

## The Last Tail

Story By Andrew Frutkin

I was a Gumbie with eight tails. I had been born as a fox with no tail, but through learning many important lessons, my magical nature had allowed me to grow eight tails. With each tail had come new powers, and those powers made me more and more human.

I was nearing my choice, the choice that would change me forever. All I needed was one more tail, and that meant one more lesson to learn. I both looked forward to it and dreaded it. What would I choose? I knew I would have to choose to become human or something else. What would that something else be? Would I become a simple fox? I didn't want that. Would I just stay as a Gumbie, a fox spirit forever trapped between the lines of humans and animals? I wasn't sure I wanted that, either, but what would it mean to be human?



I imagined having a regular human name and life. I imagined living in a small wooden house, sleeping at night and being afraid of the things beyond the village. I saw how humans lived, with sadness and suspicion. I also saw how great they could be. Nothing was as wonderful as their children. They were so alive and hopeful. Life was not as difficult for adult humans though.

Getting old was scary, too. Would I age like a human if I became one? I'd already lived far beyond the lifespan of a fox. My own mother fox and my littermates, my fox siblings, were long gone. Over years I'd grown beyond being a simple fox to being the creature that sat and watched humans, growing older but never becoming human enough. I'd watched and learned, hardly aging. I didn't even feel older, just wiser.

It was strange, but it came upon me in the daytime. In thinking about my nature and my future, in trying to decide what I was, my ninth and final tail grew. It startled me, because it is a painful process by moonlight usually, and yet this one grew without pain and it was hidden. It was under the moon so that this final tail grew.

And with the ninth tail, I felt much changed. I felt like a different being. I glowed with inner light. The last tail was different. Where the previous ones were silvery and glowed with the moon's energies, this one was bright and yellow gold. It was hard to look at it. It presented a choice. I had to choose my nature, and my choices were three fold: be a fox, be a Gumbie, or be a human. I had until sunset to choose my answer, or it would be made for me.

I took the first part of the afternoon to be a fox. I ran among the trees, I hunted-rabbits and caught fish. I roared in the freedom of running and hunting. I basked in the sun and enjoyed the breeze across my fur. The second part of the afternoon I spent as a Gumbie.