

Chapter 21

Conversations with a Fox

Half awake, Rebecca felt something heavy and warm on her feet. Slowly opening her eyes, she could make out a red ball of fluff snoring at the foot of the bed. Early morning light streamed in from sliding glass doors.

Rebecca gently slid her feet out from under the sleeping fox, so as not to wake him up. Waking a fox by surprise did not seem like a good idea, Rebecca thought.

Sitting up in the bed, she realized that she felt better than she had in quite some time. The ministrations of Jomei and the wonderful food cooked by Ken had worked wonders. Quietly, she stood up and wandered over to the glass doors.

As she slid them open, a cool blast of salty air washed over her. She could hear the waves, but the bright light just after waking up made her squint. She rubbed her eyes and let out a big yawn. Blinking, she took in the scene with a gasp.

The log home was built on stilts and stood many feet above the water. Around her were other buildings, all of varying design and brightly painted. A boardwalk connected them all. Each building seemed to hug up against the slopes of a tall mountain on one side, with a wide bay on the other side.

The bay showed no obvious outlet, encircled, it seemed, by mountains and islands. She could see boats out on the water. Looking over the railing of the boardwalk, she could see the waves, perhaps ten feet below, flowing past the pilings. It seemed a quite precarious place to put such a large building!

Rebecca was having a hard time taking in the entire scene. It just seemed so huge. Everything seemed sturdy enough. Looking around at the buildings she realized that there must be quiet a few people living here. Joe had said around fifty, she thought. It seemed awfully quiet right now, though. The only sound she could hear was that of the waves and the occasional bird, which she could no longer understand.

As she stood at the railing, the fox emerged from the open door yawning a big, toothy, yawn.

“We see they’re finally awake,” he said, looking up at Rebecca. He kept a respectable distance from the railing.

Rebecca looked at the fox with a confused look. “Who?” she asked.

“Rebecca,” the fox replied simply. He slowly inched over to the edge of the railing, looked over the edge at the water and then quickly hopped back towards the sliding doors, nervously.

“And what’s your name?” asked Rebecca. So far everyone had just referred to him as Fox. Surely he had a name.

“Our name is Prometheus. Or Epimetheus. Or Fox. Whatever,” responded the fox, as he looked anxiously towards the sky. He paced back and forth near the doors. “They should come inside,” he added, slipping back into the house through the glass doors.

While Rebecca wanted to stay outside and take in the beautiful view, the strange little fox piqued her interest. Following him back into the building, she found him once again curled up at the foot of the bed.

“It’s dangerous out there in the day,” he instructed her as she sat down in the rocking chair near the bed. “Little girls need to be more careful.” He stood up on the bed and stuck his muzzle mere inches from Rebecca’s nose. “They are always out there!”

“Who?” asked Rebecca, feeling this was going to be a common question.

“EAGLES!” the fox screeched and ducked under the covers, his bushy red tail protruding out of the side.

“He seems to be having a bad day,” said a familiar voice. Rebecca looked away from Fox to see

Joe carrying a tray towards her. "Wasn't sure if you'd be up yet, but Ken made breakfast," he said, laying a tray of pancakes in front of her. "Eat up, and we'll go for a tour of the village in a bit."

Smelling the sweet scent of syrup, the nervous little fox poked his head out from under the covers. "Do they share?" he asked.

Rebecca smiled at the fox. "Yes, they do," she replied.

Together, they ate in silence. Fox was an oddity to the little girl. After what Joe had told her, she was not surprised that he seemed so nervous. After her and Silver Sky's encounter with eagles at the beginning of their journey, she had a healthy respect for them. But the little fox was positively in fear of them.

She pushed the plate of pancakes towards Fox. "Finish them up," she instructed.

He looked at her quizzically. "They are too kind," he replied after a moment's thought.

"Why do you talk like that?" she asked, not sure if it was a rude question or not.

Fox looked at her, unsure what the little girl meant. "Like what?" he asked.

"You refer to yourself as 'we' and 'our'. You talk to others as 'they' and 'their'. But I'm just a single person, and you are just a single fox," she pressed. To her surprise, though, Fox didn't seem to mind. If it's possible for a fox to smile, he was doing just that.

"There are many parts to the self," he responded, as though educating a small child on the facts of life, which, it would seem, he was. "There once was an 'I' and a 'me', but that ended long ago. Our life has been much better since coming here. We've found peace, for once."

Rebecca looked at the fox, unsure what to say.

"Perhaps I can help," Joe said softly, lifting Rebecca's arm. "See this scar. Silver Sky says you got this when you fell off of a glacier. That was an accident. Between you two, you were able to patch it up."

Joe moved over to the bed and lifted the covers from Fox. Moving from leg to leg, he parted Fox's red fur revealing long, jagged, angry looking scars. "These aren't accidents. As I said yesterday, the child that once had Fox was a cruel boy. He pulled his stuffed animals apart in anger."

"They were cruel because they had to be!" protested Fox. "Besides," he continued, "Mother always patched us back up."

Rebecca looked sadly at the little fox. She and Silver Sky always had a good life. Samantha and Timothy had always treated them very well. They always felt loved and safe. She could not imagine what it would have been like to live every day in fear. To be broken, repaired and then broken again. She found it odd that he would defend those actions.

"Why did they *have* to be cruel?" she asked.

Fox glanced at her with sad eyes. "They were trapped, too," he answered. "We escaped when Father threw us away. For all we know, they may still be stuck there."

"That's still no reason to be mean," Rebecca said. Fox's story was horrifying to her.

"No, no," agreed Joe. "There are better ways of dealing with things, that's for sure. However, you will probably find similar stories from some of our residents. We welcome everyone here. And we *help* everyone here. There's a reason, as tricky as he is, that Wolf sends them our way. That's why I want you to meet some of the people here," he said. "And animals," he added with smile towards Fox.

The little girl looked up at Joe. "You know I'm not going to stay."

Joe smiled and laughed. "That doesn't matter. I have no doubt that you are a wise little one, but I think you will want the knowledge that some may have to pass on. Not everyone is here because their children were mean little monsters."