

An Unpleasant Run

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Category: Adult

Ever since I was a child, I've felt pulled to the sound of the water at Pleasant Run, just by Ellenberger Park. Something about the way that it drowned out the din of everything else lured me in. It called to me, like a siren's song.

It wasn't until later that I realized I was experiencing something else entirely.

Every time I crossed the footbridge over the creek into the park, I did so over a massive fog, thick as smoke and impossible to see through. In any season, in sun or in rain, the same fogbank always huddled close under me, directly under the bridge and on either side. It rose high enough that I could wave at it with my hand, and it tickled me with a chill that I felt creeping up my forearms. The fogbank had no definite shape, and yet seemed to hold a form, almost solid even as it effervesced.

I didn't think much of this as a child other than as a curiosity. I never really talked about it with my family, or asked questions of anyone near me. I assumed it was just a feature of nature that everyone else noticed, too. But if I passed by with another person, no one would so much as glance at it, let alone linger on it as I did.

As I grew older and learned more, I grew a bit more uneasy, passing by the same cloud at any hour of day or night. I started to explain it away as a peculiar low point in the streambed, a depression where moisture collected. Or maybe the fog was everywhere, and I just couldn't see it continuing past the trees. Maybe this was just a thing that swampy creeks did. Maybe it's how they breathe.

It wasn't until I was an adult that I began to truly question that mass of vapor. It started when I got a voicemail from an old friend who grew up in a different part of town, but had recently moved to Irvington. He sounded unusually panicked, and asked to meet up at Coal Yard for a cup of coffee to talk about something he had just experienced – something that unsettled him.

We sat down near the window, and he started telling me about a recent walk with his dog when he crossed over the same bridge. I felt myself tensing up in anticipation of where he was headed – for the first time, another person mentioned seeing that same fogbank I had been seeing for over two decades.

But in his telling, it behaved very differently. According to him, he felt the air as one of malice. He felt the same chill I felt as a tickle in my childhood, but the chill gathered around him like a cavern of ice, and the fog rose upwards from under the bridge, seeping through the gaps in the wood. His dog, Finn, let out a low and uncertain bark, but quickly cowered back, tail between his legs. A mild shiver ran through them both, at first from the cold, and then from the fear of what might follow.

My friend then saw, to his horror, the fog take on the shape of five distinctive wisps of vapor, each the length of a finger. These wisps joined together to form a hand, rising from the mist, reaching out for him.

At that moment, he and Finn bolted for home. I couldn't blame him. He asked me, "Have you ever had an experience like this in this neighborhood? Is this why you guys like Halloween so much?"

I laughed it off to set him at ease, but I knew I needed to take a second look. I'm a science teacher, and I'm not much into ghosts. But neither was my friend, and it would take something big to spook him like this. Was there something about this fogbank that I'd never noticed before?

I went back to the spot on a mild day in late January. There was no snow on the ground, and most of the leaves had either crunched into soil or washed into the creek. The fogbank was there, as always, but it certainly had no hands or fingers, and I didn't feel anything different. I looked around the side of the bridge, and peered over the edge. And I did notice one thing that I had never seen before.

A trail ran along the edge of the creek where the bridge met the path. It must have been a deer trail, or some other trampling that I had never noticed before with all the typical vegetation. It was obvious: I had to follow it. I stepped down along the trail, which was far from straight, winding to and fro, slowly downwards towards the creekbed. After a few hundred paces, I realized that I had, at some point, walked into the fogbank that I had only ever seen from afar. I looked left, right, forwards, backwards, and all around me was nothing but a thick, dense haze. I could see two, maybe three feet ahead of me before losing all sense of sight.

I stopped, and stood still for a moment.

I heard something. Or at least, I felt the sensation you get when you hear something, as if something was electrifying that part of my mind. A chill came over me, starting at the tips of my fingers and toes and quickly spreading through my limbs like a flame through a dry leaf. It was then that two lights appeared through the fog – if they weren't there the whole time. They seemed to be moving closer, symmetrical in size and orientation. I didn't know what to do. I felt frozen to my feet as these lights approached like eyes of wrath, with no clear bearing on where to turn. I looked down, crouched, until I could see the path, and chose the direction furthest from those lights. And I ran.

