

Case cXs4372:

A Collection of Paranormal
Circumstances



Written by J.J. Brannock
Illustrated by Onyx Mallory

Artist Statement

What makes people afraid? The question has fascinated me ever since I watched my first horror movie when I was fourteen years old. Before that, I wouldn't even look in the direction of a creepy clown costume, but in that theater with my hair standing on end and my arms covering my ears, I was captivated with the feeling I got. Ever since, I have watched horror movie after horror movie to understand how to unlock that feeling of dread in the human psyche. I have written three short horror film scripts to try and capture that fear, even producing and editing one of them myself. After my second script was written I came across and read my first horror book, Stephen King's *The Outsider*. Although I wasn't enthralled with the ending, the beginning of the story was so captivating and terrifying to me. It was then when I discovered my fear of Skinwalkers, creatures who can contort their appearance and voice to lure unsuspecting victims, but I immediately made another discovery: both scripts I had written were about Skinwalkers before I even knew what they were. Taking this knowledge I gained about my fears, I set out to write three short horror stories revolving around fears of the dark, the unknown, and the paranoia that you're not talking to the person you think you are. I hope you enjoy this short collection of works.

Emergency Broadcast

The chilly autumn air whipped into Johnathan's face as he drove down the narrow, one lane highway in his convertible. He wore his work attire, tan khakis and a blue striped button-down, having just recently clocked out. It was starting to get too cold to keep the top down on his convertible, so he was trying to get a few more rides in before closing it up for the winter. Blasting the radio near max volume, Johnathan screamed along to the lyrics as he sped down the road. Suddenly, the booming rock music changed to an earsplitting *beep*. Johnathan nearly swerved his car off the road in surprise before recognizing the familiar melody of a government alarm, like the ones on the TV that played before a weather alert. "Christ," he muttered, "trying to get me killed?"

"This is an emergency announcement," the robotic lady on the radio replied. "Normal programming has been interrupted at the request of the Mayfield County Government. Everyone receiving this broadcast should pay close attention. The information contained in this broadcast is vital to your safety. Please stand by."

The radio turned to static for a moment. Johnathan felt the hair on the back of his neck stand on end. He had been expecting some sort of weather warning that wasn't directed anywhere near him, but instead he had received that message directed at the county he was currently in the heart of. Johnathan became increasingly aware of the dense forest surrounding him, of the road and the tree line around him near pitch black except for the area lit by his dim headlights. The seconds trickled by like hours, with each passing moment of radio static causing his heart to beat harder and faster. After what seemed like an eternity, the voice came back over the radio. "Attention: if you are currently driving within

Mayfield County, pay close attention.” Johnathan’s heart was almost beating out of his chest. “There have been several reports of a s-“ the radio suddenly cut to static. Johnathan had been fine with this when it was just a few seconds without music that he could fill in with his own vocals, but now it seemed like each moment of static was decreasing his likelihood of survival. He leaned down to turn up the volume and slap his radio, and when he looked up he saw that his headlights had caught the figure of something tall and lanky wearing a black hoodie. It could have been human, but it looked to Johnathan almost eight feet tall and contorted in an animal-like way, hunched over like some type of kangaroo ready to jump. He quickly swerved to the right, barely dodging it and driving onto the grass of the forest. Trying to drag it back onto the highway was useless, and even though Johnathan had slammed on the brakes he still smashed hard into a large oak tree.

Everything was dark for a few moments, but soon Johnathan regained consciousness. He turned around to look for the figure, but it was gone. The image of it in his retinas flashed in his eyes as he blinked, but he willed it to seem closer to what he must have been. A younger man, probably in his early twenties, with a black hoodie and gray sweatpants, hunched over looking at his phone or some other device. He slowly regained his senses, hearing the slightly running water as a cold lake breeze washed over him. Johnathan noticed the moon’s reflection barely grazing the lake, most of it having been covered by clouds. He sighed and pulled out his phone to call the towing company. Suddenly, the radio crackled back to life. “-field County, pay close attention. There have been reports of a suspicious entity in the area. Over twenty cars have been found empty. It wears black hoodie and gray

sweatpants. Avoid bodies of water.” Johnathan’s heart sank as the message repeated, the phone still buzzing in his ear.

Suddenly, both were silenced. All Johnathan could hear was the light running of water nearby. The cold breeze passed through him again, reminding him of his vulnerability. Finally, a voice through the phone’s receiver and the car’s speakers. “Are you. Watching. The lake?” Johnathan froze, unable to move, before slowly moving his gaze towards the water and finding what it wanted to show him. A scream.

Johnathan threw open the door of his car and sprinted in the opposite direction of the water, weaving through trees desperately. After a few moments of running, it began to dawn on him. *There should be a road here.* Suddenly, the sound of the government alarm screeched in his ears again. He pat his pockets for his phone but quickly realized he had left it in the car. The sound came from every direction in the forest, like there were sirens hidden just behind the tall oaks.

