

Algernon Blackwood's

THE WENDIGO

Adapted for the screen by
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from the original novella
by
Algernon Blackwood

A haunting wind WHISPERS. The breath of nature itself.

Snap in

EXT. ONTARIO WILDERNESS - NORTH OF RAT PORTAGE - NIGHT

The FULL MOON shines brightly, illuminating a vast snow-covered CANADIAN WILDERNESS stretching hundreds of miles in all directions.

SUPER: "NORTH OF RAT PORTAGE. ONTARIO, CANADA 1910"

Towering BLACK SPRUCE TREES sway gently in the wind.

A GREAT HORNED OWL peers down from it's high perch.

A CAMPFIRE'S DIM GLOW emanates from a small clearing in the dense forest below.

TWO MEN warm themselves by a roaring fire in the center of their makeshift camp. They are HANK, a scruffy middle-aged man adorned from head to toe in various animal skins, and CATHCART, an older gentleman bedecked in leather fineries that appear to serve style over functionality against the harsh environment.

Hank slurs a tad as he sings, "C'est L'Avirion."

HANK

*"Riding along the road to Rochelle City
I met three girls and all of them were
pretty."*

He takes a long swig from his skin.

Across from him, Cathcart is lost in clumsy inspection of his rifle.

CATHCART

I'm sure it was my rifle. I've used this for every hunting trip and for target practice. Must be getting rusty. The rifle, that is.

HANK

Sure, sure.

Hank stuffs a pipe in his mouth, lights it, and continues his voyager song.

HANK (CONT'D)

*"Pull on the oars as we glide along
together
"Pull on the oars as we glide along."*

Remembering his manners, he offers Cathcart a cigar.

HANK (CONT'D)

Smoke?

Cathcart accepts, biting off the tip.

CATHCART

...Or maybe it's the cold. I'm not used to hunting in this frigid of weather.

He strikes a match and puffs.

CATHCART (CONT'D) I hope young Simpson and his guide have some tobacco. Cures everything. My nephew's never been much of a smoker though. Perhaps by the time we rendezvous he'll have become a cigar fiend after all. Damn this cold.

HANK

Awe, now it ain't that bad. Good for the circulation. Good for the blood! Good for getting away from the women, eh?!

(Singing)

*"By chance I chose the one who was the beauty
Lifted her up so she could ride beside me."*

CATHCART

I do hope the lad is all right. You say Défago is the best guide you've ever come upon, yes?

HANK

Indeed he is. The man's a legend 'round these parts. Not only does he know the land, but he knows the people and the history too. I'm sure Simpson and he are gettin' along just fine, Doctor.

CATHCART

Maybe they'll beat us to landing a moose, eh?

HANK

Not if I have anything to say about it. That damned Canuck ain't gonna best, ol' Hank Davis! Défago may be the superior guide, but no one matches my marksmanship, sir. I assure you of that.

CATHCART

We'll just have to see, won't we? So far there's been a great deal more drinking and smoking than tracking and shooting.

HANK

And you are most welcome for it. Live a little, Cathcart. Money well spent, if you ask me. Moose or no moose.

Hank offers Cathcart a small flask. Cathcart smiles and accepts. Hank continues his song.

HANK (CONT'D) *"With never a word we rode
along together After a while she said, "I'd
like a drink, sir"--*

Swift FOOTSTEPS CRUNCH loudly through the snow, advancing from the darkness behind them. They leap to their feet.

CATHCART

I say, what the devil is that?

MUFFLED WHIMPERING rings out from the darkness.

HANK

Look!

A FIGURE appears from the blackness beyond the firelight. It slumps a few more steps toward them before collapsing. They quickly rush toward it.

CATHCART

My God! Where did he come from?

Hank turns the Figure over, revealing young SIMPSON, delirious and mumbling incoherently.

HANK

Simpson!

CATHCART

Oh, my dear boy. Come. Come.

They struggle to lift his dead weight.

CATHCART (CONT'D)

Here, take a seat by the fire. I'll get you a blanket.

Simpson's eyes are wild with desperate fear.

