

A large, full moon is the central focus of the image, set against a deep blue, twilight sky. The moon's surface is detailed with craters and shadows. In the foreground, the dark silhouette of a tree with intricate branches is visible on the left side. The ground below is a dark, misty landscape with some low-lying vegetation. The overall mood is mysterious and atmospheric.

GENNADIY LOGINOV

WEREWOLF

Gennadiy Loginov

Werewolf

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There is a saying that when you are in Rome do as the Romans do. But what if your life has changed so dramatically that you find yourself in an almost unknown environment? Is it possible to adapt to the new circumstances or will your instincts and inborn traits be obstacles to this?

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Werewolf

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Werewolf

It all started on the fatal day when a human bit him. Well, it was not a human in the fullest sense – it was a werewolf. Before that, he had only heard about this kind of creature from the wolves of other packs. And he had also sniffed their scent marks a couple of times. But this meeting became fateful, and he remembered it forever.

Previously, he was just a regular wolf, like all those who lived in the surrounding forests in abundance. He was born a blind pup in the den that had formerly served as the home of a badger. He began to see after two weeks. At first, he ate the chewed up food, then he started to gnaw the prey that was brought to him. He obeyed the elders. He grew mature. He ran with his pack. He howled at the moon. He courted a she-wolf. He hunted. He looked after the common offspring. In short, everything just as it was supposed to be. That was, until he ran into this lunatic.

The elders had always taught that some creatures could change their form or, in other words, were capable of shape-shifting. The most known among them were those who came from human villages and became wolf-like. Genuine wolves had always tried to avoid these pseudo-wolves, and if they were spotted on the pack's territory – the wolves confronted them together without further ado. And it was quite reasonable because werewolves often did a disservice to wolves.

Since every conscious animal constantly living in the woods was well aware that all actions have inevitable consequences, they followed a certain clear framework in their deeds and respected the boundaries of acceptable behaviour, not crossing the line without good reason. For example, without extreme necessity, no wolf would ever attack a human. The exceptions were those rare occasions when the animal was sick or injured and was not able to catch its usual prey, while people lived nearby in the wilderness, cut off from the large settlements of their kind; or when the wolf was forced to defend its own life, territory or the life of its offspring. In short, it was an option constrained by either an acute need in the absence of alternatives or the actions of the human himself who left the animal with no choice except defending by force instead of fleeing. Besides, every wolf knew that people would not leave killing a man without consequences: raids would begin, dogs would start combing the forest, hunters would fire their guns, set traps and dig wolf pits. Of course, wolves didn't need such trouble.

But werewolves, who were not permanent inhabitants of the woods, but rather alien outlaws did not consider it necessary to limit themselves in any way. Thus, a werewolf, for instance, could slaughter a human with peace of mind, and then wait in a different guise, continuing to murder for the sake of murder when it was possible to do so without risk. And the problems of ordinary wolves, who would inevitably have taken on their hides all the power of human anger, bothered the werewolf at the very least.

Moreover, a werewolf killed by wolves could transform into a human guise before his death, and this again created the same problems. Therefore, such extreme measures required a high degree of prudence in order not to cause undesirable consequences. Not to mention the fact that, having eaten a werewolf, wolves became cannibals and man-eaters at the same time, which damaged the mental state significantly, forcing them to continue to devour both people and their own kind.

The werewolf, because of his human origin, generally stood out against the ordinary wolves by his height, since his body weight remained unchanged in any shape. Besides, the lifespan of an average wolf usually did not exceed fifteen years, and after ten years, the signs of old age were already

showing, while the lifespan of a werewolf corresponded to a human one. And, of course, for all these long years, the werewolf gained considerable experience, continuously putting pressure on the lives of the indigenous inhabitants of the forest. Nevertheless, the experience of a long life did not compensate for the lack of some knowledge and traits even for the cleverest werewolf. Only genuine wolves who were born and grew up in a real wolf pack could have them.

Anyway, the fact that a person bitten by a werewolf was at risk of getting this infection and starting to turn into a wolf was heard by many. However, the lycanthropy had two sides, and the principle worked both ways, so if a werewolf bit the wolf, this could begin his transformation to a human. Perhaps if a bear shapeshifter attacks a wolf – the latter would start to turn into a man and a bear at the same time, but there had never been such shapeshifters in these parts since time immemorial.

...The first few days were especially hard. His fur fell out, exposing pink skin. The tail disappeared without a trace, retracted into the spine, which in turn underwent other changes. The limbs changed their form, making regular walking uncomfortable, and running became impossible at all. Fragile human teeth replaced powerful wolf fangs. The nose reduced in size, the scent was gone, and all the variety of smells disappeared with it. The power of scent exceeded human capabilities by forty million times: the loss of this main instrument, surpassing in its importance even the wolf's acute hearing (which, however, disappeared as well) was real torture in itself...

But, at the same time, it was necessary to face the fact and learn, without a whine or a snivel, to use the opportunities offered by the new body, instead of familiar ones. Yes, on the one hand, a wolf-born could not become a man in the full sense of the word, even if he looked like him, just as a man-born could not become a real wolf, even if he was able to change his appearance.

Now he had become a werewolf but had not yet mastered the new role. He had to quit his old life, no matter how regrettable it might be. He could no longer hunt an elk, chase a hare, grab an unwary bird with his fangs or drive a badger out of its hole. He could not live in a pack and fulfil the allotted role. He could not stay with his she-wolf and pups. He could not leave scent marks because even his smell had changed. All these things were in the past, and the werewolf couldn't do anything about it.

Конец ознакомительного фрагмента.

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