

The sun reflected off the pristine clear blue waters of Bass lake. The water was calm, reflecting the trees surrounding it on the lake's mirrorlike surface. A small breeze rustled through the leaves. The rocks on the dirt path crunched under Travis's hiking boots. He breathed in the fresh outdoor air, taking in the nature. It's a shame he hadn't brought his camera along this hike. He had already passed by some birds, squirrels, and he even lucked out coming across a deer along the trail. It always seemed you found more things to take photos of when you're lacking a camera. Travis continued down his hike, passing by familiar trees and sights. He had walked these trails countless times before and always enjoyed seeing its sights. He continued going along the trail until he came across a fallen tree across the trail. It was easy enough to step over the tree, although what interested Travis more was the faint sign of a trail behind where the tree had originally been. The trail looked like it hadn't seen a decade of travel at the least, but the faint signs hid underneath the overgrown brush. Despite walking these woods so many times, he hadn't been aware of any map that included that old trail. Not even the old trail signs made any notice of it. It was as if this trail had been abandoned and forgotten with time. Curiosity got the better of Travis as he detoured down the long-abandoned trail.

Travis underestimated the difficult of this trail. It was hard to follow as he could only see faint signs of it every so often as he walked deeper into the woods, as well as the trail twisted and turned around and required climbing over several rocks and tree stumps giving him quite the workout on this trail. The forest was getting denser as he brushed away tree branches and bushes out of the way. Travis felt a little exhilarated having to get to explore a new place where he had so often explored. Upon seeing a small clearing ahead, Travis made his way over to it, not realizing he was abandoning the trail. The clearing had been well hidden, deep into the thickets of the forest and looked as if it had been

untouched by time. It was only a small patch of dirt clearing with some large rocks you could sit on here and there, but what really stuck out was an ancient wooden totem in the center. Travis walked over to inspect it further. He ran his hands gently across the timeworn wood. The carvings were smooth despite the age and weathering. Travis was really regretting not taking his camera now. What a great discovery he had found. He gently placed his hands on the totem, admiring the etched wood. Travis inspected the top and slowly moved down. Tracing his fingers around each of the carvings, he admired all the intricate details. The top was adorned with the design of a bear, then a coyote, beaver, and finally at the bottom a duck. Each animal had been carved with care and precision. He ran his hands up and down the smooth old wood but a sudden rustle in the forest caught Travis by surprise. As he jumped up, Travis felt his balance get thrown off. Instinctively he reached his hands out to catch himself. He grabbed at the wooden totem to steady himself, but the years of heavy wood rot damage inside made the totem snap as he fell, landing hard on the ground, holding the rotten hunk of wood in his hands. He sat up from the ground, still clutching the wood, staring at what had been the carving of the bear, broken completely off the totem. It had been nearly uplifted from the ground and the top carving had snapped off. Despite most of the totem intact, the piece felt utterly ruined by his hands. It was completely beyond any sort of repair.

Travis sat on the ground for a couple minutes, rather upset with himself having ruined something of that value. All he could do was stare at the ruined carving in his hands being upset with himself. The sun started to shift overhead, and it wasn't a good idea to hang out in the woods by yourself. With a heavy sigh, Travis gently sat the piece of wood on the ground beside him and stood up. Travis felt his head spin a bit as his ears rang loudly. He clutched his head trying to steady himself. He passed it off as standing up too fast, but something felt very off. His head pounded as he heard his heartbeat drumming in his head. It felt like something was pressing its hand slowly into his own hand,

stretching it like a tight glove. His nails began to grow longer and forming into a point. The skin on his digits started turning rough as the skin splotched with black pigment as it began to grow thicker. Travis could hear his head throbbing as he clutched his head steadying himself. Travis felt his hands throb as they slowly began to widen out. Fingers becoming thicker, palms becoming wider. Thud. Thud. His head pounded. The once dexterous fingers began growing shorter but wider. The prints on his fingers splotching with black pigment began swelling, the skin hardening. He felt his thumbs pop as it felt like they were being pulled slowly upwards on his hands. The grip on his throbbing head began to weaken as the dexterity in his fingers slowly waned. Throb. Throb. His head continued to pound. His hands kept expanding outward, growing wide. The skin on his palm black, growing thicker as it hardened. Travis shook his head, trying to fight off the throbbing in his skull as he looked down at his morphing hands. His heart began to beat faster as he stared at his almost bestial hands, if he could still even call them that anymore. They looked more wild and animalistic, like some beast's paws. His mouth stood agape as he watched his changing hands. Skin on the back of his hands began getting goosebumps which began to spread up his arms. The sensation of something reaching into him only intensified as it felt like something was forcing its way up his arms and into his shoulders. His shirt began to feel tight as his shoulders began to widen out as his arms grew thicker. Sleeves felt tighter as the fabric stretched outward. Travis broke away from the paralyzing fear and looked around. Whipping his head around, he looked for something, anything to stop these changes. Upon looking down, he spotted the totem piece he had broken off. That had to be it! Despite the pounding in his head, he reached down to grasp at the wooden fragment. His fingers no longer worked the way he wanted, only accomplishing to slide the object around the dirt. Thumbs weren't bending they way they were meant to; having been moved to be along side his other bestial digits and now just as useless and clumsy. He tried clamping his arms together; hoping in vain to lift it, but it kept sliding out of his huge clumsy paws. About an inch off the ground was all he could manage before it would clumsily drop down onto the dirt again. He had to think

