

### **Jogging in the Rain**

At the age of 83, Gerard had seen quite a few things over the course of his life. Two wars granted him a slew of sights he wished he'd never have to see and even more that would never really be forgotten. Over twenty years as a cop brought about its own images best not remembered. He'd thought he'd seen most of the horrors life had to offer, including the loss of his wife and one of his two children, but as his Monday evening jog taught him, there was still plenty left to see.

Jogging was an act he'd taken up more years ago than he could really recall. For a while he jogged in the morning before work, his way of waking up for the day. At some point it changed into the evening as a means of winding down after a long days work. And now, retired for quite awhile, he simply jogged to stay in shape.

He always jogged alone and through any weather, be it the heat of the summer or cold of the winter. He never missed a day except for holidays, and every so often, even on those, he'd sneak in a quick half hour of jogging if he could.

Clouds had been rolling in all day, and sure enough, around three in the afternoon it started to rain, slowly at first, before picking up momentum. Gerard watched the clouds with a bit of irritation, aware he'd get rather wet that night, not that this would stop him. Rain was the only weather he disliked running in; in fact, he often rearranged his jogging schedule in order to avoid it if he could, but on that Monday, prior commitments prevented him from leaving his house any sooner.

At ten after six he started his jog, running his usual path through the suburban area he called home. The path wasn't always the same, but lately he'd fallen into a routine and didn't see any reason to change it.

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Normally his neighbors were outside and Gerard offered his hellos as he passed, but on a day like this, with dark clouds already creating a false night, the streets were largely deserted. He saw a few children out in rain slickers, jumping in puddles, enjoying the summer rain, but no one else.

He turned a corner, jogging into what might be considered the poorer side of the suburbs, a side that had stood for far longer than the much newer homes surrounding it. Gerard himself was hardly rich, but a frugal life had granted him an easy retirement. Still, he found a part of him preferred this area, the trees older and fully-grown, and each house different and unique all unto themselves. And on this street he found the day became a darker shade of gray, trees helping along the clouds in covering up the sun.

Freddy, a high school student who lived further up the street, had decided to run that day as well, and ran in the opposite direction on the opposite side of the street from Gerard. They saw each other at the same time, and Gerard waved briefly, which prompted Freddy to do likewise.

On the sidewalk up ahead of Freddy there was a dip in the ground, filled completely with water. He almost ran out onto the street in order to avoid getting his feet any more wet than they already were, but guessing the water was only an inch deep at most, he pressed on instead, leaping so that his foot landed directly in the middle of it.

As Freddy discovered, the puddle was just a little deeper than a mere one inch. Much to his surprise, Freddy found himself fully submerged in water, yet still he was sinking further, the light of day shining through a hole up above him.

Aware that getting out of the water precluded a search for answers, Freddy started to swim, and was nearly to the top when he felt something latch onto his ankle. When he

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looked back over his shoulder at what was holding him, he tried to scream, only to fill his mouth with foul tasting rainwater. Of course, the taste in his mouth was the least of his worries.

As for Gerard, he paused when he heard a splashing sound followed by a brief, almost inaudible gasp. He slowed and turned around, curious what had made the sound, and after a few seconds of looking, realized Freddy was nowhere to be seen. After a few more seconds of staring, he decided it didn't really matter, and started back on his way. But something stopped him before he had taken more than four steps.

Gerard turned back around, positive he'd heard splashing, only to find he was still the only soul on the deserted block. Before he could disregard the sound and continue on once more, he discovered the source of the noise.

Much to Gerard's amazement, from out of a water puddle on the sidewalk a hand reached out, clawing at the pavement, followed by Freddy's head, gasping for air. Normally Gerard would've gone over and helped, but the strange circumstances kept him at bay, and before his shock could fade, he was greeted by another sight, even stranger than Freddy's sudden appearance.

A hand reached out of the water beside Freddy and latched onto his wrist, obviously trying to pull the boy back under the water. While he was standing across the street (and his eyes were hardly what they used to be), to Gerard, it appeared as if the hand pulling Freddy back down was made out of water.

Sure enough, another hand formed, not out of the water, but of the water itself, and latched onto Freddy's throat.

Gerard didn't care if he was witnessing the impossible. His sense of duty outweighed his astonishment, and without further hesitation, he ran over to help. Both of his hands closed around Freddy's wrist, right next to the liquid hand. Gerard pulled back with all the strength he had, which wasn't much.

The liquid creature pulled Freddy into the hole just as Gerard tried to pull him out, but in strength, the liquid creature outranked Gerard, and the struggle was short lived.

Three additional hands rose from the water and clamped onto Freddy's squirming body. Gerard's eyes locked with Freddy's right as it became apparent who wasn't going to win the struggle, and he whispered the word sorry under his breath.

He couldn't save Freddy, that much was clear, and letting go was the only way to save his own life as well. As much as he hated to do it, Gerard let go and watched as Freddy was pulled under, mouth open in a silent scream under the water, pulled down into depths so deep he disappeared altogether.

Gerard could do nothing but stare, transfixed by the sight. He might've stayed there all night, staring into a hole that shouldn't exist, filled with living water. Unfortunately for him, his efforts to save Freddy's life had angered whatever it was that dwelled within the hole.

