

1 The Beginning

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"Where does that supposedly scary trail go?" Janet Johnson asked her long-time childhood friend, Robert Wild, and snickered slightly as she pointed at the overgrown barely visible path that vanished just in front of them. It disappeared into the forest in an array of blackberry vines and jungle-like foliage. The once popular path was covered with blackberry vines, Scotch broom, thistles, sword fern, and tons of sapling fir trees. As they stood looking at the trail, a large bolt of lightning struck the ground not far from them and illuminated the trees. Dark clouds had formed in the sky and boiled in a cauldron above them. Immediately after the lightning, a loud clap of thunder rolled through the forest and rattled Bob's bones. Bob nearly panicked when the trees along the sides of the trail lit up and he thought he saw someone looking at them. However, Janet apparently didn't notice anyone so he tried to keep his composure and gritted his teeth.

An evilness seemed to emanate from the forest and shook Bob's bones as he looked at the trailhead and the forest. He didn't know if Janet felt it or not, but he did and an involuntary tremble crawled through him. The lightning hadn't seemed to bother her at all like it did him. Dark ominous clouds hung over the lush brown-green forest as Bob and Janet stood in the pathway opening looking at what remained of the trail. The clouds opened up and a light rain fell steadily and accompanying murky fog clung to the tree leaves as if punctuating Bob's thoughts about evilness. Bob jumped as another flash of jagged lightning knifed through the darkened sky and was instantly followed by a loud echoing clap of thunder which rattled Bob's nerves more than they already were. Janet looked at Bob and laughed as she relished the fear that he was showing. Nothing seemed to faze her, Bob thought. His friend had a toughness that he never had. Her fearlessness had carried her through many dangerous hiking adventures and situations. Bob only

wished that he had half the toughness that Janet carried with her.

The fertile forest, which was more like the Amazon jungle, got that way because of all the rain that Oregon provided. Bob thought about why he liked living in Oregon. Many people that lived in other states never got to experience the constant rain. The state was well known for its raining over one hundred percent of the year, which was not good for hiking or outdoor activity, but he loved it. Bob knew that without the constant rain, there wouldn't be lush forests like the one in front of them. Bob was happy that he had the forest within walking distance of his front door. He glanced at Janet and noticed that she still maintained her calmness. She didn't seem to be affected by the scary trail, the overgrown remains of the trail, the close lightning strikes, or the loud thundering thunder. Janet reached down and smoothed a wrinkle out of her hiking shorts. Bob thought about Janet and how she usually wore Khaki hiking shorts, a wool T-shirt, and leather hiking boots. She was definitely not a fashion model for anything except hiking and mountaineering outfits. He smiled while looking at her roughened knees. Her tanned brown skin showed that she'd spent many long hours outdoors in the sun. She smiled at Bob as she waited for him to reply to her question.

Before answering, Bob thought about the unnerving trail. He had lived near the trail for most of his eighteen years. The trail was deep in the woods above Dead Rock, Oregon. Although it was near his house, the trail seemed farther away and almost like it was in the Amazon forest where Bob wished that it was. Bob loved the woods and he enjoyed exploring the region around Dead Rock, but for him, the trail was out of bounds. It was a chilling trail started in a clearing two miles from the town, a mile from Bob's house, and then disappeared into the thick dark undergrowth. The only thing still remaining from the original trail was the trailhead and even it was slowly being overtaken by the forest.

"That trail," Bob finally said, "goes deep into the woods and I believe follows the up and down terrain to Smokey Mountain. I'm not sure what's at the end of the trail, but there are so many terrifying rumors about it that I don't want to know what's at the upper end. All I know is that there is a mountain up there and I assume it ends at it. However, I don't know for sure." I think anyone wanting to hike the trail would need a machete," Bob said as he wiped sweat from his forehead and took a swig of water from a canteen. "From what I've heard, it's a pathway to hell," Bob said wincing. "It's been said that the devil lives on the trail. As far as I know, aliens or something even more frightening may be on the trail."

"That sounds chilling," Janet said and asked, "Does the trail have a name?"

"Believe it or not, it's called, 'The Devils Tail', Bob said, shaking apprehensively at the thought, and then added, "I think that path is beyond scary. Scary would be a joy compared to what's supposedly on the trail," Bob said nervously.

"What's on the trail that's so bad?" Janet asked with a puzzled expression. "I've heard many scary rumors over the years about the trail, but I always passed them off as just that, rumors. I never really thought that any of them were true. They sounded too scary and that made me think that people just made them up. However, I love to hike and I've always wanted to hike that trail, if for no other reason than to prove the rumors untrue." Janet noticed that Bob was getting Goosebumps on his arms. She knew that fear could cause them and she almost snickered and asked him if he felt any fear.

