

I was effectively lost. I always had the urge to do this, but I never thought I'd follow up, and so suddenly. Not only that, but wearing only a t-shirt and shorts, I was really cold. Yet as I bolted into the woods, something told me that what I was doing was right. The woods was calling me.

I ran until my lungs screamed, my legs burning. Low branches and bushes whipped at my bare arms and legs, but even then I didn't stop. I didn't know how far I'd gone, but after a few more minutes, eventually I slowed into a jog, and then a walk. Wheezing, I collapsed against the thick trunk of an ancient oak, the rough bark digging into my back. The air hung heavy with the scent of damp earth and pine needles. I gulped it down eagerly. My sense of smell had suddenly gotten more sensitive as not only was I taking in the smell of earth, but other creatures around me. Birds, squirrels, mice.

My jaw felt tense. The first change was subtle, almost imperceptible. A tingling in my teeth, accompanied by a strange stretching sensation. I ran my tongue along my teeth, startled to find them sharper, more pointed. Was this real, or was it my overactive imagination? I didn't get to think about it much as the wind blew, whistling through the trees, whistling my name.

I stood up and went further into the woods. While I was nervous, even a little paranoid, I also found solace in the deepening shadows. The air grew colder, the trees thicker, their branches gnarled and skeletal. My senses continued to sharpen. The rustle of leaves under a scurrying mouse, the faint hoot of an owl miles away, the metallic tang of blood from a wounded rabbit – all assaulted me with startling clarity.

Then came the itching. An unbearable, relentless itch that started at the base of my spine and spread like a wildfire. I clawed at my back, tearing through my shirt in the process. I felt warm liquid against my skin.

Glancing down at my hands and fingers, they were stained with blood, and sprouting from my skin were coarse, dark hairs. I stumbled backwards through the undergrowth, as if I was trying to escape myself, desperate to understand. Despite my racing heart, something felt right.

My vision abruptly shifted, the vibrant greens and browns of the forest becoming muted, shades of gray and silver took over my perception. I dropped to my hands and knees, the sudden change in perspective disorienting. Closer to the earth, I felt an uncontrollable urge to sniff, so I put my nose to the ground.

My fingers throbbed which drew my attention to them, and before my eyes, they elongated and my fingernails thickened, curving into sharp, deadly claws. I screamed as an exploding pain shot through my body. It felt like the bones in my arms and legs shifted, twisting into something completely new. I cried out again but only a choked, guttural sound echoed through the trees. It wasn't a human sound.

He watched in horrified fascination as his clothes ripped apart, unable to contain the burgeoning mass of his changing form. Fur erupted from his skin, thick and black, providing a strange warmth against the chilling air. His face stretched, his nose elongating into a wet, black snout.

His human eyes, filled with confusion, sank deeper into his skull, replaced by the luminous amber orbs of a predator. What humanity that remained in Rowan was quickly overwhelmed by the burgeoning instincts of the wolf.

He stood on four legs now, his new body trembling with raw power. The scent of the forest filled his nostrils, an intoxicating symphony of life and death. The urge to run, to hunt, to explore, consumed him.

A flicker of Rowan remained, a fleeting memory of a life lived, a life that, in retrospect, felt somehow... incomplete. He thought of his human life, the expectations, the constraints and he realized, with a startling clarity, that this was his true self, the self he had always suppressed.

With a final, triumphant howl, a sound of pure, unadulterated freedom, he broke into a run leaving behind the only sign someone would've been there — a torn shirt and shorts. He disappeared into the dark heart of the woods, not in despair, but in exhilaration. He wasn't running **from** something; he was running **towards** something.

The transformation was complete. Rowan was gone, and in his place stood a magnificent wolf, a creature of instinct, a shadow in the trees, forever bound to the wild heart of the forest. He sniffed the air, testing the wind, and a low growl rumbled in his chest, a sound of pure contentment. He was a wolf now, and he was finally, truly, home. He would run with the pack, hunt under the moon, and live a life unrestrained, a life lived on instinct, a life of freedom. He was free, and the woods welcomed him with open arms, or rather, with rustling leaves and the silent promise of endless adventure. He was home. He was finally, wonderfully, a wolf.