SIMPSON

Thank God! Thank God you kept the fire going! Otherwise I'd have never found you. I'd have been lost forever. Out there.

Cathcart covers him in a heavy blanket.

CATHCART

My dear boy, you're half frozen. What on earth has happened? Where's Défago?

Simpson tries to talk between heavy sobs, but only manages incoherent mutters.

HANK

Here. This will warm you up.

Hank forces the flask into his half-frozen hands.
Simpson greedily gulps through his cracked lips.

HANK (CONT'D)

Don't forget to come up for air.

CATHCART

Well? Out with it, lad.

A beat, as Simpson works to regain some composure.

SIMPSON

Défago. He's- *gone*.

CATHCART

Gone? Gone where?

Simpson points out to the vast blackness surrounding them. The WIND HOWLS. The TREES CREAK and GROAN.

CATHCART (CONT'D)

Why, what's happened to him? An accident?

HANK

How long've you been out there by yourself?

SIMPSON

Since that second night after we left you east toward Fifty Island Water.

CATHCART

My God. You mean you've been out there on your own *for three days*?!

SIMPSON

Is that all?

(momentarily lost)

Felt like weeks. I've not slept. I finished the last of the few rations I had on me at daybreak. I lost my rifle on the water. Oh, God. I thought the forest was like to swallow me whole.

CATHCART

That damned Défago. He's shown his true colors, Mr. Davis. Leaving my nephew to fend for himself in this vast nothingness.

SIMPSON

No! No, that's not it at all. That poor man is not to blame. He- He was taken.

CATHCART

Taken? Défago? By whom?

They stare at Simpson, who can't seem to tear his gaze away from the darkness beyond their fire.

HANK

I see what happened here. I bet that crazy Canuck got drunk and headed out into the woods to commune with the wilds, if ya know what I mean. I've seen him do it before. Why, one time he--

SIMPSON

--He didn't drink anything! Neither of us did.

HANK

Still. Drink or no drink. The damn fool will likely stumble up this way come morning with a foolhardy story to tell.

CATHCART

He did say he was wary of traversing so far into that particular area of the wilderness; going on and on about dark spirits or some such thing. Yes?

HANK

The big superstitious baby.

CATHCART

You all but forced him to take my nephew out into that godforsaken territory. Maybe he knew something terrible would-

SIMPSON

We'd just made our way back to camp from yet another unsuccessful hunt. The sun was going down fast over the mountains...

His WILD EYES burn with the fire's reflection as he recounts his tale.

FLASHBACK - EXT. FIFTY ISLAND WATER - EVENING

The sun hangs low over black jagged mountains in the distance.

A large circular clearing stands alone amidst a sea of ancient trees. The WIND HOWLS as it sweeps across the expanse.

SUPER: "THREE DAYS AGO"

Two DARK SHAPES emerge into the clearing from the snow-covered treeline. As they trudge through the deep snow, they are minusculed by the all-encompassing landscape surrounding them.

They are Simpson and the hulking "Canadien français", DÉFAGO. Both men are wrapped head to toe in furs, carrying rifles and large packs over their shoulders.

Simpson struggles to keep up with his large companion. He stops to catch his breath and survey the area.

Their small camp lies just ahead of them in the distance. It consists of a single tent, makeshift table, and a fire pit with two stumps on either side.

Simpson sees their proximity to their destination and smiles. He quickly rushes to catch up with Défago.

SIMPSON

Just in time, eh? The sun's really going down.

DÉFAGO

A little longer out there and we might not have found camp.

Défago drops his pack and starts building a fire.

Simpson sits on the log opposite him.

SIMPSON

Moose or no moose, it's still a good time though. Being out here. I don't get to see much of the wilderness at college.

Défago motions for more firewood. Simpson awkwardly fumbles with an armful from the stack.

SIMPSON (CONT'D)

Maybe I should watch you do this. I may need to build a fire someday. On my own.

Défago tosses the wood into the burgeoning fire.

DÉFAGO

It's very easy. Good wood, good fire.

