

# Catskill Thunder

I lay in the creek with curtains of rain pelting on my face, my arms, and my body. I can see shapes against the sky. I think they are trees, but the rain blurs my vision. They are encroaching on the fading daylight. They compete for sunlight by day and bring an early darkness in the night.

There is a good chance my hip is broken. I try to roll to the side, but my broken body will not do my mind's bidding. Rather, it responds with screaming protests of pain. I rescinded my attempt to relocate myself or even reposition myself. Without moving, without an alternative to my current state of being I fear I do not have much time left. The summer day was warm, but the sun and its accompanying warm air have left for the day, washed away by an afternoon thunderstorm that brought about my present condition. But is this my doom? Will this be the end of my story here on earth? And what does that say about my story, my life? The chilly water of the stream pulls energy and life away. If I were able to escape the water, just maybe, I could survive. But without the ability to drag myself to the sheltered relative warmth of the pine needle banks of the river, I'm sure the process of hypothermia will overtake me in a matter of hours.

From what I have come to know, a death by hypothermia is one of the more reasonably pleasant ways to pass away, if that attribution can ever be true of meeting your final end. The true cold is only felt in the initial phases. The chills, the shivering, foggy brain, are only passing terrors. Once the body temperature falls and the furnace of the body cannot keep the brain in the warming drawer, so to speak, the terrors pass. Just a few weeks ago a family of four was found dead in the desert out West. There was no sign of foul play; No injuries or sign of struggles; Just a family found dead. Last Tuesday the cause of death was determined to be hypothermia. None of them even felt it coming.

Calling for help or being rescued is a remote possibility. My phone is lost; it is probably lying at the top of the forty-foot cliff from which I slipped and fell. My GPS watch is smashed; it looks like its final act may have been to protect my arm and wrist from a severe impact on a rock or branch. For that at least I am grateful. It was my hobby that may have been my undoing. I have spent many pleasant afternoons in the woods of the Catskill mountains in New York, searching for birds of all types that live among the rolling mountains and hills. One that I have been longing to see is a Bicknell's Thrush. It's a mountain bird that is scattered among the hills of the area. I heard an unfamiliar call in a patch of struggling balsam trees. I held my phone up to capture the song. My intrigue superseded my usual caution in my anxiousness to find something new. In the falling rain I failed to see how the land fell downward in front of me as I approached the thicket which was the source of the birdsong.]

It's dark now. I can see the canopy of stars through the arched branches of the trees. I see flashes of light across the distance bringing brief illumination to the surrounding trees and rocks. I must be coming out of a state of shock, because now I have a heightened sense of feeling, and smell, and taste, and pain. I feel a whole-body pain. I took a hard fall into the creek. It must have been a thirty-foot fall. I landed on my back, into the rocks and fallen logs that make up this stream bed. It hurts to breath, to move, to swallow. I

can taste my salty skin. I can taste the bland but distinctive taste of my own blood. It's then I realize I must have bit my mouth. It hurts to move my jaw.

There are no sounds, not even from birds or insects. It's as if someone has pressed a mute button. Summer evenings are filled with the sounds of birds, frogs, and insects. Often, the distant hum of trains along the Hudson River mixes with occasional loud motorcycles or trucks call from the nearby highway. A breeze rustles through the beech and birch trees among the fragrant Balsam pine along the stream. A bank of fireflies lights up their lanterns in a synchronous flash of coordination. Beyond their light I sense a presence as lightning flashes again, and I look to see what it might be. A breeze picks up, as if to pull life from the very ground next to the stream. Even with my addled state, I feel as if the breeze is lifting me out of my condition, that I can hope to move above the grave that I feel I am in.

Clouds roll in over the canopy of stars, blocking the shadows of the branches. Total darkness surrounds me. A silent flash of lightning illuminates the knoll of my forest. The white bark of the birch trees come alive with the light. The rocks shimmer in their finest colors. The roots of the balsams lurch menacingly over the edge of the Creek clawing into the depths of the water. And on the edge of the stream, I catch a glimpse of something. Something animal, but it is gone before I can put a name to the image. My eyes and neck turned with every effort I can muster. Could this be a wild animal? A bear? A Panther? A deer? A man? Someone who has come to rescue me? I can only wait for another flash. I pull back my stretch.