"Of course I feel a little fear," Bob said as he continued thinking about all the rumors that he'd heard over the years. "Why do you ask?"

"You have Goosebumps on top of Goosebumps on your arms," she said. "They're so big that I'd actually call them Elephant bumps." Janet laughed, but Bob didn't see the humor in it. Instead, he just looked at Janet.

Janet swatted at some gnats while she waited for Bob to answer her question about the trail. Some of these gnats should be called Elephant gnats, she thought as she swung at an extra large one. "Maybe," she said, "it's just gnats on the trail."

"From what I've heard, it's not gnats," Bob said and the Goosebumps got larger.

Finally, between gnat swings, Bob managed to say as sweat poured down his face. "You've never heard what's so scary about that trail? I know you didn't grow up around spend all of your early years around Dead Rock, but I thought that everyone knew. I'll tell you what I've heard about the trail. The scariest rumors are that anyone that's ever hiked the trail, never came back to say what's on the trail. The rumors are not just about one or two people, but many people."

"No one's ever come back that hiked the trail?" Janet asked with a non-believing expression. She looked at the signs nailed to the trees around the parking lot. "Is that why all the warning signs are posted here?"

"Yes, that's exactly the reason. After so many hikers disappeared, they put those signs up to warn hikers about the dangers."

Bob repeated what he'd previously said, "As far as I know, no one that's ever hiked the trail has come back." He tried not to look too terrified. However, his five-foot, eleven-inch frame was shaking like a bowl of jelly and the Goosebumps were shaking along with him. He took out his

handkerchief from his back pocket and again wiped the sweat from his forehead. It was a nervous gesture and completely involuntary. "I'm not sure if it's that hot or I'm just too nervous thinking about the trail," Bob said.

Janet looked at her friend and for the first time, she saw that he had a full head of hair that looked kind of cute pulled back in a ponytail. She looked at him more closely than she ever had and noticed that Bob was no longer the young boy that she went to grade school with. He had matured and she admired his clean-shaven mustache which adorned his face. His mustache was neatly trimmed and it gave him an even more mature appearance. My she thought, he's grown up to be a very handsome man. There were no gray hairs showing in any of the hair on his head. Other than a large black mole on the side of his face that he'd always had, he didn't have any unusual characteristics. Janet knew that Bob didn't have many friends around the area and as far as she knew she was one of his closest friends. Although she didn't see him very often, she was one of Bob's long-time friends that she'd known since grade school. She hadn't seen Bob in over two years and she enjoyed visiting with him. She lived a few miles from Bob in the town of Deadwood. It was summer and, being a schoolteacher, she was out of work until school started again in the fall. Since she hadn't visited her aunt and uncle in Dead Rock for over a year she called and asked if she could come and visit for a couple of weeks. They were overjoyed that she was coming and said they couldn't wait for her to get there. She figured that while she was there with them she could visit Bob.

Janet took a swat at an oversized mosquito that had landed on her arm and she knocked it a few feet away. After disposing of the mosquito, she smiled at Bob and said, "I took care of that little devil." Then, she turned serious and asked, "So do you have any idea what lies at the end of the trail?"

"I don't even know what lies along the trail, let alone at the end of the trail," Bob said nervously. "I've heard some frightening stories though."

"Let's hike the trail," Janet said suddenly with a wry smile. "It should be fun. Then, we can find out if any of the rumors are true. I really feel that they are just that, rumors. I can't imagine that people wouldn't come back. The rumors probably started because someone got lost and couldn't find their way back. That's usually how rumors get started and then people add to them by making things up."

"No way," Bob said shaking his head. "I've heard too many terrifying stories about it and none of them sounded fun enough to entice me to hike it."

"What can be so scary about a trail?" Janet asked. "I've hiked a lot of trails. I've been hiking trails for as long as I can remember. Some have been almost impossible to hike with near vertical hiking terrain. I've even done rock climbing."

"This trail is different."

"What do you mean by different?"

Before Bob could answer, another bolt of lightning sliced through the darkening sky and hit a tree close to them. Bob jumped as lightning struck the ground not far from them and a loud clap of thunder shook the area. "That lightning struck very close!" Bob exclaimed. "Didn't that scare you just a little?" Bob asked, looking at Janet. She smiled and asked again about what he meant by the trail is different.

"What I mean is that of all the trails that you've hiked, you came back," Bob said. "I think we'd better get away from here and get back to my house. That lightning struck too close for comfort. Come on," he added, "let's get back to the car."