Défago sits back onto his stump and pulls a pipe kit from his satchel. He takes his time readying his pipe.

Simpson squirms at the long silence.

SIMPSON

You know, it's cold but it's not unbearable. You may make a true outdoorsman of me yet. God willing.

Défago smiles, finally lighting his pipe and puffing long and deep.

DÉFAGO

This bible college teaches you a lot of things?

SIMPSON

Yes. I believe so. I hope so.

Simpson eagerly pulls a pipe from his own satchel. It is a little too large for his hands and the stuffing of it takes great effort.

Défago watches in amusement.

SIMPSON (CONT'D) Yes, I mean. If you can be taught religion, that is. It seems like such a strange thing to be taught in school. Either you have it or you don't.

Défago stands, stretching his arms wide.

DÉFAGO

This. THIS is my religion.

A HAWK SCREECHES far in the distance. Défago inhales deeply and lets out a deep bellowing sigh.

SIMPSON

It is very beautiful out here. Peaceful. Like a church. No, not like a church. I don't feel this way when I'm in a church.

SIMPSON'S VOICE FADES and is replaced by SOUNDS of the WILD UNTAMED NATURE around them.

DÉFAGO'S EYES

Squinting through the thick pipe smoke curling around his face, he scans across the deepening shadows of the distant treeline.

FAR SIDE OF THE CLEARING

The darkness grows deeper, slowly swallowing everything in its path. And perhaps something is in that darkness. Perhaps it watches them too.

Simpson plops down hard next to Défago, breaking his focus.

SIMPSON (CONT'D)

Are you able to see anything out there at all? I could light a lantern and-

DÉFAGO

No, I don't see anything.

SIMPSON

Well, I'm going to boil water for tea, if you should care to join me. Are you hungry?

DÉFAGO

No.

SIMPSON

Me either.

Simpson places a pot of water into the fire.

SIMPSON (CONT'D)

I can't help but think how terrible it'd
be to find one's self alone out here.
Easily lost and never found again.

Défago snorts.

SIMPSON (CONT'D)

I mean, these woods are a bit too vast to
feel quite at home in. Eh?

DÉFAGO

You've hit it right, Simpson. That's the
truth. There's no end to them. No end at
all. There's many a man found out that,
and gone to pieces.

SIMPSON

Uncle used to tell me stories of men who'd
left behind the bustle of their daily lives
to come out here to the Canadian wilds.
They were sometimes stricken with a strange
fever of the wilderness. Where the
seemingly infinite solitude of these
uninhabited lands caught them so fiercely
that they went forth, half fascinated, half
deluded, to their deaths.

The fire dances wildly in DÉFAGO'S EYES.

DÉFAGO

(quoting to himself) *"The silence of the
vast listening forest stole forward and
enveloped them."*

SIMPSON

How's that?

Défago snaps out of his haze. Simpson pours two cups
of tea, handing one steaming mug to him.

Défago sets it aside without a sip, and goes about
stoking the fire. As he works at turning over the
burning logs, he softly sings to himself a melancholy
version of *"V'là l'bon l'joli vent."*

DÉFAGO

*"V'la joli vent V'la l'bon vent V'la joli
vent M'amie m'appelle. Go good wind. Go
pretty wind. Go good wind. My friend is
calling."*

As he continues, the sun's last dying rays disappear
and the night sky is littered with infinite stars.

Frigid WIND MOANS through the towering black trees of
the surrounding forest.

DÉFAGO (CONT'D)

*"Three handsome ducks went for a swim.
The king's son went hunting-"*

A BRANCH SNAPS far off in the distance. Défago stops.

It could be just his imagination. Or maybe it's *something else*. Out there in the dark. Waiting. Wanting.

He swallows hard before starting up again. His eyes continue searching the surrounding dark beyond the fire.

DÉFAGO (CONT'D)

*"From 'neath its wing it loses blood, and
from its eyes, diamonds..."*

The WIND'S HOWLING grows louder. Closer.

DÉFAGO (CONT'D)

*"Go good wind. Go pretty wind Go good
wind... My friend is calling."*

DÉFAGO'S NOSE

Twitches.

