

Lost Among the Pines

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M -> Feral Fox SFW

Recording Initiated

Day 1

My colleagues at Standardized Biologics refused to accept my Theory of Natural Enlightenment. No, that's a lie. The truth is far worse than that. They, wretched academia, all laughed at me. Buffoonish faces looked over and read my notes, listened to my pitch, and then they all laughed at me. I offered them a claim that in the simplicity of nature, mere *dumb* beasts can achieve a deeper understanding of our universe than the brightest human

scientists. Their derision eventually turned to threats. Now they've finally cast me out and severed my credentials. I have to crawl low to the ground like an animal, groveling before academia for daring to discuss a heterodox view of our beautiful, mysterious world.

Fine.

I'll show them just how wrong they are. Consider this a practical demonstration.

The only flesh that can twist and bend is my own. The awestruck words at my own metamorphosis will pass my darkening lips before any others'. I'm a plain man, weary already in my late 30s. But I can still put on quite a show.

My human mind proves to be the final obstacle. I cannot sever myself from my sentient thoughts. Animal instinct has to be learned. I'm walking the path of pure nurture, not nature. Some more critical scientists might question the logic of my entire experiment based upon this flimsy control factor. I can't stop now, though, despite the little imperfections.

When I walk the path of the vulpine, I shall stalk the meadows and forests as the silent hunter. What a glorious way to spend dawn and dusk.

I'll be using the dictation software built into this E-Journal to document my steady metamorphosis. Solar power keeps the batteries charged, the warranty claims the cells will last several years. Good. I'm glad to have a little diary to keep me company. Even with altered vocal cords, I should be able to effectively communicate my thoughts. Any gaps I'll write one keystroke at a time. A stick clutched between sharp canine teeth can function just like a finger as far as a keypress is concerned. Clean, consistent notes will help me prove my case.

My method of metamorphosis? Consider it *Martin's Trade Secret*. Confidential. Easy to pull off, though. No ancient magic. No nanotechnology. All that's required is simple mastery of evolution. Mind over matter.

I am a man no longer. My foray into the world of the animal begins in earnest.

Day 2

The body is but the clay of the mind. Adaptation can give me anything. I can already see the reddish fur tinting the backs of my arms. Any hair on my chest gradually turns white before my eyes, and I can actually see the color melt away from the base upward as if the follicle pumps the transformation up every strand. Moments like this let me know that all living creatures are just organic machines, built out of pieces that can, with the right application of science, be swapped or changed.

Change.

Change.

What a word.

I welcome each change no matter how painful. My path is one of the artist as much as it is of the scientist. I am the canvas upon which my grand theorem shall be

printed. Each additional hair that sprouts across my exposed flesh will bring me deeper into the role of hunter.

Perhaps it's merely a trick of the light, but in the small mirror I've brought with me, I can see my ears stretching to points. Hmmm, yes, a trick of the shadows just like the slight darkening of the tip of my nose. Ha. My increasingly foxy features veer toward the sharp, distinctively angular, and canine. A narrow fox's muzzle is to be coveted and is to be mine.

What joy is to come.

Day 3

Thin itchy fur coats my face, and through my recording setup, I see slitted yellow eyes reflecting the light of my camera. What was once my scraggly beard now yields to brilliant white and orange fluff that curls and thickens by the hour.

My other senses need to heighten in order to properly compensate. Any enhancements to my olfactory capabilities, despite my nose growing dark, damp, and

slightly upturned, require me to actually grow a muzzle. Sure, I can pick up new scents more easily compared to my baseline human functions, but I know that what I'm currently experiencing is but a fleeting taste of my ultimate potential. I want to run through the forest guided by scent alone, darting through the underbrush as I hunt for each meal. The opportunity to lose myself in nature's dance, the back-and-forth tango, motivates me onward.

I'm starting to grow a tail. No, no. Tail doesn't cut it. A magnificent fox brush stretches inch by inch from my elongated spine. With enough concentration, I can move this new stubby appendage. Right now the stretching skin under my thin fur holds tight to the new bones, but once the numbness fades I know that I'll be able to feel each swish.

I swear I watched my claws grow in real time, enough to see my nails darken and fuse with underlying bone that pushed forward. Again, absolutely no pain rushes across my body, but working with these dulled talons will take some getting used to. I can already tell that my fingers, no, actually my entire hands are stubbier, losing dexterity. Looks like my fox paws are going to grow in early. Can't

say I'm not a bit excited, even at the loss of finer motor function.

Soon I'll run, my body down on all fours sprinting with my canine heart beating full force.

Day 7

I anticipated growing a pelt would itch, but c'mon even the thinner summer coat? Bah.

Venturing deeper into the forest, I come across my first fox burrow. I don't see them, but I see their dugout burrows. The grizzled veterans of the forest keep busy. I'm not going to be welcomed by them, neither as a human or a fellow fox. Regardless of which shape I take, to the fox family I'd only ever be an external threat come to take away what little sanctuary they could dig away with their claws.

I'm an outsider.