"Okay," Janet said and turned to go. The rain started falling harder and Janet's hair became wet and water ran off of it and onto her shoulders. They raced to the car and jumped in. As Bob started the engine and pulled out of the parking lot, Janet again asked with an almost comical expressing, "Are you saying that if I hiked up that trail, no one would ever see me again?"

"That's what I'm saying," Bob said, staring at the trail that disappeared into the woods. The thought of people hiking it and never coming back terrified him. He was shaking so hard his Levi pants were almost falling off. He pulled them up and tightened his belt. He tried to quit shaking, but fear clung to him. He looked at Janet and could see that she was a very strong person and probably not afraid of anything.

"I don't believe it," Janet said and narrowed her eyes. "Can you tell me one story, just one that's supposedly true that would keep me from going on the trail. It had better be good because I don't scare easily."

"I can't swear on a stack of bibles that it's true, but five years ago an eleven-year-old boy and his ten-year-old sister started up the trail on a warm springtime Saturday morning. They told their mom where they were going and said they'd be home sometime in the afternoon. The afternoon came and then nighttime came, but they never returned. Their mom alerted the authorities that they never came back. Several search parties were sent out to find them, but no trace of the two was ever found. It's as if they disappeared into a never-never land. That was five years ago and no trace of them has ever been found."

"You said that the people searching came back, right. So, if the those that were doing the searching came back, I could do it too," Janet said, confidently.

"I didn't say that those that were doing the searching came back," Bob said looking frightened at Janet. "I said that those that were doing the searching never found them. Those that were doing the searching also disappeared and never came back."

"Just those that were searching went out and never came back?" Janet asked skeptically. She looked at her long-time friend and noticed that he was shaking. "You are really scared aren't you?" she asked with an amused expression.

They were almost to Bob's house when another brilliant bolt of lightning lit up the sky and loud thunder bounced the car and echoed through the mountain valleys.

The lightning shook Bob and he took a couple of minutes to compose himself again. He pulled up in front of his house and they both sat there watching for more lightning.

Bob was quiet and couldn't quit thinking about the frightening trail. After a few minutes, he managed to say, "No, not just those that were searching for the boy and girl vanished, but many others that were also sent out to search." He looked uneasily at Janet, "including the parents that went out looking for them. The newspaper said that they all disappeared."

"Didn't the police look for them?"

"Yes, many police and even the FBI."

"I will admit that is a frightening story," Janet said as fear started to creep into her voice, but you don't really believe it, do you?"

Bob started to get in the car, but when he glanced back towards the trail he could see a stifling fog that climbed through the woods. Bob and Janet both jumped as another jagged bolt of lightning lit up the sky and shattered a nearby tree, less than two hundred feet away. The lightning was followed by rumbling thunder. The rain fell harder as lightning and thunder continued to dominate their thoughts.

"Come on," Bob said, looking through the rain at Janet. "Let's go in the house before we get completely soaked. I get the shivers just thinking about that trail and yes I do believe the story. I don't think it's just made-up rumors. There were too many documented newspaper articles."

As they started up the path to his house, Bob said glancing at Janet, "I hope that you're not thinking about going on that trail." Bob's house was painted a light green color that blended in with the surrounding forest. The yard looked well manicured and inviting. Bob had spent a lot of time making his home into a welcoming place to live. He loved Dead Rock and living in the woods

outside of town. His nearest neighbors were over a half-mile away. He liked being alone and away from people. However, he wished that the dreaded evil trail wasn't so close. Every time he thought about the trail he cringed and Goosebumps broke out on his arms.

"I wouldn't think of hiking that trail," Janet said smiling and seeing the bumps. She could see that Bob really was afraid of the trail. "I can take care of anything I would meet on the trail," she said fearlessly. "I have a black belt in Karate and besides that, I have two pistols and plenty of ammunition to take care of anything dangerous that I run into."

"Anything?" Bob asked looking incredibly at Janet.

"Yep, I'm ready and just need you to come with me," Janet said with a devious smile. "I prefer hiking with a companion."

"I don't think I ever want to hike that trail," Bob said. "I'm not sure I could ever be talked into doing it, even with you. If anyone could do it and come back, I feel that you could do it, but I'd have to give it a lot of thought."

"Don't think too long," Janet said as they went in the house. "I want to hike that trail and find out what's on it and I don't want to have to do it by myself unless I have to. I'm sure that we can prove the rumors untrue." After they were in the living room, Janet got closer to Bob and asked pleadingly, "Will you please go with me?"

"I told you that no one has ever come back that went on that trail and you expect me to go with you. You don't believe the rumors and now you want to go find out what evil thing is lurking on the trail?"