He juts up suddenly, startling Simpson.

SIMPSON

What?! What is it? What's wrong?

Défago closes his eyes sniffs at the air.

Simpson studies him closely. Waiting for...

DÉFAGO

Nothing.

Relieved, Simpson squeaks out a nervous chuckle.

DÉFAGO (CONT'D)

What are you laughing for?

SIMPSON

Oh, I was just- Nothing.

DÉFAGO

You shouldn't be laughing. Not out here. There's places out here no man will ever set eyes on. Nobody will ever know what dwells out there in the wilds. And they should be thankful for that, boy.

Simpson hangs on his every word. Défago sniffs again.

SIMPSON

What can you smell? Moose?

DÉFAGO

Nothing, I guess. The wind's shifted. It carries a faint odor. Utterly unfamiliar. That song I was singing. I hadn't thought of it in years. Not since I was a boy. It used to frighten me so.

SIMPSON

What is it about?

DÉFAGO

Old legends from a time when old gods danced in the dark of the forest. Silly stuff.

SIMPSON

I'm intrigued. Really. Please tell me.

DÉFAGO

That's the song frightened men sing in god forsaken places like this, when they fear the Wendigo is somewhere about.

SIMPSON

And what's the Wendigo?

Défago hesitates, before turning back and taking his seat by the fire.

DÉFAGO

It's a kind of great animal- but *more than that*. A monster. Quick as lightning and bigger than anything else in the dark of the forest.

(poorly concealing
his sudden fear)

...and not too good to set eyes on, that's all.

SIMPSON

An old backwoods superstition!

He chuckles, gulping down the last of his tea.

DÉFAGO

I warned you about laughing, boy. The trees don't like it.

They stare at each other in a momentary standoff.

Simpson breaks the tension, tossing his cup aside and standing.

SIMPSON

Come on. It's time we were in bed and asleep if we're going to be up early.

Simpson grabs his rifle and pack.

DÉFAGO

Yes. I'll join you shortly.

Simpson smiles and disappears into the tent.

SIMPSON (O.S.)

Good night, Défago.

Défago's breast rises and falls heavily as he stares into the black void beyond. *Something isn't right.*

DÉFAGO

Good night, Simpson.

He lifts his rifle, holding it close across his chest.

CATHCART (V.O.)

And he never said what it was that spooked him?

SIMPSON (V.O.)

Never once.

HANK (V.O.)

I thought nothing could scare Joseph Défago.

SIMPSON (V.O.)

I'd have believed that. If it wasn't for what happened next.

CAMPFIRE

The flames blaze in strong defiance of the swallowing darkness, greedily chewing through the crackling wood.

DISSOLVE TO:

FLASHBACK - EXT. FIFTY ISLAND WATER - LATER

Hours have passed and the campfire's dying embers glow dimly.

The MOON casts it's pale light down onto the men's camp, nestled in the center of the forest clearing.

The night is deathly still, save for WIND SOFTLY RUSTLING through the towering trees.

A SMALL WHIMPER emanates from inside the tent.

FLASHBACK - INT. DÉFAGO'S TENT - NIGHT

Simpson snores, swaddled in a blanket.

Behind him, Défago tosses and turns, whimpering softly.

The two men, each lost in their own opposing dreamscapes, are oblivious as a large OMINOUS SHADOW slowly stretches over Défago.

The WIND MOANS DEEPLY outside beyond the tent. A SOFT WHISPER, barely audible, floats within it.

WHISPERING VOICE (O.S.)

Défaaaaaagoooooooo.

Défago shudders.

Simpson stirs slightly, but turns away as Défago's blanket slowly creeps down his body. Pulled by an unseen force.

Défago's cries softly in his sleep.

SIMPSON

(half asleep)

Défago? Is that you?

Silence. Simpson falls back to gently snoring.

Défago is suddenly yanked violently downward toward the tent flap.

He screeches. Simpson bolts upright.

SIMPSON (CONT'D)

Défago?! Are you feeling poorly?