But instead of hearing the warning again, the voice returned to him. Surrounding him.

“Do you see it? Me?”

Johnathan, unable to think from the earsplitting volume of everything around him, curled into a ball, sobbing.

“Come here.”

Julie and her husband Eric drove fast down the narrow, one lane highway in their jeep, laughing and listening to music. "There's a gorgeous lake up here," Julie called, "I can't wait for you to see it." Suddenly, the booming rock music changed to an earsplitting *beep*, causing Julie to swerve a bit, startled. "This is an emergency announcement," the robotic lady on the radio said. "Normal programming has been interrupted at the request of the Mayfield County Government. Everyone receiving this broadcast should pay close attention. The information contained in this broadcast is vital to your safety. Please stand by. Attention: if you are currently driving within Mayfield County, pay close attention. There have been reports of a suspicious entity in the area. Over thirty cars have been found empty. It wears tan khakis and a blue striped button-down. Avoid bodies of water."

Julie and Eric looked at each other, the hair on the back of their necks standing on end.

The Windows are Housing Something Alive

It happened in the worst possible place. There were so many people. There were so many windows. So few weapons. So little information. I became a monster.

I had just walked into my cubicle after grabbing my morning coffee by the window, having a nice chat with my coworker, Tom. The U.S. versus Canada game had ended the day before, broadcast from Canada too, and since Tom was Canadian of course he had to rub it in. I just listened along to his gloating as we sat down and I began working. He was in the cubicle right next to me and never seemed to have any work to do so I wasn't saved by sitting down at my computer. Normally, I might have decided to fight back against him, but I was especially tired that day. Luckily, my pal Alex, who's one red-blooded American, made his way over to defend the country on my behalf. I couldn't focus on my work with them both around, so I looked up to the TVs hanging from the ceiling, which annoyingly were switched to the news, where broadcasters silently discussed the outcome of the soccer game. That's about the time that it started.

The TV suddenly switched to a breaking news report, but it was nothing like I had ever seen. The whole screen changed to black, and a green box encased some words. I don't remember what they were. I looked at Alex and Tom. Both had noticed the sudden shift in the programming and were staring at the TV, confused. I called to Ella, our manager, and she unmuted the TVs. I still remember what it said.

This is an emergency broadcast by request of the United States Government. Do not look out your windows. I repeat, do not go anywhere near any of the windows in your house or

building. If you see a figure in your window, do not engage with it and look away immediately.

The TV turned to black. The figure in the window they showed... geez, did it have to be so terrifying?

Now, I'm starting to wake up now, but I stay staring at it for a couple seconds after it turns off. Alex and Ella, I'm sure they turned to look at each other, confused, but Tom, the curious bastard, must have looked out through one of the windows. Can't say I blame him, the entire building's made of windows on the outer wall. I heard his scream with a couple other coworkers further off. I looked at Tom, he had the most terrified expression I'd ever seen him make. I stood up to try and see out the window for myself when Alex tackled me to the ground, telling me off. I told him there was nothing to worry about, we were on the fifteenth floor, there was no way anyone could be in the window. I don't know why I was compelled to look, there was just some urge to do it. Luckily, Alex didn't get off of me until the security department came in a few moments later and began boarding up the windows.

I tried asking one of the guards what was going on, but he said he knew as much as I did and that he was just following orders. Tom wasn't looking so good at this point, incredibly pale and murmuring indistinguishably. Ella was trying to talk to him and make sure he was okay but he was completely unresponsive. I took a little lap around the office and checked on all the other people who looked at... looked out the window. Aaron, Ben, Molly, they seemed just as bad. Then the, well, it's hard to remember much about what happened next.

Something changed with Tom. He was still white as a sheet, but he stopped talking. Ella stepped back as he stood up and walked to the window he must have looked at. We watched as he lifted his hand up to touch one of the boards blocking the window. I realized right before it happened. I looked away as Tom ripped the board away from the window. I watched sunlight seep into the building and onto the floor I had moved my eyes to. Ella screamed, followed by several other people from further away, then after a couple seconds I heard more boards being ripped up by those who saw it. The guards tried to stop them, I even heard a gunshot ring out, but eventually would hear their screams too. Soon, I heard them moving to grab those of us that were hiding and dragging us to the windows. I don't think I'll ever be able to forget the screams. I waited for them to find me, it felt like such a long time, and eventually I saw shoes shuffling into my cubicle before a shot rang out. Tom fell to the floor in front of me, blood spouting from his forehead. I recoiled in terror and disgust. After a moment another pair of shoes ran in and Alex bent down to look at me. He told me to get up and handed me a pistol. He wasn't sure what was happening, but we'd need to shoot our way out to escape.

Jeremy, Aaron, McKenzie, Noah, Trey, Ben, Molly, Brendan, Ella. I killed so many people. We thought we got everyone, but Jamie came up from behind me next to the window and grabbed my neck. Alex heard me choking and turned toward me, his face illuminated by sunlight, and whacked me with his pistol. I saw a dark shadow out the window as I passed out.

