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Sleeping Ladies

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SLEEPING LADIES

Rachele Ketchem

Out of nowhere a man jumped out of the bushes on the trail a little ahead of us. He was balding, tall, a 40 something year-old with spooky eyes. Christine knew damn well Kim and I were scaredy cats and began to quote a favorite old horror movie of ours,

“Barbara! He is coming to get you Barbara!” At that point, Kim and I were giving her the shut-the-fuck-up look as this creepy guy wearing camouflage in the dark was walking towards us. As I was sweating profusely, and breathing irregularly, from the hike and nerves, I had to break the ice somehow with this oncoming stranger.

“Good evening!” The man shot me a cold dark look, and then smiled artificially.

“Ga-ga-ga-goo-goo-good-eve-ning.” Christine started to laugh at this man’s obvious stutter. Kim and I felt badly and were horrified when she blurted out,

“The-the-the that’s all folks.”

“Shut up Christine! Leave him alone,” Kim and I said in unison.

“What did I do? You heard him?”

“You’re such a mean bitch!”

The stuttering man leered at her as he walked past us. He disappeared into the darkness around a turn. Something about him creeped me out and I was constantly watching over my shoulder the rest of the way to Wildcat Camp.

West Marin and Mount Tamalpais are known for their scenic beauty as well as the coastline. This attracts many people to hike, mountain bike, backpack and jog its’ many trails, despite it’s dark past. It was August of 1979, and my two friends Kim and Christine and I had just completed our sophomore year. We were on top of the world because boys had not really come into the picture to put a monkey wrench on girlfriend time...yet. Since neither of our families had planned any family vacations in years, we decided to plan our own summer vacation. So we organized a backpacking trip to Wildcat Camp out in the Point Reyes National Seashore.

I planned the meals since I was usually the one cooking. The day of departure, we met at my house since my parents bought half the food we needed. Kim’s parents bought the other half with all the things my parents never bought like Hostess Twinkies, candy and trail mix...treats. My parents never went camping. My mother liked to lock herself in her room and read books on women’s rights to muster up the courage to tell my father off and one day leave him. Camping was not her forte. My father was too

busy philandering...allegedly golfing and not coming home on the weekend. However, he did provide me with a decent sleeping bag, backpack, tent and GAZ stove I so needed for my backpacking endeavors.

Kim's parents were the socialites in our neighborhood and liked to throw huge parties in their newly built home with a swimming pool. Her mother was known for making the most fabulous appetizers and dinners. Most afternoons you could find her with a glass of wine in one hand, and a Harlequin romance novel in the other, lathered in coconut oil lounging next to the pool. Kim was one of five siblings and so she got whatever leftovers from her brother's scouting campouts, which was usually broken equipment. Her mother bought her a cloth sleeping bag, the kind one would buy a little girl to spend the night over a friend's house. Her backpack which was not waterproof, had seen better day, and it had the BSA logo on it. Kim was the apple of her parents' eyes with naturally platinum blonde hair and the prettiest blue eyes.

Christine's mother had left her father in Phoenix and hitchhiked to the Haight Ashbury in the late 1960's with a toddler and baby in tow. She went from being a suburban housewife to "shacking up" with a physically abusive boyfriend who was addicted to the same poison. He was once the postmaster in San Geronimo, until he got busted for selling drugs along with stamps. Christine's mother worried more about her daughter cleaning up after their parties with their junkie friends than her wellbeing. She was a hippy mother who thought it would be fun to drop LSD in her daughter's soda pop on her fifth birthday. Drugs always came first in that household where I was never allowed to spend the night. The woman never developed any concern that her daughter needed to eat, wear clean clothes, let alone give her a decent sleeping bag that wasn't disintegrating in the elements due to time and lack of laundering it. The darn thing had to be roped together with several bungee cords to a U.S. Army bloodstained backpack that belonged to her Uncle John who was sent to Vietnam. Christine was a beautiful girl with long golden blonde hair and blue eyes that grown men would bump into walls over, trying to get a glimpse of her. Out of all our parents, not one of them wanted to spend the time supervising three teenage girls on a backpacking trip.

We all met at my parent's house on Orchard Way in San Geronimo. We packed our backpacks with the food and equipment, and weighed them on the bathroom scale to make certain there was an equal distribution of the weight. Christine was the lazy complaining one that somehow found a way to slip stuff in our backpacks to lighten her load. My dad was never interested in driving me anywhere once he got home from work, or he simply was not home. Neither did my friend's parents. So, the three of us waited for the daily one and only...6:45 PM, 64 Inverness bus heading west to drop us off at the Bear Valley trail head in Olema. We picked up our camping permit in the after-hours box, and started out at the trail-head.

It was twilight when we got there, and a huge full moon was expected. The sunset was rich with hues of pink, periwinkle and darker blue. It was just so beautiful that evening as we headed out on the trail through the meadows and forest. Kim and Christine smoked cigarettes, which I thought was dumb and stinky. They insisted on

stopping every 15 to 30 minutes for a long breaks which was murder on me as I was trying to pace myself and balance 75 lbs on my back. I just wanted to move. At one point we really did have to stop, because a huge white Tule elk with antlers that looked like branches, was standing in the path up ahead of us just staring at us like he was about to stampede. He looked at us, and we stared back.

“I read somewhere if you make yourself appear big...that deer, bears and even lions will run away. Let’s all do it!”

