

## **The Fifth Tail**

Story by Andrew Friddle

As Gumbo, it was my destiny to become more than the fox I had been born as. I was slowly collecting tails as I learned important lessons, and each one made me different and gave me more abilities. I'd already collected four, and I'd learned many important lessons along the way. So far, I'd learned to outsmart humans and dogs. I'd also learned what it was to be a fox, and how foxes and humans are sometimes similar. I had more lessons to learn and more powers to gain, but nothing prepared me for this one!

Since gaining the fourth tail, I'd begun to feel strange. I'd woken up many times from a nap or sleep to find myself with hands! Hands, I tell you, hands! I'm a fox. I'm not supposed to have hands, am I? You see, I'm not just any old fox. I do have four tails after all, and I'm getting smarter by the day.

My hands came in useful sometimes. I didn't always have them, but I found myself running around in an upright position sometimes. It felt very odd to be like the two-legged humans that prowled dumbly around the forest. Running upright began to feel normal though, and I enjoyed the use of hands, I found. I could open things. I could climb trees. I could do all manners of things I'd never thought about before, and this was important.

These new human abilities made me want to explore the nearby village again. I could remember the last time I'd gone there, how it'd help me learn that I was not so different from humans after all. I wondered what I would learn this time, but mostly I hoped they had more chickens! You see, humans and foxes alike can't get enough chicken. The only difference is that humans like theirs cooked.

So I walked to town. Fancy that, right? I walked into town, keeping my head down beneath the hedges that bordered a fancier house on the edge of the village. Once there, I decided to watch it to make sure no one was around, and then I went right for the door, only stopping to make sure there were no dogs inside or out. I might be getting powers and getting smarter, but I didn't want to play with dogs any more than I had to.

When I could hear and smell that no one was home, I walked up onto the front porch and tried the door. I smiled as my paw shifted into something resembling a hand, and I tried the doorknob. It was locked! Fortunately, the windows were not. That was foolish of them, wasn't it?