door all the

Crazy Like the Foxes

way to the entrance of the kitchen, over 5,000 square feet, is open and flanked by several giant windows with a northern exposure. The flooring is cherry wood with a dark stain and in the center is a set of steps leading up to the living quarters which are enclosed. The furniture has been arranged to create several stations throughout the space and toward the far end is a massive bar with several taps and a functional sink. Across from the living area is another balcony space that spans the entire wall and is accessible on one end by a narrow staircase and at the other by a spiral ramp.

“What do you think?” Renee says as Charles surveys the place.

“Sure beats the hell out of those shotgun shacks we used to stay in out west,” he says.

“Doesn't it, though?” she says.

“Do I even want to know how much it all cost?” he says.

“We can afford it,” Renee says. “Take a look at this.”

She taps her foot on the floor once or twice then begins a tap dance routine.

“That's great,” Charles says then joins her. They tap around the room mimicking each other's steps and gestures.

“That is really smooth,” Charles says. “I bet we could even—”

He takes her hand and pulls her to him and they tango from one end of the room to the other then switch to a waltz step.

“Wonderful,” he says. “We'll have hours of fun here.”

Renee laughs. “And you haven't even seen the bedroom yet.”

“Oh, believe me, we'll get to that,” he says. “Show me the kitchen.”

She takes his hand and leads him into a kitchen worthy of a large hotel with a marble floor and granite countertops. There is a large refrigerator with glass doors, an industrial sized oven and a large island with stools around one end. There's a sink along one wall and another in the middle of the island.

“Spared no expense,” she says.

The Long-Timer Chronicles

“I see that,” he replies. “We can entertain the troops here.”

She laughs and punches him in the arm. “The lovely thing about this design is that we can eat over in the corner there by the window and it's nice and intimate, or we can open the dividers here and use the counter as a buffet for more formal dinners.

Charles nods.

“I'd say you've thought of everything,” he says.

“I'll say,” she replies. “I had one of those television chefs in the other night and he said his restaurant wasn't this well-equipped.”

“Which one?” Charles asks.

“Oh, I'm blanking on his name,” she says. “The one who grills.”

“Ah yes,” Charles says, nodding. “I like that show.”

“Hey, remember when we met?” she says. “The dining hall? Remember the chime the servant would ring?”

“Yes,” he says, looking at her sideways.

She reaches beside the counter and pulls up a metal triangle and strikes it with a small hammer that's tied to the top of it. It makes a loud, distinct ding.

“Impressive,” he says. He gives her a quick kiss and says, “Maybe you should show me what's upstairs.”

“Gladly,” she says, taking his hand and pulling him toward the stairs.

As he approaches his fourteenth summer, Karl, son of Hogart, of the tribe known as the Fuchsleute or “fox people” as they are called by the neighboring tribes because of the standard they bear, a fox pelt, knows it will soon be time to set out on his ritual hunt. From the earliest times, since Kanute followed the fox to the land of plenty, when a boy reaches a certain age, he is sent into the woods to find and track a fox to some destination then await guidance from it. After a few days, the boy returns with the

Crazy Like the Foxes

fox and can then be considered a man. If he fails on his first attempt, he can still try again over the next three years, after which time, if he is still unsuccessful, it would be deemed he no longer follows the fox and he'll be dismissed from the tribe. Karl is anxious to prove his worth and has been listening to and speaking with many others who've performed this ritual for their tips on how best to accomplish it.

Karl is the oldest of Hogart's offspring and the only child of Hogart's first bride, Gerthe. Gerthe was overtaken by the withering sickness not quite a year after giving birth to Karl and she died several months after that. Hogart wasted no time in choosing another bride, who gave him two sons, and his third wife who is the mother of his daughter and youngest son, The girl, though not quite nine, is already betrothed to the son of Hogart's trusted advisor. They will be married as soon as she reaches the proper age. Karl has yet to be matched with someone as all are awaiting the outcome of his ritual hunt. Taller than average, with dark hair that he keeps just above shoulder length, Karl has proven to be fleet footed and an excellent hunter, so the general wisdom is that he'll be successful in his first attempt.

