

The Curious Situation of Foxes

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Gina looks around her new bedroom. Her family bought this old hotel last week. She's still getting used to living here. The sun is rising, and Gina pulls the covers over her head

On her dresser, there's a porcelain doll in the shape of a fox. It's musical. It plays "Peter and the Wolf" when you wind a key in the back. It came with the hotel.

Gina dresses herself in jeans and her favorite sweatshirt. The hotel is quiet. Father is already out back. He's working on fixing the hotel so guests can stay there soon. It's time to head to school.

As she leaves, she notices an old bicycle she's never seen before lying in the driveway. Gina shrugs and figures she'll get to school quicker this way. She puts her schoolbooks in the basket and hops on.

The hill is steep and rocky. Her bicycle quickly starts wavering. The front tire is moving back and forth. Suddenly, the bike veers off the road. It's as if someone else is steering the bike. And then, a tumble! Back tire over front tire, her books fly up in the air. Everything goes flying.

Thud! Her English book hits her right on top of the head. Thud! Thud! Down comes Math and then Biology. (Thankfully, those last two are softcover books!)

"Woaaaaahhh ohhhhh." she cries, her eyes rolling back up into her head. Everything gets dark and dizzy and feels like she's spinning around on a carousel. Perhaps she is.

Gina lies down in the grass and falls asleep for a while. It's starting to get dark when she lifts her head. The book that hit her on the temple is now lying below her like a pillow. She reads the title: *The Curious Situation of Foxes*.

That's funny, Gina thinks. I don't remember taking this book out of the library.

She's surely missed school now, and the bicycle is nowhere to be seen. Must be lying in a heap in the brambles. She stands and looks around, dusting off her jeans. There's a big hole in the sleeve of her favorite sweatshirt!

She's far behind the hotel, surrounded by blackberry bushes. There's a stone wall covered in moss and a heavy green door with a copper handle in the shape of a fox. She touches the fox head, and the door opens.

She walks through the door and sees the front of the hotel. And there's the bicycle! But this can't be the entrance to the hotel, can it?

She peers down a long hallway. It's longer than she remembers. Her head still hurts from being hit so hard. In her hand, she carries the book that attacked her from the air. She touches her forehead and winces.

"Ugh, I've got a lump on my head like a horn!"

At the end of the hallway is a room she has never seen before. She hears laughter and clinking glasses, and sees the flicker of a roaring fireplace.

In a strange room with oak walls and tapestries, three people are playing a board game. One man is wearing a tweed jacket and a monocle. One woman has a feather in her hair. The other woman wears a long string of pearls around her neck. They look like ghosts. They drink champagne and white tea, and pass around cherries on a silver platter.

"Hello, my dear," says the woman in the necklace of pearls. "Join our party. Don't look so scared."

"Who are you, and how did you get into the hotel?" Gina asks.

"I am Marilyn," she says. "And the young woman with the feather in her hair is Melinda. We have always lived here."

"Festive outfit!" Melinda quips.

Marilyn takes Gina by the hand and leads her to a chair. Now, Gina she sees that her clothes have changed. She is no longer wearing the jeans and sweatshirt she put on earlier. She is wearing a red and green party dress with a black velvet bow in her hair.

"And finally, our guest is in matching holiday attire!" jokes Melinda.

The man stands and introduces himself. He places one hand in front of his stomach and bows. "Madame Gina, allow me to introduce myself. I am the fox hunter known as Gerard."

"Look here, Mr. Fox Hunter," Gina says. "We do not hunt or hurt foxes in my family!"

"I don't hurt them! I stuff them and hang them on my wall as art!" he bellows. "The foxes are ripe for the picking!"

Before Gina can scold him for this terrible comment, the old, oak library shelf begins to stir.

"What moves behind the leather-bound almanac?" asks the Fox Hunter.

The almanac begins to quiver. Gina moves closer to the bookcase to inspect the fluttering. At this moment, the book pops out of the shelf like a toy on a spring! And what appears in its place? None other than a fox!

The fox will not remain still, however. He is wriggling himself free. Frantic movements: a hard bearing-down on his front paws, and an occasional grunting.

Suddenly, the fox comes flying out of the hole and shoots like an arrow across the room. He lands on a bearskin rug and falls into a deep sleep.

Another fox appears! The animals plug the round hole perfectly, like a soft, red cork!

"But how can this be?" Gina rubs her eyes with her fist. "From a library shelf?"

When that fox jumps out, yet another fox appears. And again. Faster and faster. The hole becomes a momentous blur of orange and brown. Foxes are bubbling forth in a stream, like a faucet that won't turn off. All of them landing on the rug in a pile.

"The hole," Marilyn gasps. "It's a portal! A portal to foxes!"

Although you may imagine our group to be in the midst of a commotion, the foxes are actually quite docile. First, they jump from the hole and run around the room. Quickly, though, their eyes close gently and they settle down as if for a long winter's nap.

The floor, however, is now nowhere to be seen. Foxes are sleeping and snoring everywhere, without any regard for manners.

"Help! Help!" cries Melinda. She is trapped beneath a fuzzy pile of small, baby foxes sleeping all around her shoulders and head.

"Tragedy! What can we do?" they cry.