A scream escaped Gerard's mouth as a hand exploded out from the water. An instinct for survival was what saved Gerard's life, an instinct his experience on the police force had granted him. This isn't to say he gracefully dodged the assault, as he fell back instead, nearly breaking his hip in the process, but he did live, and did manage to pull himself up and out of the arm's reach before the hand could grab him.

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At the sound of his scream others came, a few people opening their front doors, curious what was going on, but none had time to even ask Gerard what was wrong before the liquid creature emerged from its hole.

No one spoke and no one moved as three watery arms latched onto the sidewalk, followed by a hulking form, barely able to squeeze its way through the two-foot wide hole. And as it pulled itself out, more arms extended from the body, probably ten at least, many pushing on the ground, others latching onto nearby trees.

When the creature was nearly free, a woman who'd apparently seen enough, screamed, and ran back into her house.

The woman's scream broke whatever trance the watery monster held over the group of people, and others followed her lead, many running into their homes for safety, others walking towards this impossible thing, too in awe, while others still went for their cameras and camcorders.

Gerard himself remained in the middle of the street, still transfixed as the liquid creature finally pulled itself free. He should've been running, an eight foot tall, probably five foot wide, creature made out of pure water now moving towards him, but Gerard found he could do nothing. Perhaps a part of him still wanted to refuse this thing's existence, because Gerard knew what the world had to offer and what just wasn't possible, and what he was seeing certainly wasn't possible.

Right as a hand was about to latch onto Gerard's shoulder, his shock was ended by the sound of a gun firing.

The gun fired was a hunting rifle, which happened to be one of the suburbanite's hobbies, and his aim was for what appeared to be the water demon's head. The bullet had

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no effect, passing through the liquid as if it was, well, water, but it did succeed in gaining the creature's attention.

Five hands shot out of the mass of water, and before the man had time to react, he was picked up off his feet and thrown into the hole in the sidewalk. Those who had still been transfixed now ran, and those recording the event ducked behind cars, their equipment still focused on the action.

What happened to the man Gerard didn't know, but he didn't doubt in the least that he was dead. The distraction had granted Gerard a slightly longer life, but Gerard wasn't foolish enough to think he was going to live.

When the man first fired, drawing the demon's attention, Gerard had almost run, backing up onto the sidewalk as he prepared to take off, but reason took hold, and Gerard knew he'd never make it. Given the speed with which the hands had shot towards the man, Gerard, 83 years old with bad hips made worse by his recent fall, wasn't about to escape. Perhaps in his youth, yes, but not now, and he accepted his coming death.

With the man disposed of, the creature turned back towards its original target, ten hands reaching out towards Gerard. Apparently aware Gerard wasn't going anywhere, it took its time, each hand grabbing hold of another part of Gerard's body before lifting him up off the ground just a little. All the while Gerard simply stared into what he believed to be the creature's face, not that he could really see what expression it made, what with its entire body being translucent. Still, Gerard thought the creature was smiling; at least, until the delivery truck blew its horn.

Sitting behind the wheel of this truck, just as dumbfounded by what he saw as everyone else had been, a man named Rick blew the horn again, almost on top of the

thing. In truth, he wasn't sure if he should hit the brakes or hit the accelerator, and in the end did nothing until the impact.

The creature's entire body exploded and Gerard found himself falling towards the ground, the hands holding him no longer connected to a body. Fortunately he hadn't been high up, and aside from a painful jolt in his legs, was relatively unhurt.

Immediately after impact Rick hit the brakes, frozen behind the wheel, staring into his rear view mirror. He—along with nearly everyone else there—was expecting to see the water reform, pulling back into its shape, but nothing happened. The evening was silent, rain splattering on the ground all around them.

One person, a teenager, slowly moved towards the puddle from which the creature had emerged, and did what everyone wanted to, but didn't have the guts to. He leaned his head over it, all eyes on him, and then, much to everyone's horror, reached out his foot, and pressed it down in the middle. His foot went only an inch at most into the water before it stopped, the puddle apparently a normal gathering of water once more.

There were more questions to answer, Gerard knew, and plenty more to ask, but in truth, he didn't care. No one noticed his departure; most gathered around the puddle, waiting for the police.

Slowly and painfully Gerard walked home. He took up a seat in his living room and sat in the darkness.

Just that morning, had death come for Gerard, he wouldn't have cared, content with a long and interesting life lived. He'd thought he'd seen more than enough for one lifetime. And just one hour ago he'd stood before something that shouldn't exist, and

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once again he would've gladly died, because he'd seen just a little too much of what life apparently had to offer.

A smile touched Gerard's face as he looked through his front window at the pouring rain. Maybe he wasn't ready to die just yet. Maybe there was so much more to see he couldn't possibly imagine, and for just a second he felt like a child again, staring out the window at nothing more than the falling rain, yet seeing it with a sense of wonderment and intrigue he hadn't felt in years.

Gerard laughed to himself and closed his eyes, ready to fall asleep after a long day, but more than anything else, he wanted tomorrow to come. After all, tomorrow, *anything* could happen.