of something. Anything! He felt his skin prickling as his arms were covering in a thick layer of brown hair. His mind raced, the changes only fueling the panic. Escape! Yes! Travis moved as fast as his legs could carry him. He wasn't paying attention to where he was going, just getting far enough away from that cursed object as he could. His bearish paws swatted away branches as he ran further into the woods in a blind panic. He could hear fabric stretching out with every swing of his paws as his shoulders broadened out, gaining muscle and strength. He could feel his sharp nails ripping off leaves and twigs from trees with each swipe. Distance didn't seem to matter as the changes kept creeping over his body. All this did was wear him out. Travis leaned his back against a sturdy tree and panted, trying to catch his breath. He could feel his shirt stretching out as it lifted upward showing off his fuzzy belly. He scanned around the area while trying to catch his breath. Familiarity became foreign in both his surroundings, and his own body. Arms coated in thick shaggy brown fur as it only crept up his wide broad shoulders. A once trim build was now looking bearishly bulky as his shirt began riding upward more. His broad shoulders began tearing holes in the back of his shirt as his frame widened. Travis tried adjusting his shoulders, trying to spare his shirt from destruction. The throbbing pounding in his head returned. His feet began straining the sides of his shoes, feeling his feet expanding and growing out. His feet grew out as it felt like something had stepped into his feet like they were a pair of boots. He could hear the leather stretching and straining against his expanding feet. Claws cut through the front of his shoes like nails being punched through wood. With one final loud burst the shoes slit open like an axe to wood. His new wide feet felt sturdy, helping balance his changing frame. Travis gently kicked off the scraps that had once been his shoes off his new paws. He could feel the cool earth underneath his padded paws. Travis felt gentle breezes of wind blow past him. The wafts of air almost timed rhythmically, as if the forest around him was breathing. The shaggy brown fur on his body blowing with each gentle breeze. Flashes of thoughts began invading his mind. Thoughts of foraging thought bushes, scratching his back on trees, and swiping at salmon flashed into his mind. Travis shook his head and tried to recompose himself. He

was just panicked about these changes and being lost deep into the woods. He exhaled through his wet nose, almost letting out a bearlike grunt as he tried to calm himself. Though that did not last long, as panic began to rise again as the familiar throbbing now plagued his face. Travis could feel his jaw bones and nose pushing forward slowly. His jaw began popping as it shifted forward little by little. Despite the audible sounds of his bones pushing forward, it felt more akin to when someone pops your joints to loosen them up than of one of pain. Travis pressed his paws against his changing face. He pressed against face that was pushing out, hoping to press it back into place. That if he pressed against it, he could keep his human face. He felt the growing muzzle fighting against him, refusing to budge as it grew against his paws. He felt his paws being pushed further away from his eyes, revealing more of his growing snout. Travis grunted continuing to fight it. His grunts once coming from his throat, now coming from deep within him. He could hear his voice audibly change, growing deeper as his grunts became more bestial growls. No, he couldn't lose his humanity. He was going to lose one the last important thing he had, his own human identity. He could feel his large wet bear nose puffing air out in frustration. No one was going to recognize him as some animal! His back slowly slid down the tree as Travis went down into a sitting position. Travis was still human. Somewhat. On the outside. But he was completely a human on the inside. He quickly traced one of his bear claws on the ground spelling his name. "T R A V I S" he spelled out in the dirt. That proved he still had his humanity still, right? A scent wafting in the air caught Travis off-guard. Lifting his nose into the air, he sniffed around, trying to distinguish the scents mixed in the air. A myriad of both familiar and strange scents filled his nose. He tilted his head upward, this way and that way, sniffing the air trying to sniff out the area. There was certainly a lot of foraging nearby. Travis shook his head, his hat falling off his growing skull. No! There was no foraging around. Humans don't forage! Travis winced, feeling something underneath him. Was he sitting on a rock? Travis gave a bearish grunt as he pushed himself upward, using the tree next to him to help push himself up.