Just now, Gina remembers the book in her hand: *The Curious Situation of Foxes*. She opens to the first page and begins to read: "Chapter One: In Case Of Emergency. What to do when a fox portal is opened."

Melinda throws her arms in the air. "MRRPHN!" She pulls a sleeping baby fox out of her mouth. "Read it!"

"Well, it says here," Gina reads, "that the un-foxing spell must be chanted in unison. Now, everyone, try your best to grab each other's hand!"

"I can't reach!" Marilyn cries.

“Yes, you can!” says the Fox Hunter. He begins swimming around the room. He does the backstroke through foxes, gathering Marilyn and Melinda in each arm.

Marilyn's dainty fingers wrap around Gina's hand. They chant.

“Foxes of Nature, we beg for your forgiveness and beseech thee to return to the forest. This hotel is not where you should hibernate!”

Gina pauses for a second, and then says: “FOXEN BEGONEN BENEDICTEN FOXNOMORE!”

There is a lightning crash outside and all the windows rattle. And then, backwards, the way they came, the foxes are sucked back into the portal. One by one, tails first and heads last. They are sucked back into the hole, still sleeping soundly, to return to only the devil knows where.

When the last fox disappears, the book in Gina's hand begins to flutter. It's being pulled uncontrollably toward the portal now. She cannot control her arm, if she doesn't let go, she'll go flying across the room. And she does!

“AHHHH!” Gina screams, being pulled toward the hole. It feels like her arm will tear right off.

“Let go of the book!” Gina hears a voice cry. And she does that, too. The force pulling her is released and her body stops mid-air. She falls to the floor with a thud. Just like the foxes, she falls asleep.

“Gina, let go of the book,” she hears. She opens her eyes, and her mother and father are standing above her. She's back in the bramble, the bicycle a twisted mess beside her. “Let go of the book, Gina. We're going to take you inside and clean up all these scrapes and bruises.

“What happened?”

“You’ve fallen off this bike, Dear. And it’s no wonder; it had a completely rusted chain! Now, let go of the book.”

She is clutching a book to her chest. The cover reads: *The Curious Situation of Boxes: How to Build a Box for Any Occasion*.

“What are you doing with this strange book, anyway? Planning to make a box?”

“I... don’t really remember,” Gina says, rubbing a painful lump on her forehead.

“Oh, will you look at that!” her mother says, pointing at the woods. “How sweet!”

On the dirt path behind her, a family of foxes is making their way into the woods. Gina squints and swears she sees Marilyn and Melinda, dressed in feathers and fineries, leading them home.

Name: _____ Date: _____

1. Where does Gina's family live?

- A in the forest
- B in an old hotel
- C in an old school
- D in a fox den

2. How does Gina deal with the problem of the fox portal?

- A swimming through the foxes
- B running out of the hotel
- C chanting a spell from a book
- D calling her parents for help

3. The hotel that Gina visits after falling off her bike is magical. What evidence from the story supports this conclusion?

- A Foxes appear from a hole in the bookcase.
- B The hallway is longer than Gina remembers.
- C Gina walks through a door with a fox-shaped handle.
- D Marilyn and Melinda drink champagne and white tea.

4. What can be inferred about Gina's experience with Marilyn, Melinda, and the Fox Hunter?

- A Gina's experience with Marilyn, Melinda, and the Fox Hunter taught her to be careful around strangers.
- B Gina does not want to see Marilyn, Melinda, and the Fox Hunter again.
- C Gina experience with Marilyn, Melinda, and the Fox Hunter took place in reality.
- D Gina imagined or dreamt her experience with Marilyn, Melinda, and the Fox Hunter.

5. What is this story mostly about?

- A a mysterious hotel with a portal to foxes
- B a family that moves to an old hotel
- C a girl who crashes her bike and is late to school
- D a book called *The Curious Situation of Foxes*

6. Read the following sentences: "The hill is steep and rocky. Her bicycle quickly starts **wavering**. The front tire is moving back and forth. Suddenly, the bike veers off the road."

What does "**wavering**" mean as used in this sentence?

- A moving in a straight line
- B jumping up and down
- C going off the road
- D moving in different directions

7. Choose the answer that best completes the sentence below.

There are many foxes in this story, _____ the porcelain fox doll, the fox-shaped door handle, and the foxes that come from the portal.

- A on the other hand
- B including
- C therefore
- D initially

8. What do the foxes do after coming through the portal?

9. What does Gina think that Marilyn, Melinda, and the Fox Hunter look like?

10. Explain whether this story is realistic or fantastical, and why. Use evidence from the story to support your answer.

Teacher Guide & Answers

Passage Reading Level: Lexile 570

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8. What do the foxes do after coming through the portal?

Suggested answer: The foxes fall asleep.

9. What does Gina think that Marilyn, Melinda, and the Fox Hunter look like?

Suggested answer: Gina thinks that Marilyn, Melinda, and the Fox Hunter look like ghosts.

10. Explain whether this story is realistic or fantastical, and why. Use evidence from the story to support your answer.

Suggested answer: Answers may vary and should be supported by the passage. Students should explain that the story is fantastical, using appropriate evidence (the portal to foxes, the people who look like ghosts, Gina's outfit magically changing into a party dress, etc.).