I hear a low growl. A slow deep throated growl indigenous to the Catskills. A sound with a soul from the ground and voiced from the air. A voice from of the hills; a voice spoken from time eternal. It rolled and spilled across the hills, bouncing and reverberating across the hills down to the trees and vales, and through every surface, living or not, in its path and it waited for an answer. I cranked my neck towards the source of energy I perceived. Another flash of lightning streaked across the sky, different this time with three trailing bursts, providing a continuing the show of light. This time I saw it. I saw him. He was standing on a rock not more than fifteen feet away. I could see he was an Mohawk Indian, a man of some stature within the tribe. He held a staff decorated with ribbons and feathers. Fireflies swarmed the top of the staff, illuminating his clothing. He wore a similarly adorned headdress. He was looking at me with piercing eyes. Was I alive? Was I dead? I did not sense he was there to save me, but only to assess me. Was he my escort to the next world? Would I have my consciousness with me as I passed from my life to an eternal life with this endemic guide? I could only hope so. It may not be as I was taught in my Christian faith, but this was if this was the true power, and path from my worldly body to the next World, I was willing to go with my spirit guide. His presence felt so natural, so bound to the earth, so real. Alas, I felt almost deceived he took two steps towards me and reached out to me with his staff. I tried to reach for his staff, so that he may touch me and guide me, but he pulled away. He pulled back, and the light faded. Blackness fell across my world. I tried to call out to him, but my voice failed in my injured condition. I tried again to call, but my voice was drowned out by the thunderous collapse all around me, followed by new flashes of light. I looked towards him, and he appeared, but farther away. He raised his staff and motioned me. Showing me a path to the shore, to the safety and warmth of the leaves and pine ground. The lightning faded. Rumbles of Thunder continued to reverberate, and lightning returned, faded and hushed by distance. I felt for my body, checking what strength it's available to me. My arms worked, and the pain of any movement in my hips was all but gone. I wasn't sure if it was from some hypothermia induced hallucinations, but I was appreciative that the debilitating pains were gone. I remembered the direction my guide motioned me toward, so I twisted my torso around and pulled my body, broken and

limp, across stones rocks and sticks to the shore. In a final rush I grabbed one of the roots as it was digging into the riverbank and pulled myself onto the soft dry blanket of earth. I opened my eyes to find a single beam of light shining across the small dell of earth I was captured in. My clothes were still wet, I found myself not warm, but covered in the leaves and brush that must have been enough for my body warmth to slowly return to me. I had no way of knowing if I had somehow covered myself, or could it be that my spirit guide had returned to me and covered me for once? I could not know. And I would wonder for the rest of my days.

My situation has changed. From the icy cold tight grip of a rocky stream bed left for dead in a cradle of nature, to a movement restricted hospital bed with bed sheets fastened down holding me in place. The stream, with its earthbound energy flowing over me has been replaced by intravenous tubing dripping



directly into my veins. The songs of the birds have been replaced by the beeping and medical alerts of health monitoring equipment. For a moment, as I lay awake from a drug-induced haze, I hear the distant thunder in the hills of the Catskill mountains, only to realize I'm hearing the low grumbling of laundry bins in the halls passing by my room. But between the beeping and rolling wheels, the stillness is still there. It's the kind of stillness that creates a vacuum for another form of energy to grow into the void. A door opens to calls from another world. Willing or not, the portal beacons to me and I can feel the pull, as if I am caught in a tide receding from a shore.

I move towards the portal as I feel the energy closing in and gathering around me, pulling me further toward it. I can hear the voices of attendants in the room. They call to me; They poke and prod at my body, trying to bring me back to consciousness. But there is not enough of my body left to restore. The organs are too weak, and they are not coming back. The heart still pumps but the blood does not carry the oxygen I need.

“His organs are failing; his heart is too weak. The best we can do is make him comfortable.”

I feel I am falling through soft cobwebs of time; silken threads of memories and feelings that have no strength to hold me. They brush my passing mind with a feather's touch as I swirl towards my destination. I yearn to grasp onto their comfort, only to slip further away.

I fall once again to my cradle in the mountain stream. This time there is no pain. A single beam of sunlight breaks through the clouds and parts the tree branches enough to fall upon my face and light up the boreal forest around me. I rise up and I am greeted by my spiritual guide who appeared to me just days before. He stands by me with his staff held firmly. In the distance, a low crumbling sound stirs the wind. The trees part ever so slightly to allow the sound and movement of the mountains to open their arms. The fullness of the thunder is now clear in my head. The sound is no longer just received on my body; it is amplified by it. My bones and body melt into the sound and bring it forth again, projecting in harmony to it.

My spirit guide looks at me and points ahead of us. He reaches for me to attend his movements next to him, not behind him.

As I approach the final exit of this garden on earth, I realize he is not showing me to an exit. No. He is showing me an entrance. An entrance that I must fully embrace in order to proceed. My body is broken and finished. It is only here and now I find the entrance that so many seek. What I will find I cannot know. I fear moving inside. Just then a small bird appears to me to allay my fears; a small Bicknell's Thrush which sings to me and calls me to the portal. He is beckoning to me.

I cannot prove to you or promise that someday you will meet spirit a guide to greet you. But I can offer you the opportunity to be open to it. If you find yourself in a thunderstorm on a summer evening in the Catskills (or anywhere thunder rumbles), take an extra moment to hear as the mountains and land echo back to the storm. Is it somehow more than an echo? Somewhere nearby a spirit guide may be there, and you may realize that you go beyond just feeling those rumblings of thunder. You are part of it – you are living, yet echoing back to the storm.

The end.

**Author notes.** My inspiration for this was really my continual need to connect and imagine with nature. The sound of thunder in the Catskills and upstate New York is something I think is unique, like the sky on the Riviera or moonlight on the Pacific coast. My use of AI is minimal and only for grammar and graphics. I wanted to try to generate an image that reflected my thoughts of the Mohawk Indian. The graphics came out well from describing the world I was writing about, so I included it. I used Gemini AI.