

## **The Sixth Tail**

Story by Andrew Friddle

I was a fox with five tails. They gathered behind me in an ever-growing bundle. Each one had been earned, and each one was a badge of learning and growing power. Already, I could tell I was becoming much more than a simple fox, more than even a fox with tails. I was becoming more human!

With the fifth tail, the intelligence, speed, and other things I'd learned added to a new set of powers: shape-changing. I'd already been able to grow something like hands and walk upright for a while, but now I could change my body even more! I could grow taller, resembling a young girl if I wore clothes that I took from the human villages. When I put on clothes, my luxurious red fur would fade to a skin-like color, and my face would take on more human features. Was I human? No. Could I even pass for one upon close inspection? Certainly not, but it was a start.

That was another thing, too. I realized that I wanted to be more human. I wanted to go among them to play, to eat their foods, and to do human things. I wanted the best of both worlds – the human world and the forest world of foxes.

I determined that I needed to know more about humans. That would require spending time with them, or at least their young. Their children would be safer to interact with than the adults, so I waited and watched from the forest's edge whenever I could, looking for a lone human.

I found one on a sunny afternoon, fishing by a nearby lake. I put on the dress I'd stolen from a human house, but it was hard to cover up five tails with a little girl's dress. Little girls don't have tails, and there is not space provided in a dress for five fluffy fox tails. It would have to work, because I did not have any other clothes. I made the best human hands and feet that I could, which took some concentration, but was possible now with my new powers.

I approached the boy with the sun behind me, so that he could not make out my features too clearly. He was watching his fishing line with its hook and worm as I walked up to him. He glanced over at me in surprise as I leaned over to look at his creel, which was a woven fish basket. He had a couple decent-sized fish in there, and it was hard to not just pluck one out of there and start eating.

I think my stomach rumbled, because he laughed. "Those are my fish. Catch your own."

