Wendigo

Erin Manuel

The waning moon shone bright overhead as Alex Reid found himself traveling deeper into the local forest. It wasn’t an easy task entering with a chain link fence built to block the public out. Still, Reid maneuvered with haste. The old lore was passed from one generation to the next. Everyone knew what was supposedly in these woods and made a point to keep it contained.

Reid found their fears and superstitions comical. If these woods were as tainted

as they claimed, shouldn’t the town be also? It’s as if they never questioned it, only blindly accepted and absorbed what they were told. Unlike the rest of his population, Reid became curious about the creature that inhabited this particular area. Sure, it was likely an effort to keep teenagers from destroying another piece of property--if that was why, it worked--but what if something really was out there? Reid was determined to find out.

The description intrigued and terrified him. *It was once human*, they said, *but acted as a rabid animal would, devouring it’s own kind.* *It* a*lmost looked like one with its scarred, hunched body and eyes beyond reason and logic. It was supernatural.* Cunning intelligence was one of its few human-like qualities. *If they wanted to create a town monster*, Reid thought, *they could at least make it slightly scarier*. Yet, in honesty at three AM. on a Monday morning, the sight of anything other than his shadow could cause Reid’s heart to stop. He was shaking as if he were a young child that had just been introduced to caffeine.

 As the night ended, Reid was only slightly disappointed. The most monstrous thing that had crossed his path was a rather large moth. Granted, moths can be quite terrifying when they fly out of nowhere and hit your face, especially at the speed that moth was flying. Still, he promised himself to visit later in the week after he had caught up on sleep. Days passed with only one thing on his mind: The Forest.

 Reid would lay awake at night thinking about this creature, creating a vivid picture in his mind before falling asleep. This image would follow him into his dreams. These alarming slideshows threw him back into the woods, except this time the forest was already occupied. Whispers came from all directions making it impossible to think clearly. Everything he saw ran together in one large blur. The smell of rotting pine trees was overwhelming. Whispers grew to screams, but nothing was intelligible. When Reid woke up he began clawing at his flesh as if he was trying to throw something off. *It’s human, just like me. Just like everyone in town.* He began visiting the woods nightly, obsessively. Reid was slowly deteriorating before his eyes.

 Slipping through the fence, Reid began his nightly rounds. The trees engulfed him; the smell of rot was nauseating. It was raining. Beads of water tumbled from one branch to the next, ending their descent in heavy droplets scattered throughout the forest floor. Reid began picking at the remaining bark of a large pine. Crumbling off, two large worms eating away at the heart of the tree were revealed. Reid grimaced.

 Thunder rumbled overhead startling him. Like an animal fleeing a hunter, Reid ripped through the foliage blindly. His path became twisted. He rapidly climbed a steep hill with the use of all limbs, dirtying himself with mud. There was a rustle of a decaying bush behind him, a twig snapped. It’s breathing synchronized with Reid’s.

 Reid ran thoughtlessly, fleeing from the intruder. He was stopped when loose roots from plants grabbed hold of his foot, causing him to fall to the ground. Unintelligible whispers filled the air interrupted by crazed laughter. A glisten caught Reid’s eye and held his gaze. A gust of wind blew scattering overhanging leaves around him. Reid’s heart pounded in his ears.

 A low lying figure emerged from a bush, then rose to inhuman height. A rabid growl sounded from the depths of the creature. Shadows were cast on it’s sickly pale face, not quite covering protruding teeth. It approached him slowly, as if being ran by rusting clockwork. Blood coated the creature, in-laced with scabs. At parts the skin seemed to be ate away completely, ivory poked through. A ghastly smirk framed it’s face. Vertebrae clicked as the creature lunged at Reid, it’s mouth opened wide.

