

The First Tail

Story By: Andrew Frinkle

I was born as a fox with no tail...

This is not a normal situation for foxes. Foxes are supposed to have long bushy tails, but I had only a stub where a long tails should have been. I did not know it at the time, but it was because I was special. My mother, who was a smart fox, could not explain it to me either, because foxes can't talk.

Just how can I talk then? Well, I'm not really, completely a fox. I'm not a person either. I'm something in-between, something called a Gumiho. You see, this nub of a tail was just the beginning of a collection of tails that I would have to grow, but I don't want to get ahead of myself. Let me tell you how I got my first tail.

I later learned that my mother had once been caught in a snare trap. When the hunter came and saw her stuck there, he decided he could not keep her for her furs. It was too cruel of a fate. No, he decided that he should let her go. Of course, my mother was a wild fox, and she was already in pain from having a snare cutting into her foot, so she was not ready to trust any human.

When the hunter reached for the snare to set her free, she snapped and snarled at him. He backed away and put on gloves. Then he reached to set her free again. This time she bit down and pierced his skin, even through the gloves! She drew a drop of blood as he unhooked her foot, and that drop of blood is part of what made me a Gumiho, instead of a young fox kit like the rest of my littermates.

In that one instant, her fox eyes meeting his human ones, a flicker of understanding passed between the two. She was changed forever. He rubbed some salve on her wounded leg, and then let her go. She retreated into the woods, but they watched each other for a long while before they finally turned to leave. After that, my mother was smarter, different from the other foxes in the woods.

When I was born, I had five brothers and sisters, my littermates. I alone of the six fox kits inherited her intelligence, but a little something else came with it, or didn't come with it, I should say, and that was my missing tail. As a Gumiho, I had to *earn* the right to a tail that all other foxes would have been born with. My siblings and I watched my mother and learned



from her. She taught us what it was to be a fox: how to survive and how to live. She could cleverly catch bugs, frogs, moles, mice, and all manners of food. She knew how to hide from humans and the forest's predators. She knew where the best places to slake her thirst were and how to build a den. She knew how to care for young and how to mark her territory.

I learned all of the ways of the fox, mastering all of the skills that my mother could teach me. I was her best student. My intelligence, strength, and speed made me quickly surpass even my mother's skills, and when I had learned my lessons well enough, I fell asleep one night, on the night of a full moon, feeling more tired than I could ever remember.

I awoke with a terrible pain in my chest. The pain ran down my spine to my missing tail, which throbbed with the most horrible sensation. Then, before my eyes, the tail appeared, silvery and ghost-like at first, but growing more solid with time. By morning, the pain was gone, and I had my first tail.

My five littermates were all nearly grown, ready to leave and seek out lives of their own, but I was beyond them. I was the fastest, smartest, and most daring of the six, and it was I who left first. I remember meeting my mother's eyes for the last time as I left the den. She knew I was different. She knew there would be more for me.

Part of her looked sad, because she could not share in what I would learn and see, despite being more than just a common fox. She was not Gumiho, and she could not grow beyond what she was. She would always be just a fox, but I would have the chance to become more than just a fox with each new lesson learned.

But first I had 8 more tails to grow, and each one would mean learning a difficult lesson. Each one would mean unbearable pain on a full moon, until one day, when I had to make the most difficult choice of all... but that was another story.

The First Tail

Story By: Andrew Frinkle

Use the information in the story to answer the questions below.

1. What is the name given to this type of fox creature?
 - A. Werewolf
 - B. Gumiho
 - C. Vampire
 - D. Monster

2. How many littermates did the fox have?
 - A. 3
 - B. 4
 - C. 5
 - D. 6

3. How many tails was the Gumiho born with?
 - A. only a stub tail
 - B. 1
 - C. 2
 - D. 9

4. TRUE OR FALSE: The Gumiho fox had to learn to be a fox before she got her first tail.
 - A. True
 - B. False

5. TRUE OR FALSE: The Gumiho fox was different because her mother had once been a pet of a human.
 - A. True
 - B. False

The First Tail

Story By: Andrew Frinkle

Use the information in the story to answer the questions below.

1. What is the name given to this type of fox creature?
 - A. Werewolf
 - B. Gumiho**
 - C. Vampire
 - D. Monster

2. How many littermates did the fox have?
 - A. 3
 - B. 4
 - C. 5**
 - D. 6

3. How many tails was the Gumiho born with?
 - A. only a stub tail**
 - B. 1
 - C. 2
 - D. 9

4. TRUE OR FALSE: The Gumiho fox had to learn to be a fox before she got her first tail.
 - A. True**
 - B. False

5. TRUE OR FALSE: The Gumiho fox was different because her mother had once been a pet of a human.
 - A. True
 - B. False**