"I'm not afraid," Janet said confidently. "After all, I've fought off some ferocious animals on some of my hikes. One time, I managed to kill a black bear that attacked me. The bear was no match. I killed it with my knife. Besides the bear, I managed to fight off a large evil brute of a man that tried to attack me. The guy ran off into the woods screaming after I kicked him in his groin."

Janet smiled at Bob with an 'I'm-ready-for-anything fierce look'. Besides proving herself to be very tough, she had the fierce looks of a fighter. Her body showed that she was no slouch when it came to her strength. Her arms and leg muscles showed evidence of having done physical labor. Janet had a scar on the left side of her face that she'd gotten from being in a fight with a boy when she was ten years old. It was a jagged scar and made her face somewhat distorted. The scar made her look a little evil, but he knew she wasn't evil. He somewhat liked her face with the scar. It gave her a special feature and made her look rough. Looking at her ruggedness, Bob could see why a bear might fear her.

"Okay," Bob said, "I believe you, but I think we might run into something way more frightening than what you've ever encountered."

"I doubt it," she said. "I can't imagine anything worse than I've seen. Bob, I really want to go," she again pleaded and added, "Believe me, I can handle anything."

"I don't know if you could handle *anything*," he said, looking seriously at her. "What may lie on the trail isn't just anything. Give me a few days to think about it."

Bob looked at Janet and saw a different person than the innocent looking girl that he knew in grade school. Janet was born and raised just outside Portland, Oregon in the small rural town of Deadwood. She was born Janet Tonya Johnson and Bob first met her when they both went to the same grade school in Deadwood. At the end of his seventh grade, Janet's folks moved to the outskirts of Portland. They'd kept in touch over the years by visiting each other several times since she moved away. He had always liked her and thought she looked cute, even with the scar on her face. In grade school, students used to tease her by calling her Scarface, which infuriated her. Now, she looked different, older and more mature, as she stood before him. However, as cute as Bob thought she was, she looked resolutely fierce and he almost thought that he could see smoke coming from her nostrils. He'd known her for a long time and he knew that she wasn't as tough as she looked, but sometimes she almost scared him. Damn, he thought, maybe she could handle whatever she'd meet on the trail.

"Is there some reason that you can't hike the trail?" Janet asked. "

"I guess not," he answered. "I'm not working right now. I was laid off my store job a month ago and I haven't been able to find another job yet."

"Well then," she said, "you don't have any excuses."

"Other than not wanting to go," he said sheepishly.

"I'll give you until next Saturday, seven days," she said with a wry smile. "And, if the answer isn't yes, then I'll have to twist your arm until you cry and give in. I don't take the word 'no' very easily and will all I can to persuade you." Janet again said that she wanted to hike the trail more than anything and that she'd wait for his answer. She told Bob goodbye and headed for her car. Bob watched her go and thought about how persuasive she could be.

Early Saturday morning, as promised, Janet knocked on Bob's door. He opened the door and said, "come on in, I've been waiting for you."

"Well," she asked with piercing eyes that tortured Bob's soul, "What's your answer?" She asked waiting.

Bob hesitated before saying anything. After a couple of minutes, he managed to timidly blurt out, "I'm still not sure."

"What do you mean by that?" Janet asked. "Jeez, you've had a week to make up your mind. I'll tell you what," she said, in a demanding voice, "I'll give you to the count of three to decide that you're going to do it." She smiled at Bob, but the smile tore through him like a dagger. It was the look that said do it or else. He knew that if he told her he wouldn't go, she would never give up her quest. So, after more thought, he looked at her with an 'I give up look'.

"I'll go with you under one condition," he said resignedly to Janet. "I think you're the only one that could ever convince me to go on that trail."

"One condition?" she asked. "What's the one condition?"

Bob looked at her seriously and said, "That we are given our last rites. I want us to be prepared."

"Come on, you're kidding, right?" she asked. However, Bob didn't look like he was kidding about it. He looked as serious as a person begging for Mercy from someone trying to kill him.

"No, I'm dead serious," he said. "I have a deep discomforting feeling that if we go on that trail that we won't be coming back. I feel very strongly that we'll end up just like all the others."

"Whatever you want to do, it's okay with me, but don't count on me doing it with you," she said. "I assure you that I intend to come back and I don't need any last or first rites." She looked at Bob like he was a little child. "Go ahead and get your last rites, if it'll make you feel better, but don't look for me to accompany you. I don't need anything like that to help me. I can take care of myself without any divine interventions."