“Rachele, have you been reading your parent’s National Geographic magazines again?” Christine was always the loud one full of putdowns and sarcasm with a husky truck driver’s voice. However we all did it on a count of three. Funny enough, she let out a scream and moan that sounded like a yeti doing a mating call. The three of us fell over laughing. The elk lifted its head high and then sauntered off into the forest disappearing forever into the darkening darkness.

Just as we came upon the fork in the road where we could either continue on the trail and go to Wildcat Camp, or go to the left to Glenn Camp, we stopped for the 107th time for the nicotine toads to have one more death stick. Christine’s cloth army backpack was patched together as her mother used it hitching rides to Woodstock. She had a down mummy bag that probably was never professionally cleaned, and it had feathers leaking out of it that could act as a trail to find our way back home, as in the story of Hansel and Gretel. Kim’s sleeping bag was not fastened properly, nor rolled up correctly, and at one point as we were standing on a gradual incline, it came loose rolling downhill. She and I went running after it. We captured it rolled it back up the right way and fastened it back to her backpack. The moon was full and although it was dark you could see the trail. That is when the man dressed in army clothes jumped out of the bushes with a bad stutter. During one of our breaks I decided I was going to try to freak Christine out after her shenanigans on the trail.

“You know I heard this old Miwok Indian tale about the sleeping lady on Mount Tamalpais. Once upon a time a sun god was gazing upon the beauty of a local Indian woman, and kidnapped her and whisked her away to live with him in the sky. However, he tripped over Mount Diablo in the East Bay and fell down to earth and of course she fell with him and he crushed her under him and she died. Somewhere along the mountain is where you can see the image of the sleeping lady,”

“Whatever! I’m not into reading fairy tales or watching horror movies like you over and over Rachele. You are a nerd.” I felt my face getting hot from her calling me names.

Our backpacking trip was souring fast, and we had not even gotten to our destination. Once we got there, Kim and I set up the tent in the darkness as the fog was rolling in as Christine watched us smoking her cigarettes, the one staple she did purchase along with a leaking Tupperware of warm smelly eggs. Getting her to help with anything was like pulling teeth. Once we laid down to sleep, we slept soundly.

The very next day was a warm one, so we went to the beach. Christine excused herself to use the bathroom at one point, and did not return for over an hour. Kim and I went looking for her and found her sobbing at our table. The cupboard that held all our food was open and all our food was gone.

“Who stole our food Christine? What happened?”

“I ate it all and then I made myself get sick.”

“What...do you have the flu?” I asked.

“No! I stuck my finger down my throat dumb-shit, so I won’t get fat.” I didn’t know what eating disorders were yet. It was all new to me. However, we were facing a problem as we had four more days left of our trip. Angrily, I yelled at her,

“What the fuck? This has got to be the most retarded thing I have ever heard of! Eating all the food to just throw it up? Couldn’t you have drank water instead?”

“You just don’t know.”

“No I do not know why you did this but what I do know is that YOU are going to go around to the other campsites and ask the other campers for food.”

“I don’t want to unless one of you goes with me.” Christine was lazy and did not want to do it, like she did not want to cook or wash dishes either.

“Why should we? You were the stupid one to eat all the food and throw it all up!” Kim caved in and agreed to help her because there were some cute guys in the campground. So she and Christine strolled through the campground and lied and told people tearfully,

“Someone had eaten all our food.” Luckily for us, some people who really did have the flu were going home early and gave us all their food to lighten their load for the long two mile hike back up the hill. From then on, I had to police the food as Christine was not to be trusted. The boy scout troop invited us for breakfast meals as they had an abundance of food. As we dined with them they scolded us to always,

“Be prepared!”

The days left at Wildcat Camp drug on slowly, and finally came to a close. Every morning, a ranger drove into camp, to put out smoldering fires, remove garbage and clean the restrooms. The morning we were packing to leave, he came over to our campsite.

“Make sure you girls hike back with other campers as young women are safer in larger groups!” That was all he said. We didn’t hear any urgency in his voice. We just thought we were invincible, and he was your typical adult who thought he knew it all who got pleasure out of exasperating females with his patriarchal paranoia. Just by coincidence, we hiked back with the scout troop that fed us.

It was not until we got home and watched the news on television and read the newspaper that we found out what happened. Holy shit! A lone woman camping at Glenn Camp where we saw the guy jump out of the bushes, was murdered during the time we were out there. I called Detective Prandi as I went to school with his daughter, who worked for the Marin County Sheriff Department and spoke with a really cocky gruff man and told him of our experience on the trail backpacking to Wildcat Cat.

“He is bald, he has a bulbous nose, large dark eyes and he stutters.”

“Do you know how many phone calls I get a day like this? Do you know how many people in this county stutter?” Detective Prandi’s voice was intimidating and rude, and as a result I hung up on him. A few years later after more murders, he was finally apprehended because the Trailside Killer shot and killed another woman, and her wounded boyfriend got away ran off to get help. Law enforcement in another county arrested him. It was the same guy we saw that night on the trail to Wildcat Camp. When he was brought to trial, and we saw his image and heard his stuttering voice on the news segments. It confirmed in all three of our hearts, minds and souls that we had witnessed this psychopath. I felt a civil duty, and I called the district attorney’s office and told them what happened.

“We don’t need your testimony, we have our guy. You can put your mind to rest. The Trailside Killer has been caught.”

There was prior physical evidence from older rapes this killer had committed, and had served a sentence for before the murders in Marin County. Had they simply looked at their criminal records of a stuttering rapist, lives could have been saved. While the police were waiting for the killer to slip up and get caught and somehow fall into their hands which is what happened, my friends and I could very well have been one of many of David Carpenter’s sleeping ladies.