

The killer trail

nick

A woman's father goes missing while hiking. When she searches for him she learns a mystical secret.

Murder on the trail

Written by nick

"That's it! Pop I can't take it any more!" the attractive brunette was huffing and puffing between words as she pleaded with her relentless father.

"Oh. Sigal it is only half a mile to the top. We can't stop here! It would be giving the win to the mountain!" Ami was tall and strong with youth that refused to leave him throughout his fifty's and into his Sixtieth year. He looked with love on his daughter, not about to let her give up even after such a killer hike as this.

"Dad! I'm gonna wait for you at the car. I can't take any more of this!" Sigal threw her arms up in exasperation and started back.

"Okay. Okay. We can take a little break and start back up when you've caught your breath. You will like the view at the top I guarantee it! Come on! You know that you like to get to the top of a trail. I won't let you loose the opportunity."

Sigal had dealt with this sort of un-killable optimism all her life. She looked at this man that was her father and then looked up the next half mile of torturous trail and felt defeated. "You know one day your gonna meet a trail that you can't climb." She grinned.

"When I do, I hope to have the good sense not to ever give up trying to get to it's top." And how he said it; you knew that it was meant with all of his heart.

Sigal couldn't help it. She loved this man of mans that was her father beyond all measure. Suddenly she felt more than just willing to go on for the top but also a desire to push herself there. The optimism was contagious.

The two started back up the hill and made the top in fifteen minutes of happy, if painful, work. The view was gorgeous. A light haze strayed in the early morning air and the sky still held the pinks and velvet of the dazzling sunrise which was just now beginning to burn with the fervor of day.

The trees and little buildings of the valley bellow their feet were picturesque in the mist and glistened freshly. Far in the West a silver glistening could be seen that was the Pacific. Or at least could be imagined to be.

Later at the office: "Hey Sigal!" The Cheerful voice of Sigal's coworker Lotus chimed as she walked in the door.

"How's things? Any calls?" Sigal walked to her desk and sat down, "Ooff! I can't feel my legs." She groaned, "I need a calmag!"

"Here I still have half of mine from this morning. It's a bit cold but your welcome to it. No calls. Were you hiking?" Lotus looked concernedly as Sigal stretched aching muscles.

"Ya. Up in Chevy Chase Canyon. My dad took me up Torture Trail again!" Sigal made a face as she took a sip of the calcium magnesium drink. "Whew, that's a good brew! Did you make it?" Sigal looked up at her friend, "What's the matter?"

"Well let's say I'm happy you're alive at all! Check out the news." Lotus pointed to the small TV which had remained unnoticed in the corner till now. She went over to it and turned the volume up. "They've been on about it all morning."

The announcer from the channel 4 news filled the small office with her sincere voice she used for grisly announcements, "... The bodies have been identified by police and names will be released after family members have been informed personally. It looks as if the two men were hiking in the early morning hours up what has been known as 'Torture Trail' when they were attacked. Details are sketchy, as the police department has issued no formal statement. We are going now to Jill Froster at the scene. Jill, What are you seeing there?"

A young lady dressed in warm winter wear came onto the screen. Her face was grave but her eyes were clear and detached as an observer not a participant, "The scene isn't pretty up here in the canyon Jane. The entire trail is cordoned off on the north side. Police are closing the trails on the south end as well in order to preserve any evidence that may be needed. They're not sure what has happened here. It looks as if these two hikers may have stumbled upon some illegal activity at this point here on the trail and that the perpetrators killed them for it. There appears to be some evidence that knives were used to..." The camera switched to footage taken earlier that morning of the two victims.

"Turn it off. That's gross!" Sigal covered her mouth and nose with the end of her sweater sleeve, "Those news guys just love to push your nose in it man!"

Lotus switched the TV off, "Is that where you were today?" Excitement coming through her voice reminded Sigal why the News could get away with it.