I don't know how long it took or how I got there, but when I looked up again, I was at the top of the bridge. The fog was still there, but I couldn't see the lights. But I wasn't going to wait for them again. I went straight home.

Now, I've seen enough horror movies and read enough ghost stories to know what the next step would be. Something was down there in that fog. Something that was stuck here. And the best way to get it to move on was to learn about it, and tell its story to others. I avoided the path until the weekend, and took some time in the afternoon to go by the Bona Thompson Library to do some research.

I scoured through journal clippings, Howe yearbooks, old photographs from the decades. Nothing seemed to fit, until eventually, I stumbled upon a collection of audio cassette tapes in a cardboard box marked "Oral History." Each tape was clearly labeled with yellowed paper, except one. One had a brand new white label, with nothing written on it. I pulled it, checked it out, and took it home.

I popped the tape into an old deck I had purchased from Irvington Vinyl down the street from my house. I heard static crackling, for almost two minutes, before a voice came through. She seemed to be crying heavy, heaving sobs, and it was difficult to make out what was being said. But a few words rose out clear as day: "*She fell...river red...he pushed her...she's gone...*"

I looked at the clock – it was 11:03pm – but my heart was pounding with adrenaline. I jumped online and hopped on *Hoosier State Chronicles*, checking newspapers from the 70s and 80s, and found a story from 1979 that had to be a match buried in the bottom corner of page 16 of *The Indianapolis News*. According to an account from two witnesses, a young woman, Carol Milligan, got into an argument with her husband on the bridge, and in a rage, he pushed her over the edge, where she was killed on impact. He fled before he could be apprehended.

A spectrum of emotions washed over me, but from the mixture, the one that rose up was indignation. Something horrible had happened to this person, and now she was trapped there. She was reaching out to my friend for help, or for release.

I threw on some shoes, rushed out the door, and jogged over to the bridge, where the fog was gathered like always. For the first time, I spoke to it, haltingly at first before my confidence grew. "...Hello? Carol? Is that you?"

I know it's impossible, but I'm telling you that the fog somehow stiffened, as if listening.

"I just want you to know that I know what happened to you, and I'm so sorry. It was an injustice, and I'm going to make sure that others know your story. I hope that gives you some peace."

For what seemed like hours, nothing happened. I stood there, waiting hopelessly for a cloud of droplets to speak back to me. Instead, after a few moments, the fog started to fade. I couldn't believe it. After thirty years, I could see the streambed clearly for the first time.

I laughed to myself, beaming, proud that I had been able to give this spirit some rest. I checked my phone – 12:32am – and walked back home and went to bed.

I slept peacefully that night. At least at first. The room had started to feel a bit chilly, and eventually the cold pulled me awake. I looked around for the clock to check the time, but I couldn't see the LED. Had the power gone out, and the heat with it?

I reached for my phone by my bedside, and saw that it was just after 3:00 in the morning. My screen looked fuzzy, though. I rubbed my eyes, put on my glasses, and looked again, but everything seemed to be in a haze.

I switched on my phone light to locate the lamp. That's when, to my horror, I realized the entirety of my bedroom was filled with fog. It was unmistakable – this was the exact same haze I had walked into at Pleasant Run. I panned my light left and right, and saw, at the foot of my bed, two lights, symmetrical, and five wisps of vapor, forming a hand, reaching out for me.

I was wrong. In my arrogance, I thought I had somehow exorcized a tortured spirit with a Google search. But I didn't find the spirit. The spirit found me. And I had unwittingly invited it to latch itself onto me.

Carol's pain, anger, and chill is part of me now. I've tried setting boundaries, making space for her. I've managed as best I can. But I have good news for you. If you are ever on a walk by Pleasant Run, and while crossing the bridge, pass a fogbank that you can't explain, don't be afraid. It's already spoken for. It's not your burden. It's mine. Just keep walking, and don't follow the trail into the mist.