

The Second Tail

Story By: Andrew Frinkle

I was a fox with one tail. This was normal, right? Well, considering I had been born without a tail, having a tail was a great improvement. Little did I know at the time that I was working on my second tail!

Growing my first tail had required me to learn a lesson: how to be a fox. As a Gumiho, a fox spirit, I was working on a collection of tails that would ultimately lead me to a very important choice, but I won't get into that too much right now. I had one tail, and I didn't know what lesson was required to get my second. There wasn't a manual for these things, and I was a fox, after all, so it wasn't like there was a book I could read or someone to talk to about what I was going through.

I had been born with 5 sibling fox kits, all of whom I'd surpassed in terms of hunting skills, hiding, speed, intelligence, and pretty much every imaginable way. Because of this, I'd left my mother's den first, heading out into the world to make my way. I really hadn't expected much more at the time, figuring I'd just eat, sleep, hide, and eventually die like every other fox. Little did I know what destiny had in store for me!



One day I was playing along a creek that ran through the woods I lived in. I was eating crayfish, bugs, and other creatures that lived along the river. It was a lazy, sunny day, so I was having a great time of it, sitting upon a rock in the sun. It was as close to perfect as a day can get, and that meant the peace had to be broken somehow or maybe by someone, right?

A hunter happened through the woods. Most hunters preferred to use snares, foothold traps, or cage live traps to catch animals for furs. Foxes have luxurious and beautiful furs, so we are often hunted for them. This particular hunter was armed with a bow and arrow, which meant he was generally looking for boars or deer, but he didn't seem to mind going after a fox. I was just resting in the sun on a warm rock when he stumbled across the creek and saw me.

Immediately, my head shot up. I was angry at myself for being so careless. My mother had taught me better! I darted to the side, making it into the bushes as an arrow pierced the air where I'd just been. The human had seemed as surprised as me to come across a fox, but he had wasted no time shooting arrows at me!

I waited while he nocked another arrow. Then, I rustled the bushes to make it look like I was going to run left, when in actuality I planned on running right! An arrow thudded into the dirt beside the bush and I darted to the right. I ran like my life depended on it, because it really did!

I heard the clumsy snapping of branches and stomping of feet behind me as the hunter gave chase. I was fast, like I mentioned before, so he had a hard time keeping up with me. He was above average for a human, I suppose, because he was smart about following me. He nearly had me cornered once more, and an arrow stuck into a tree near my tail!

I flashed my teeth at him and led him into a trap. It was fitting, I suppose, but he stumbled across a human snare and got his foot stuck. A trap that would have snagged my leg and trapped me for him to catch me had meant my escape! If foxes could have laughed, I would have right then. It was terribly ironic.

As he freed himself and tried to catch sight of me again, I slipped into the bushes and hid. Even free, he could not see me in my hiding spot. He was frustrated at losing his payday, but he could do nothing about it. I'd had to learn to outsmart a man. This was my second lesson. Each of my 9 tails would come with a price and a lesson that had to be learned.



That night was a full moon once more, and I woke with a terrible pain in my chest. The pain spread down my back as it had only once before, but I was only a fox, and I did not understand what was happening. When the moon finally set in the sky, the pain was gone, and in its place was a second tail.

I was a Gumiho, a fox spirit, and now I had two tails. I was a fox that was becoming something more! I felt smarter. I knew more. I understood now what I was. I was more aware of what I was becoming, and I knew to keep my eyes out for chances to learn new lessons and to collect more tails. Someday, I would get all 9 tails. Then I would have to make the biggest choice of my life.

That, though, is another story!

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

1. How many tails does the Gumiho have at the beginning of the story?
 - A. 1
 - B. 2
 - C. 3
 - D. 4
2. Who comes across the fox by the creek?
 - A. her mother fox
 - B. a hunter
 - C. a fisherman
 - D. a hiker
3. What does the hunter try to use to catch the fox?
 - A. a snare trap
 - B. a leg trap
 - C. a live trap cage
 - D. a bow and arrow
4. TRUE OR FALSE: The Gumiho fox had to learn to outsmart a dog to earn her second tail.
 - A. True
 - B. False
5. TRUE OR FALSE: The Gumiho grows a second tail at the end of the story.
 - A. True
 - B. False

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