2

Written by nick

"The trail is the same but that is the other side of it. The trail entrances there are in La Canada not Glendale." Sigal shivered as she thought of what she had just seen and what she could have seen if they had tackled the trail from the other side that day. "We were within a mile of that spot." Involuntarily she thought of the other hikers she had seen that day. Had they...? She shivered with the thought.

"Wow. It almost makes you not want to hike up there any more." Lotus hadn't ever hiked in the local hills to Sigal's knowledge but she refrained from pointing it out.

"Well I'm not going to for a couple weeks at least!" And having said that, it became fact. At least, so thought Sigal.

Two days later as Sigal was getting ready for work she received a phone call from Ami. "Hey dad! What's up?" she cheerfully said after seeing the name on her cell.

"Going on a hike dear. Want to come?" Came the robust answer.

"I'm not going in those hills for at least a week or two dad. Sorry but that news report freaked me out." Of all people Sigal had expected Ami to be least understanding of this statement.

"I completely understand! No problem darling." Ami's voice told all that needed telling. There was no judgement or criticism there only love and sincerity.

Sigal's jaw dropped, "You're not going to push me to go?"

Ami was now surprised, "Of course not. I push you to do things that I think you really want to do deep down. Not to do things that you don't want to or that might be frightening to you." Ami was again the height of cheer, "I'm going to go anyway as I am not worried that I will find any gangsters today!"

"Okay, but be careful alright daddy?" Sigal knew better than to try talking him out of it for the same reasons that she respected his choice not to talk her into it.

And he was gone.

Later that day Sigal's mother called. "Yes Ema how are you?"

"Oh Siggy! I am worried for Ami." Concern came easily to Ema but here it was rife.

"What is the matter? Is he alright?" Sigal thought again, involuntarily of the news report days before.

"He went for a hike and didn't come back! Also I read something really weird this afternoon at the newsstand. Listen, 'Torture Trail or Killer Trail?' went the headline. She read on, "Some are beginning to wonder if the name, torture trail is quite adequate for the infamous trail through Chevy Chase Cyn. where the bodies of two hikers were found yesterday. The toll of missing persons rose suddenly as four more hikers have been reported missing since. Some are wondering if the connection between the recent murders and these inexplicable disappearances goes further than just the location."

Sigal felt a cold chill run through her. This could mean that her own father was now added to the number of casualties. This called for action! But what could she do? The police were already doing whatever they could. "I'm going to go and find him Ma."

"Oh! Be careful Siggy!" Ema shook with concern for her daughter and with pride in her spirit.

Sigal would be careful. She told Ema so. No she didn't need her to come too. No it was best to just go and get him. Yes she would be all right. Okay she would take some sandwiches in case they got hungry.

3

Written by nick

Sigal found Torture Trail easily enough even though she had never gone there on her own before. Come to think of it, she had never gone there voluntarily before this point.

Setting out with a determination she got half way to the top when the day seemed to dim. A cloud covered the sun a moment casting her and the trail in its shadow. Sigal shivered at a cold wind, which came from nowhere.

Strangely the shadow did not lift really when the cloud had past and Sigal began to get a bit creeped out. Something was not right up here. Torture Trail was a place of pain it was true, but it was usually a sort of wholesome no-pain no-gain type that left you feeling better at the end. This was just weird. The flows were all wrong and she felt like she was accompanied by a bad vibe that she couldn't shake.

Or something that she could shake but that kept coming back. Being forced on her at a time when she was preoccupied with finding her father.

"AMI!" She called until her voice roughed over. Visibility was getting worse as a mist came over the ground. She was about three-quarters there by now but with the mist the top still looked as distant as ever. Soon she could no longer even see it.

AMIIII!" She called repeatedly in the hopes that volume would carry where eyes couldn't see. She continued climbing the hill but she should have cleared the top by now. It must have been two hours since she had been halfway and the mist was beginning to creep her out. Several times it seemed as if she heard someone climbing next to her when there was nothing to be found on investigation. No one answered her calls and she saw no other hikers. Also it was getting dark.