But that's just an opportunity for me to compete for prey and to seize territory for myself. It's no different from a fresh human face wandering with distinct and insightful talents into whatever institution or corporation opens their doors, willingly or not. The stranger carves out his place in due time. Always.

I can leverage the benefits of my human mind to make up for lack of instinct. Piece by piece I shall construct my kingdom.

Day 30

My gait grows stiffer with each passing day, I think it's the combination of shortening legs coupled with stretching ankles that has thrown my center of balance completely off kilter.

My morphing face makes human communication difficult, which is why I'm grateful for the recording software's ability to parse my garbled language. I still have to *try* to form vaguely human words, but the technology can parse meaning and I have the ability to, with my increasingly limited hand motion, choose single words.

There will come a day where I have to clutch a branch between my jowls to manually enter the correct information. Guess I better find the most comfortable stick, a luxury mouth pencil.

I have so much to share, after all.

With the growth of my stubby muzzle comes my first exposure to true sensory enhancement. I can finally detect different odors upon the wind, pollen, the presence of other animals, the presence of other *foxes*, and most critically the faint hint of gasoline fumes and other noxious pollutants that don't choke the air from my lungs, but makes me well aware that humanity's influence can never fully be escaped, even out in the secluded wild.

Oh how we touch the world in ways we can never truly appreciate except with an outsider's perspective.

However, I've run into a problem. My body isn't attuned to hunting both psychologically and physically. The food provisions I stacked away for this experiment have dwindled. I'm subsisting off of crumbs, downing crackers so dry that they stick to my blackened and gummy

lips and make my throat retch. As my stomach grumbles more with each passing day, my ears swivel and twitch in annoyance. My situation simply isn't fair, I can hear the distant prey, but my half-formed digitigrade legs can't run properly, I'm still much too large for my own gait.

A common misconception among the layperson is that canine knees are 'reversed' when that's simply not true. What people think is a dog's 'knee' is actually part of the ankle structure. Direct comparative anatomy helps out, but I've found that watching my own feet contort such that I'm forced to walk on my toes drives the point home.

I can still wriggle my stubby toes, but they've suffered a similar fate to my hands. Laying on my back and kicking them in the air is a fun activity, I must admit although before I lose my big toes I get a few stray scratches that sting through my fur. There's a *good* reason why canines lack hind dewclaws, a very good one. I get it now. I also understand the benefits of having toughened pads to better trod the earth. Puffy paw pads, toebeans as my ex-girlfriend referred to her cat's paws when she cradled her feline friend and watched over my shoulder during my

long afternoons spent running gene sequencing on my laptop.

Oh memories. If only she could see me now.

My center of gravity is completely thrown off by my arching back, I'm leaning forward hunched over just to try to stand on two limbs. Soon, I know, I'll hit the ground running on all fours... but this hunger is of great annoyance. I didn't plan as meticulously as I should have, I realize that now.

Snarls of frustration and hunger fill the night as I scrounge together what's left of my supplies. Teeth work like knives, I get the predatory analogy now. I shred through whatever plastic containers keep me from my sustenance. The entire time I'm being watched through the pines by slitted pairs of eyes, the other foxes still not sure what to make of the furry man whose body contorts more with each passing day. To them I'm strictly a novelty, I'm sure of it.

Day 75

I've become a bully. Hate to admit as much, but my superior size allows me to run off the other foxes from their kills. So much for winning friends. I might smell and sound like a fox, but the smaller creatures stare at me with horror as I lumber toward them to take whatever rabbit they'd managed to snag.

At least I'm not hungry anymore, and I've found a strange improvised hybrid niche. While I'd much prefer to actively hunt as a *real fox*, this will do for now as I get used to running on all fours. The process hasn't come naturally, and I curse myself for not studying up on canine locomotion. Digitigrade movement proves more difficult than I anticipated, walking on my toes doesn't *feel* right and yet balancing my awkward hands and shoulders frustrates me even more.

Again, I'm a scavenger strictly out of necessity.

So much stumbling. Embarrassing, really. Imagine watching a misshapen half-man, half-fox creature trying and failing to walk, let alone sprint. Thank goodness that I don't have to chase animals for my meals, I don't think I'd

survive to see the rest of my changes if I did. Luckily, my rearranging bones understand this, and with a noticeable pop I feel them shift into a vertical arrangement one fine afternoon. What a blessed relief.

Feeling my head reshape completely into a canine snout aches at times, muscle and sinew snapping and reforming around altered bones. So much marrow has to flow and ebb, much as my lengthened enamel had during my muzzle's emergence.

Day 100

I'm still cracking the other foxes' body language, trying my hardest even as a half-formed hybrid to make them understand that I mean them no harm. I just seek the bliss and happiness that swirls in their slitted eyes. The other scientists would tell me that these animals lived for simple pleasures. Shelter. Food. They indicated that any higher thought would be reserved for dreaming about such things. How wrong they were... how wrong they are! Each moment I live in the glory of this new life allows me to fully comprehend the world around me, such that I'm

finally able to see and hear, as if waking up from a blinded, deafened hibernation.

