“Terror on the Mountain – An Algonquin Retelling” / 1490

*This is going to be an epic day!* Lana thought as she drove to the trail head for Mt Princeton. It was early morning on a cool October day. Pulling into a parking place, Lana gazed at the mountain before her. She thought of the recent article she’d read about a missing family that didn’t come back from a camping trip.

*I’ll be here all day if I get spooked now.* Pulling her light brown hair back into a ponytail, Lana moved to the trail head. She planned to be back to her car by late afternoon. Lana moved at a brisk pace. *If I can keep this up, I should reach the summit in no time.*

Lana slowed as she approached a dark section on the trail. The overcast sky made the forest seem to close in around her. It was deathly quiet. No birds or crickets. A low *thud…thud* was ringing in her ears. She realized it was her heart pounding. She took some deep breaths to calm herself down.

*I’m safe.* Feeling a bit more relaxed, she took in her surroundings. At this elevation, the ground had a different feeling in the wet, humid environment. Moss covered the trail in this section of the forest. The tree trunks looked black in the light. Only pines and shrubs of varying dark oranges and reds surrounded her. The cool crisp morning air smelled fresh and earthy.

She had recently become interested in Native American folklore after an essay she had to write her senior year of high school. She’d become fascinated with sasquatch, wendigo, and skin walker mythology. Being in this dark, quiet forest made her recall some of the information she had researched. *Wendigos, also called Windigos, are well known in Algonquian folklore. A predator beast with the head of a deer that hunts its prey in the Canadian and Alaskan woods.*

She was coming to the end of the dark stretch of the trail. She could see the light up ahead. She picked up the pace feeling like a child running up the stairs from the basement monster.

A low growl sounded to her right. Lana stopped moving. Her blood was running cold like ice in her veins. She peered into the darkness. She couldn’t see anything. She stood there for a few moments barely breathing when a rustling somewhere behind her brought her back to her senses and she ran full out. She dared turn around, but nothing was there. Realizing that she must’ve stumbled on an animal’s home, like a prairie dog or gopher, she kept moving.

Lana felt a cold sting on her nose. She looked up to see that there were dark clouds above and a few fluttering snowflakes were starting to fall.

*Crap!* She’d forgotten to check the weather that morning. Lana contemplated turning around. They’d had a couple of snow flurries over the last couple of weeks, but they hadn’t amounted to anything. It was still too warm for snow to stick.

As she walked, the snow slowed and melted as soon as it touched the ground. Her thoughts drifted again. *Wendigo legends said that they were cursed people who devoured members of their tribe. They were cursed to always be hungry, and they liked to scare, attack, and eat their victims.*

After what seemed like hours, Lana emerged from the tree line. The summit looked deceptively close. At this point, hiking became difficult as she moved through the rock fall made of grey granite stones that varied in size from a shoe up to the size of a small car. Huffing and puffing, she worked her way to the top of the peak.

“Yes!” Lana yelled with excitement as she finally reached the summit.

She had her phone but had lost service somewhere down below the tree line. She used it to take a few selfies and videos to post on her social media. As she browsed through the photos to see how they looked, she stopped on one because she was blurred out. Something in the background was in focus. It looked like a person, tall and grey, behind her in the distance. Lana whirled around. There was no one there.

The sky darkened, and snow started to fall again. Feeling spooked, she knew she needed to start back down the trail.

Lana hurried down the summit. She was close to the tree line when she tripped and tumbled down the steep slope. She tried to stop herself, but went off a small ledge, hitting her head as she landed. Her vision blurred, and Lana knew she was in trouble. Crawling under the ledge she had fallen off, Lana pulled out her survival blanket. She curled up in it as unconsciousness took over.

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Lana slowly opened her eyes. The back of her head was throbbing. She reached back to touch it and flinched. She brought her hand back and saw blood. Her watch said 6:17. She had been out for hours. The snowflakes were falling fast and actually sticking to the ground now. She tried to stand, but a sharp pain in her ankle made her stop. She must have sprained it during the fall.

Grabbing her pack, Lana climbed back up to the trail. She found a stick that would work as a crutch and started to head down the mountain. It was late in the season, but she was surprised that she hadn’t seen another person the entire day. If the snow kept falling at this rate, she’d lose the trail.

A loud, thunderous roar erupted in the distance. Lana stopped dead in her tracks. The blood drained from her face and arms. *How close was that?* In these mountains, sounds could be miles away carried on the wind…or…they could be close.

An earsplitting scream pierced the air. Lana paused, listening. Not daring to breathe.

“Help me!” Came a yell further down the trail.

Unsure, Lana started limping toward the cry.

“Help me!” This time it was closer.

Was this the person she’d seen in her photo? She pulled out her can of bear spray, removing the safety pin. She was getting closer. She wondered if she should try calling out to them. “Hello,” she whispered in the darkened forest. Nothing.

 She finally came to a clearing where she thought the calls were coming from. No one was there. Twilight had set in, casting eerie grey and black shadows everywhere. “Hello,” she called again. A little louder this time.

“Help me!” Came the reply. The voice didn’t sound right. It sounded garbled with the wrong inflection.

*Wendigos are known for mimicking human voices to draw them out and attack.*

A crack from behind her, made her whirl around. “Help me!” She saw a flash of grey fur as it darted toward her. She screamed and sprayed whatever it was in the face with the bear spray then ran as fast as she could, twisted ankle or not. An angry, deafening roar broke the night as thunderous hooves hit the ground trying to find the direction she’d run.

Her ankle gave out and she fell. She could hear the creature’s pounding footsteps rushing in her direction. *Thud-thud … thud-thud … thud-thud*.

Gripping the hard dirt beneath her fingers, she pushed to her feet and ran, ignoring the pain. The galloping behind her stopped. Was it just toying with her? She thought of her phone. Was she far enough down the trail to use it? Seeing a small cave off the path, she hid just inside the entrance.

Panting, she pulled out her phone and dialed 911. “Hello this is emergency dispatch.”

Lana replied, her voice quivering. “Theres something out here.”

Then the dispatcher said, “miss…going to need …. more specific…where are….” The phone cut out.

“I’m…I was hiking on Mt. Princeton. I’m hurt and there’s something stalking me. I…I can’t get away.” Tears rushed down her face. She stopped speaking, hoping the dispatcher had heard her. The creature’s footsteps were approaching again. The call failed.

She stayed quiet and moved further into the cave as she heard the creature just outside the cave opening. It no doubt could smell her. She cried silently as she tried to dial 911 again. Fumbling for her phone, she didn’t see it crawl into the cave behind her. Its raspy breathing made her whirl around. Seeing it, she knew help would never find her in time. Her phone slipped from her hand. It clattered on the stone surface. She vaguely heard someone saying, “Are you there?”

The creature slowly stood up on two legs. It was tall with grey skin and fur. Where its head should have been, was a deer skull with antlers still intact. It turned its head, eyes glowing yellow. “Hello?” It lunged forward. Lana heard screaming and realized it was coming from her own mouth. Pain and warm liquid consumed her. Then the cave faded into darkness.