She continued up the hill determined to get above this mist or at least get to the top of the hill and find out if her father was there. But she felt miles past the distance where the top should have been and still the trail went on. She thought about turning back but grim determination to get to the bottom of this kept her moving forward. And she felt sure that whatever was at the bottom of all of this weird stuff would be found at the top.

Again she heard footsteps. Again she called out to them and again they stopped. She called again. The feel of something waiting in the distance took hold of her heart. A griping sensation that gets to you when something is hiding and waiting. Waiting for you to go away or waiting for you to come closer. A fear, not entirely her own gripped her to the core. She had not really been afraid up to this point. But now it was clear that whatever had killed those two hikers may now be after her.

Running was stupid in this mist she would trip and crack her head.

She called out, "Hey! Who is there?" She felt the expectation of the other. She felt it wanting to hear her speak again.

"I don't know what you want but I am armed and it would be very bad for you to try anything funny," she lied. She heard footsteps again. It was the first time she could be certain that they were there. She began to shake; tried to stop and managed for a moment to hold still. Then her knees began to knock.

"Who's there? I'm telling you! Don't come closer!!" Sigal fought not to run blindly away. It was dark now and the mist and darkness combined worked to steal her hopes.

Footsteps came again and stopped just out of her sight. She thought she could make out a silhouette but was not sure. Fear skipped straight past terror and into the giddy sensation found past rationality. "Look. I don't know who you are but if you're trying to freak me out, you got it man. But don't come any closer. I'm not going out, without a fight like those other hikers you killed. If you come any closer I will Krav Maga your ass straight over the side of this mountain!" And she meant it!

4

Written by nick

"Hikers?" Came a question. "Killed?" A chilly thought came through the mist. Two more footsteps and Sigal almost fainted. For staring her in the eye now was not a gangster or practical joker and not even rightly a man at all, but an apparition. A ghost of a man if you will. She recognized the face though it had been badly mauled in the television shot two days ago.

"Who is dead? What hikers?" Asked the thing which was not a man.

Sigal swallowed then swallowed again. She thanked herself for not passing out and took courage from that. "You are the hiker. You were murdered two days ago."

A vacant expression and disorientation overcame the being's demeanor. "No I haven't made it to the top. I was going up the trail." And he began to turn off into the mist again.

"Wait." Sigal stifled a gasp as he did in fact wait. She pulled herself together and decided to do what she could for this being. "Take a good look around you. Look at the rocks there and the tree there." The being did so and the mist began to clear that he might better see. Sigal continued to point bring the ghost back to awareness of the present by pointing out more things for it to look at. Soon the night was clear and the being calm. He looked sadly at Sigal. His emotion wasn't dampened by any body so she felt the full force of his grief. His life stripped from him too early. He said, if said is the right word, "But I just wanted to get to the top of the mountain. I didn't want this."

Sigal felt her heart go to this thing which was a man and now was more than a man. She understood it and wanted still to help him. "Why don't you go to the top now then. Nothing is stopping you."

It seemed a new idea to the being. As the inventor who has a good theory and needs to test its merits. It smiled at Sigal by way of a thank you. And...was gone.

For the first time in hours, Sigal was not being watched by some unknown thing. But she was not alone! There, not twenty feet away was Ami and with him but still farther off were four other men looking around quite startled at the disappearance of the mist.

"AMI!" Sigal ran to her father.

"Siggy!" He picked her up in his arms. "I'm sorry I took so long but the trail just didn't end."

"So you mean, you weren't trying to get back?" Sigal was astonished.

"Of course I was! But I was going to get to the top of the hill first!" Ami beamed at her. "Thanks for coming to rescue me in any case. I am really touched. That was so brave. I am proud to have such a guardian angel as a daughter."

They hugged again.

After calling Ema to let her know they were all right they made their way to the top of the trail and went back down laughing and talking the whole way.

For you see, as far as Ami was concerned, this was the best hike yet.

The end