Défago's eyes are wide: searching, pleading in confused terror.

SIMPSON (CONT'D)

Défago, what's the matter?

Défago's blanket is bunched at his knees and his bare feet protrude through the tent flap into the frozen darkness outside. It's as if someone *or something* were trying to pull him from the tent.

SIMPSON (CONT'D)

My God, your feet are outside the tent. Aren't you freezing? What on earth has gotten into you, man?

DÉFAGO'S WILD EYES turn to lock on Simpson. His face is a horrific struggle between grotesque ecstasy and desperate plea for help.

The very sight of him, forces Simpson to recoil.

SIMPSON (CONT'D)

Dear God. Défago. What-

A sudden VIOLENT RUSH, like the flapping of large wings, sweeps above the tent. Simpson ducks. Défago groans in painful ecstasy.

SIMPSON (CONT'D)

What the bloody hell was that?!

Simpson quickly wraps himself in his furs and shoves on his boots.

He pulls Défago's blanket over his bare feet, and peers out through the tent flap.

OUTSIDE THE TENT

Simpson's head juts from the tent. He scans the surroundings.

Darkness has completely swallowed the clearing, lit now only by pale moonlight.

The fire pit is cold and still.

A LARGE TREE shakes high above the tent, sloughing off a blanket of snow as if recently disturbed by some massive unseen force.

SIMPSON

(whispering)

Défago? Défago, get up. I think something just flew overhead. It must have been a large bird or--

The wind picks up force. Within the WIND'S HOWL, a SOFT VOICE calls out more clearly now.

VOICE (O.S.)

Défaaaaaagoooooooo.

Simpson freezes in terror. This isn't a dream.

VOICE (O.S.) (CONT'D)

Défaaaaaagoooooooo.

Back within the tent, Défago thrashes and groans.

Simpson continues scanning the surrounding tree line. The VOICE seems to be emanating from ALL DIRECTIONS.

Something catches his eye-

ACROSS THE MOONLIT CLEARING

At the very edge of the dark tree line, A MASSIVE SHAPE slinks behind a tree. *Or did it?*

Simpson rubs his eyes. Looks again.

Nothing.

The VOICE on the wind is even closer now.

VOICE (O.S.) (CONT'D)

Défaaaaaaaaaaaaaaaaagoooooooooooooooooooooooooooo!

Simpson shrieks and ducks back-

INSIDE THE TENT

Simpson quickly works at tying closed the flaps. He reaches down to pull Défago's feet back inside.

They're no longer there.

He turns slowly to find his pale sweat-drenched companion huddled against the back of the tent, rocking and muttering incoherently to himself.

The rugged outdoorsman who guided him into this godforsaken place, now reduced to a quivering terrified child.

The VOICE on the wind is DEEPER now, and MUCH CLOSER.

VOICE (O.S.)

Défaaaaaaaaaaaaaaaaaagooooooooooooooooooooo!

Both men freeze. No more confusion or second guessing. Something is out there. And it's right upon them.

Simpson is about to go for his rifle, when-

A DEEP VOICE BOOMS VERY CLOSE, as if inside *with them*.

VOICE (O.S.) (CONT'D)

DÉFAGO!

Défago bellows a blood-curdling scream and knocks Simpson backward, ripping through the tent flaps.

SIMPSON

WAIT! DÉFAGO! WHAT ARE YOU DOING?!

But he is already outside.

Défago's SCREAMS ECHO from beyond the tent as Simpson quickly grabs his rifle and lantern, rushing out after him.

FLASHBACK - EXT. FIFTY ISLAND WATER - NIGHT

Simpson bursts from the tent and stumbles over the woodpile, crashing into the thick snow. He looks out.

Défago is now a distant shape, running barefoot toward the tree line. As the darkness swallows him, his CRIES REVERBERATE across the frozen landscape.

DÉFAGO

*Oh! My Feeeeeeet! My burning feeeeeeet!
My burning feet of fire! Ohhhhhh!*

Simpson clamors to his feet and races after him.

SIMPSON

Défago! **DÉFAGO!**