"Thanks," he said looking at the ground and kicking a rock. "It might be a waste of time, but I'll feel a lot better. Just thinking about hiking that trail scares the Holy Grail out of me. I'd feel better if we both were given our last rites, but if you don't want to do it then that's okay. I know that not everyone believes in it."

"I don't know about you Bob and your last rites," she said. "but I assume that from what you're saying, you will go with me."

"Yes, but against my better judgment and only after I've been given my last rites. At least after I've been given them, I'll be ready to face anything that would kill me on the trail."

"I think you're being silly," Janet said.

"Maybe, but I want to be prepared."

"Prepared? Prepared for what?"

"My death," Bob said cringing at the thought of death and the trail. As the thought of death floated through his mind, he resignedly looked at Janet.

"Oh, I think that you're just being a big baby," she said. I didn't expect you to be this silly. You're like a little kid that's afraid of his shadow. Then, she added, smiling, "It's a good thing I like babies. Well, let me know when you've done it. I hope that it doesn't take too long. I want to get going on the trail and I want to do it soon."

"It's not silly," he protested. I just want to be ready in case we never come back." Bob appreciated the fact that Janet was confident in her abilities. However, he wasn't as confident in his abilities.

"Okay, whatever," Janet replied with a look of disdain. "Give me a call after you've done it. I'll be waiting."

3

The road to Bob's house wound through the woods and went by the evil trail that they were going to hike. Janet glanced towards the trail as she drove by. *The Devils Tail*, she scoffed as she looked at it. She laughed as she said out loud, "I'll grab you by the tail and grind you up into a thousand pieces. You will be devil's mincemeat when I get through with you."

Janet drove the rest of the winding road to Bob's house. She thought about her friend as she drove. Bob was born Robert J. Wild in California. His folks moved to Grange, Oregon when he was two years old. It was a small town about thirty miles east of Portland. Bob's dad couldn't find a job in Grange and when Bob was four years old, they moved from that town to the town of Dead Rock, Oregon. It was not too far from Grange and was just a few miles southeast of Portland and close to the town of Deadwood. Janet first met Bob in grade school when his parents moved to Dead Rock and they both attended the same grade school. They lived next door to each other and

their parents worked at the local Sarema lumber mill. Janet's mom always seemed like a strong lady to Bob. She worked on the green chain pulling lumber off of it for sorting. Some of the lumber was heavy and it was a hard job, but she liked it. Bob figured that Janet got her toughness from her mom. Both his dad and her dad worked inside the mill. Bob's dad ran the edger and her dad worked as a foreman. Bob's mom was a housewife. She preferred that job to working at the mill.

Bob's parents called him Bobby and some close friends still called him that. However, he preferred Bob to Bobby. He told Janet that the name Bobby sounded too childish and he didn't like it. Janet liked the name Bobby, but whenever she called him that, he would get mad at her. So, to make him happy she called him Bob and only teasingly called him Bobby only when she wanted to get under his skin in a fun way.

Janet's thoughts were abruptly interrupted when a deer bounded across the road in front of her car and she slammed on the car's brakes. She was thankful that she barely missed hitting the deer. Fortunately, for her and the deer, she only clipped its tail. She slowed the car to a stop and sat there for a minute as she watched the deer bound off into the woods. A couple of seconds later, two more deer bounded across the road behind the car and joined the deer she'd almost hit. She regained her composure, smiled back at the deer, and then drove the short distance to Bob's house.

Janet anxiously walked up to Bob's door and knocked. She was eager to get their hike started and hoped that he was ready to go. Bob came to the door and greeted her.

"Good morning," Janet said smiling. "Are you ready to go?"

Bob didn't look well and Janet asked if he was okay. "No," he answered, "I was sick all night and I don't really feel like going today."

"I think maybe you're scared to go," she said looking at him with a crooked smile.

"Think whatever you want," he said with a sarcastic answer, "but I really don't want to go today. Can we plan on going next Saturday?" he pleadingly asked.

Janet was disappointed beyond words, but she reluctantly agreed to wait another week. "Okay," she said and turned to go. "But, you'd better be ready when I get here next Saturday. We're going to go whether you're ready or not."

Bob had to admit that although he liked Janet, she was very strong-willed. "I'll be ready," he assured her and had no doubt that he had better be ready.

Bob watched Janet walk out to her car and closed his door as she got in and drove away. He wished that he felt better because he didn't want to see her go. He went to the kitchen and ate a dish of ice-cream. Ice-cream, especially vanilla, always seemed to make him feel better when he was

sick. For him, it worked better than any medicine. He might even have to eat more ice-cream to make sure he was ready for next Saturdays hike, maybe a lot more. The thought brought a smile and made him feel a little better as he headed back to the comfort of his bed.