My paws retain opposable thumbs in lieu of dewclaws, I can use this extra leverage to wrestle my foes. A fortified grip goes a long way when the feisty dogfoxes attempt to rise up before me, their paws pressed against my furry shoulders. I still have the mass advantage, too, so I'm never in danger even when they snap at me with curved fangs. Granted, now I've got my own elongated canines to gnash back at them. I can match their screams of challenge, too. My voice wavers between a fox's screech and a human roar, I'm sure you all would find it most distressing.

The summer heat makes me pant, my lengthened tongue dipping out past my blackened lips. I must escape this cruel sun, and I suppose it's time to leverage a *learned behavior* for a change.

That's right.

I dig to live, I dig because I can no longer sweat, and I dig for the earthen palace I know I can carve out.

Day 250

Dawn comes and I'm still underground. The den's deep enough to keep out the snow, and I figure that my winter coat will not hold up forever with a polar vortex sweeping down. Strange how the animals seem to know the weather before the storms hit, as if their attuned minds tap into silent messages on the wind that still elude me.

But *why* do they elude me? Why?! What did I do to deserve such ignominy? A man in a beast's shape with none of a beast's instinct, completely lacking in deeper understanding, serves only as a vessel for pity. My thick fluffy coat can keep out winter's chill while I'm underground, but it doesn't tell me how the other animals know when to burrow or when to retreat from the ice. I'm a straggler in a race I didn't even know I entered.

No matter, I can compensate. My digging has gotten better, that's for sure. I don't need to extend my den, not when it's only for myself, but practice is practice. Sure my hands might not be able to work the interface of my

recorder, or grasp *anything* for that matter, but the padded claws make short work of the soft earth around me.

The extra perk of still losing mass means that my den, even if I don't dig new corridors, only grows roomier as I shrink. We all crave a little shelter, a place where I can curl up with my brush across my pointed nose and catch a few moments of respite. I sleep through the noon sun and the witching hour alike. Dawn and dusk is when I channel my hunger to rally myself to hunt the rabbits and mice that thrive in the shadows of thornbushes. They think they're protected from my fangs, insulated by their own *shelter* either dug by paws or reappropriated from the last poor creature who fell before a predator.

Some humans consider foxes vermin, quite the contrary. We foxes keep the actual vermin in line. It's just that sometimes we can't help but look upon your kept poultry with hunger and delight, our bellies craving artificially fattened chicken meat filled with growth hormones and antibiotic shots.

We find our niche.

Dig, dig, dig. My tail wags now as I carve out what could be my rec room. Human me's tiny apartment never had such versatility. I couldn't just knock a wall out and give my neighbor the boot. But here any spot fortified by tree roots can be part of my den. All this space, space where I can store extra food for the winter. That's about it, really, but maybe I can brainstorm ideas for what else to do.

Whenever I do surface back into the frozen world, my eyes catch what little sunlight trickles through the clouds and trees. What a shine is now mine. Oh how my eyes glow, even as the colors around me start to mute. That shift happens gradually at first, blues and yellows mute out and my world pivots toward a washed out partial rainbow. Never grayscale, no.

My forest is such a beautiful kingdom.

Day 800

Final message for the time being. The battery on my interpreter device has lasted far beyond its rating, but the

flickering on the screen lets me know that all tools eventually pass on. Not that I even really *need* it, I've mastered all the skills I need.

At last I've uncovered the secret to animal joy, and I've attuned the echoes of my heart to nature itself. No instinct barriers remain. I've taught myself to hunt, scavenge, and dig out dens many meters deep. My brain might be smaller, confined within a canine cranium, but I've never felt so clever. The other foxes are impressed, and I catch the glint of jealousy and competition in their shimmery slitted eyes. In the past, they tested me, jowls parted to flash sharp fangs accompanied by incessant screeching. I've found my own voice to answer them, and my screams drown them out and send them packing. The opposite skulk's tails are always tucked, I make sure I get that confirmed submission before seizing territory. I try to be polite in my deeds, no misgivings toward my fellow furry brethren. Still, anything I want is mine, I own this entire forest should I desire each evergreen tree and rock resting beside a bubbling creek.

My eyes are open now. The long winters and marvelous summers made me finally understand the glory

of our natural world. Immersing myself with the wild allowed me to appreciate true freedom. I think I always *understood* freedom, but I never recognized that I'd lost mine.

No matter.

I am found.

No more papers. No more deadlines. No more utility bills. No more obligations to the taxman. Instead, I get to run with my face raised to the sun, raised to the moon, I am the scion of dusk and dawn. My coat catches the evening glare and turns redder. Am I not beautiful? Like an Arcadian renaissance?

I've created my own solo utopia, and I never intend to return to the realm of man.

The only words I have left to say to the academia after my foray into a new superior life is that when you're walking late at night along abandoned, overgrown forest roads, and your flashlight catches the glare of a hundred

simmering yellow eyes staring back, I am among the many
watching you wander, lost among the pines.

Recording Terminated