Karl's youngest brother, Gerd, is as anxious, if not more so than Karl for the ritual to begin. Gerd entertains notions of Karl taking him along and showing him techniques on how to be a good hunter. Karl finally has to pull Gerd aside to tell him that this is a trip Karl has to make on his own. Gerd is relentless, though and on the day Karl sets out on his quest, Gerd sets out after him, walking at a slower pace and after waiting until the shadow of the tree line reaches a particular spot to give Karl enough time to get well ahead of him. Karl left a trail which Gerd finds easy to follow and for several hours, Gerd stays right behind his older brother.

At last, he comes to a point where a second set of tracks start and Gerd recognizes them as being those of a fox. Gerd can tell

The Long-Timer Chronicles

by the spacing in the tracks that the fox was running and Karl had run after it. Gerd follows both sets until he comes to the edge of a ravine. The dirt around the edge is disturbed and a frightening thought overtakes Gerd as he slowly approaches the edge. Looking down, his worse fears come true as he sees Karl lying at the bottom. Blood surrounds a cut on his forehead and he doesn't appear to be breathing. Gerd first thinks to run back to the tribe to get help, but then he decides to find a way down to Karl. If his brother is only slightly injured, Karl might still be able to complete his quest. Gerd searches along the ridge and finds a place where he can make it down into the ravine and he works his way down to where Karl lies.

Approaching him, Gerd realizes that there is little he'll be able to do for his brother. Karl apparently slid over the ravine and rolled down the rocky side, hitting his head at least once, maybe more. Gerd kneels beside him and sees that Karl is not breathing and his eyes are slightly open. Trying to keep his wits about him, Gerd looks around for a place to ascend the ravine so he can summon others from the tribe, but he can't find anyplace and doesn't feel confident about going back up the way he came down. He kneels beside his brother again and begins to cry. Suddenly, Karl's body jerks and his hands start shaking. Gerd jumps up and moves away, watching in amazement as the cut on Karl's head starts to heal. Then Karl's eyes open and he takes in a deep breath then sits up and looks around.

Seeing Gerd, he says, "What happened?"

Gerd is still staring at him in amazement and can't speak. Karl repeats, "What happened? Why are you looking at me like that?"

"You — you were dead," Gerd tells him. "I saw you. You weren't breathing then suddenly you were."

"That's not possible," Karl said.

"It happened!" Gerd cries out. "Your forehead was cut, but

Crazy Like the Foxes

now it's not."

Karl brushes his hand over his forehead and notes the blood then looks around at the disturbed earth around him.

"I must have just had the wind knocked out of me," he says. "I couldn't have been dead, otherwise how could I be talking to you now?"

Gerd shakes his head then walks over to help Karl get up. Karl notes the soreness in his neck and right rib cage, but decides it must have been a result of the fall.

"This should serve as a lesson," Karl says to Gerd. "This is no place for a child. Hop on my back and I'll carry you up then you should head back to the tribe. Your time will come soon enough."

He pats Gerd's head then carries him back up the side of the ravine using the accessible point Gerd discovered. Karl walks him halfway back to the tribe's location then stoops down and says, "The tribe is straight that way. You should hurry because it will be dark soon." Gerd nods and starts away. Karl stops him and says, "And not a word to anyone about this dying nonsense. No need in worrying anyone needlessly."

Gerd says, "Okay, I won't tell."

He heads back to the tribe and keeps his promise to Karl. Several days go by when suddenly a cheer goes up from within the tribe. Gerd runs out to see Karl emerging from the woods and running alongside him is a grey fox. He is greeted by the people of the tribe and by Gerd, who whispers to him, "I didn't tell anyone." Karl winks at him and jostles his hair.

As is custom, the fox is allowed to remain in the camp for as long as it chooses, while Karl tends to its care. At last, it runs into the brush, where it disappears back into the forest. That evening, a council is held where Karl is presented with his own fox pelt to wear over his right shoulder, denoting a tribal leader, a role which Karl, as a son of the current chieftain, will one day as-

The Long-Timer Chronicles

sume.

In the celebration that follows, Karl is allowed to join the men as they sing of the exploits of the tribe. For him, this is the highlight of his being recognized as a man, as Karl has long enjoyed hearing and singing the songs his tribe uses to commemorate various events in their history. While he is only allowed to sing with the men now, he has been learning the songs since before he was Gerd's age.

The secret of what happened to him in the ravine that day remains solely between Karl and Gerd.