“RIIIP” the sound echoed through the forest. Travis quickly turned around to see the back of his pants having a huge split down the back of them. Though what really caught his eye, was something small wiggling around in the back of his briefs. He pinched at the lump with his claws and felt a sharp sting in his tailbone. Hesitantly, he lowered his briefs down just enough for a small furry nub to wiggle its way out. The stubby tail twitched around as if it had a mind of its own. Travis was both enthralled and intimidated watching what was his tailbone move around, although the more he stared at it, the more he began to feel like he was controlling it and that it was very much apart of him as his paws and muzzle were. It was only small twitches, but he could begin to mindfully move it. The forests scents filled his nose again, his tail wiggled. He knew honey was somewhere within a couple miles from him. What he wouldn't give to just scoop a paw full of honey- No! Travis buried his muzzle into his paws, trying to get the scents out of his mind. He was not a bear! The forest was acting like some siren, trying to draw in his mind into that of an animal. He had a life to get back to! Travis lumbered through the forest. His gait trying to compensate with his rather stout frame. His knees began not wanting to bend as much as they used. It felt like his heavy frame was pressing downward into his legs, making his thighs look like haunches. His paws wobbled around as he tried to keep balance. Standing upright was starting to feel uncomfortable but there was no way he was going down on all fours! He had to fight it. He continued to wobble his way around, trying to search for any trace of the trail he had been on. It was like watching a drunk bear stumble its way through the forest. He swatted at branches and shrubs, trying to push things out of his way in a hurry. He turned his head this way, and that way. Nothing looked familiar. Had he already gone this way? What direction was he even going? Not paying attention to where he was stepping, one of his hind paws caught on an exposed tree root and caused him to stumble forward. Instinctively, Travis put his forepaws out, catching himself with a loud thud. Travis tried pushing himself back up but found it hard to find his balance and fell back down. After a couple of failed attempts, he stayed on all fours. It felt if his front paws were being pulled back down to the ground as if by magnets,

servicing to remind him how he was supposed to walk now. The bear shifted his weight around. It certainly felt comfier being on all fours. It was as if he was more suited to walk this way. The bear walked on all fours, scanning his environments. Travis could feel his senses heightening, the world feeling as if it were moving more slowly. He felt more attuned to the woods around him. His worrying thoughts began to dissipate into the back of his mind, taking less precedence. He ambled his way around, sniffing out all the new scents in the air. He could strongly smell all the woody and earthy scents of the forest, but also a faint smell of camp smoke perhaps a couple miles away. The bear's ears twitched slightly, hearing different calls of birds as well as the gentle sounds from the lake. Travis looked around, the forest feeling more and more familiar as other memories began feeling very distant. A breeze brushed passed his face, the sprouting fur blowing in the gentle breeze as fur began hiding more of his old identity. It was getting almost impossible to tell that he even had changed just by looking at his fuzzy face. Travis stopped and looked down at the dirt. He took one of his claws and traced it along the dirt. "T R A V" . . his mind blanked. Trav is? Trav is what? The bear blinked. The memories felt so close, but also far out of his reach. It was on the tip of the tongue, but his mind strained to think of what it was and starting to strain the why of it. The bear's paw stepped down on its attempts at writing, accidentally erasing it with his bear paw print as he continued. His hind legs felt confined. He kicked his hind paws, feeling something shuffle its way off him. He turned around to see scraps of something fallen off him. Those were on him on purpose, but he struggled to remember why. The bear didn't need them, they felt confining and tight on him. The bear shook it's body, his fur fluffing out. A faint memory of those being used to cover him crossed his mind. Why would Bear need that? Fur had completely covered his body. Only bits of his black fur peeking through the top of his head, and bits of black fur on his chin remained of his old hair color. As the bear sauntered, he felt his back get itchy. It felt as something was tickling his back as he walked. The bear managed to push itself upward against a tree and began rubbing its back up and down the side of the tree. The bear closed its eyes, feeling pretty good as he scratched himself

against the tree's bark. The last vestiges of his old human life began falling off. The scraps of his human clothes, falling bit by bit as he scratched himself. It felt almost freeing to be rid of the itchy rags. The bear gently went back down onto all fours and sniffed at the scraps. Familiar scents drifted into his mind, although the bear couldn't quite make out the fuzzy memories, nor what they stood for. The important thing was no food was inside so interest in the tatters quickly lost his interest. Bear turned away from the remains of his identity and possessions and meandered about. Once again, the forest felt welcoming and familiar. Bear was no longer lost, and he no longer sensed any danger. Bear wandered its way down to the lake. He stepped his paw down into the water. It felt cool but refreshing. The bear noticed and watched the water rippling around his paw until the waters became calm like a mirrored surface. Looking down he could see his bearish face. Again, faint memories floated into his mind, but they were just that. An old life he had lived, it felt rather far away and distant. Details incredibly muddled. Bear stared at his reflection. Seeing just a seemingly ordinary bear's face looking back at him. The bear's sight began looking past the reflection, looking deeper into the waters, seeing the light dance across the rocks across the bottom. His energy was better spent looking at food, and there was certainly plenty of salmon to catch before winter!