 He woke with a start; his leg throbbed. Blood has seeped through his makeshift bandage staining his bed crimson. As he stood pain rippled through him while blood ran down his leg once again. Gripping to the walls as a crutch, he made it into the bathroom to smear various medicated ointments on the open wound. A putrid smell wafted up from Reid’s leg; one too similar to that of the woods. Fever overtook him, as did paranoia of the creatures return. Reid did not leave his home for days on end.

 His sweat became acidic, eating away at his skin. Yet, this was the least of Reid’s worries. He stayed in a constant stage of nausea, but no fluids came up. Eating was useless, although Reid had tried numerous times over the weeks. Nothing appealed to him; he had lost over forty pounds. To add to the confusion, a nail-like substance began growing over the bite. When he tried to pick it off more appeared in it’s place. He began to scratch until the skin peeled away. The nail substance began covering his body. Panic enclosed him in the walls of his own mind. With every word spoken they shrunk inwards, smothering out all arguments. These attacks became more frequent, encouraging him to return to the woods. Reid paced the length of his house numerous times until his instincts took over. He fled to the forest once again.

 Reid progressed through the woods with overwhelming speed until he reached the exact spot of where he was bitten. He stood waiting for the return of his attacker. Breathing became a labored task. His chest rose and fell in sharp hitches. Absently, he began to scratch again. His elongated nails gripped under his loose flesh, and began working it off his hand. Reid looked down, greeted by the clicking of his bones as they pushed against each other. Almost as soon as he noticed, the nail substance had covered the wound.

 Thunder roared overhead, interrupted by crashes of lightning. The whispers returned, but this time they formed intelligible words in hissing waves. *Eat,* They urged. Reid had eaten more than he usually did with no relief of the hunger.

“How?” He asked weakly.

*Dig.* They chanted. And so he did. He dug until his fingers bled. Reid’s body ached from his forced position. Joints let out groans of protest until he uncovered something damp and cold. The rot smell intensified. *Human flesh. It is the only way to stop the hunger.* Reid’s last shred of humanity screamed for him to stop, leave the forest, and search for help. It was not heard over his hunger, animalistic actions arose. He tore into decaying flesh, handful after another. Reid’s hunger subsided. *You are among us now. All humanity in your heart has left, only ice remains.* An abrupt crackle of laughter rose from the antagonizing words mingled with a crash of thunder.

 With that Reid collapsed and began convulsing on the ground, clawing at his head. The chant continued despite his efforts to block it out. Bile began filling his lungs: he was drowning. The nail substance began spreading, covering him within minutes. Reid let out a bloodcurdling scream. Darkness overtook him, followed by deafening silence.

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 The sound of nails breaking was Alex Reid’s requiem. A shell of what he had once been emerged from a hardened husk. Milky cataracts obscured it’s vision and a smell of rot filled the nose at first. Within minutes the disorientation vanished; it’s senses became enhanced. The creature let out a deep, bellowing howl into the night. A Wendigo was reborn into the forest.

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 Ada Webb was woken up by a monstrous howl at 4 AM. She sighed and shuffled to her feet. Walking was not as easy at it had once been in her younger years. She had heard this howl precisely five times in her life, and wondered why her warnings failed to reach everyone. *There’s always one too stupid and curious for their own good,* she thought. Ada locked the deadbolt on her back door and double checked the locks on the windows.

 Digging through various items passed down from her ancestors, she located a black candle with runes carved into it. When she was a little girl her great-grandfather had gifted this candle to her. As an Indian Tribe leader he was deeply involved in spiritual beliefs and beings.*To ward off evil* was all the tag looped around it said. She shakily flicked on an old lighter producing a small flame. Ada sat at her kitchen table inhaling the subtle scent of the candle.

 Bones clicking broke her out of her trance. As Ada looked up to meet the glowing orbs of a monstrosity she let out a whimper. Yellowing teeth formed a sickening harsh smile, with blood coated gums. A growl that vaguely resembled a laugh emerged from the void of decay. As the creature approached, Ada let out a sharp scream. The small flame of her great-grandfather’s candle winked out. Only the tearing of flesh followed.