Jamie was in a pool of blood beside me when I came to. Alex shook me awake, telling me he had seen it, and that I needed to... He wouldn't do it himself, he's always

been weirdly religious like that. I was the only one left after all of it. So I made my way down the concrete steps. They were covered in blood. The smell was unbearable. I met your government people at the entrance and they took me here, that's why I'm still covered in blood. I don't think there's anyone else.

"But you saw it?"

I guess so, I haven't lied, but it was only a small glimpse before I passed out, and I feel fine, maybe I didn't see enough of it for anything to-

A gunshot rang out.

"No lifeforms remaining in the building, upstairs or down, sir."

"Good. Luckily this guy was going to turn too so we can keep this under wraps for a little while longer. See if there's any salvageable windows, then get your scientists on this. If nothing comes of it, demolish the building. Hopefully we can get this under control before anything comes out. Keep the families paid off and relocate them, I don't want anything coming out for at least a month about this incident, if at all."

"Yes sir. Right away."

"God help us all."

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"Yes sir. Right away."

God help us all "

After Hours

Transcript of several torn pages from some sort of diary found in Stronghand Hall's third floor hallways on campus of Midwestern University. Discovered by custodian Deborah Washington on July 27th, 1996.

July 11th

Thankfully one of the doorways was left unlocked for some reason. I don't win the bet unless I have proof, and Cory thinks I'm better at Photoshop than I am, so I brought my polaroid camera with me. Read it and weep. [PICTURE REDACTED]

I'm in no rush to go back and I'm already writing so I might as well keep going. This place is normally so loud and lively, it's pretty creepy coming here. We'll have to come back at night and see if the doorway's still open and do a little ghosthunting like we used to. I heard this place is supposed to be haunted, but at the very least it should be fun to check this place out at night. I'm gonna check out my room to see if my ID still works on it.

HAHAHA it totally does. It's a shame I had to move all my stuff out of here though. Holy shit it got dark fast. I only just now opened the window and I can barely see anything. It feels like I was barely even in here for that long but I guess it's time to go collect my money.

Uhhh ok so the door's locked now. And I mean ALL of them. I tried every single one. Shouldn't these fire alarm ones always be unlocked? Feels like a massive safety hazard.

Whatever. You know that food drive box they said they were gonna donate that I accidentally tried to take from? It's still here, they were supposed to ship it off in like the winter. [PICTURE REDACTED] Worst case scenario I eat some of this and the door will be unlocked in the morning.

July 12th

The door still won't open. I camped out on the nice couch in the lobby in case someone came in so I could sneak out, but I think that was a bad idea because I kinda freaked myself out. I thought I heard voices at some point in the night but it was just my imagination. The cleaning people are supposed to come on Saturdays though so I should be fine, just need to wait until tomorrow. One more picture of me for good measure in case you try and argue I'm lying. [PICTURE REDACTED]

July 13th

When I woke up I couldn't see the sun out of any of the windows so it must've been past noon. I don't think the cleaning people came, I would have heard their vacuums or something. I misplaced my camera or something, I wasn't able to find it this morning. This place is starting to really creep me out. I don't have to worry about running out of food anytime soon, but I swear I hear people at night. Wait, I think I hear Debbie.

THAT'S NOT DEBBIE. I DON'T KNOW WHAT

IT TALKS JUST LIKE HER.

I hid in the bathroom because whatever it is didn't see me. I didn't get a good look but when I got closer it stopped sounding like Debbie. It changed to something else. Your voice maybe? It wasn't hers. Why haven't you called for help yet? You know where I am. It's been 3 days.

July ???

There's a full moon in the sky. I can see it rising. It was a crescent just a few days ago. It should be Sunday now. Whoever that was must have left, I didn't hear any voices tonight but I only just now left the bathroom. I don't know why it had me so freaked out, I guess I just didn't want to get in trouble. The doors still aren't opening though.

What's going on????

I went back upstairs to my hall to spend today. My ID doesn't work on my door anymore. I put my ear up to it and thought I heard someone. It sounded sorta like me, but when I knocked it went away. I even stayed there for an hour but no one came out and there was no more sound.

I heard a vacuum cleaner running downstairs so I ran down to where I thought I heard it. I found the vacuum cleaner but there's no one here.

July 20th I think?

Why isn't anyone here or even searching for me? I've stopped trying the doors by this point, so

Holy shit I hear someone downstairs. I think it's the police I don't even care.

WHAT THE HELL IS THAT THING

I ran upstairs but it chased me. There was no place to hide so I tried my ID again and it worked for some reason. It doesn't know where I went, I can't hear it anymore.

The sun's going down. I don't know what to do anymore.

[MISSING DATE]

The sun hasn't come up yet. I haven't been able to sleep. I'm too afraid that whatever it was will come back.

It's been too long. Where's the sun? Where's the moon? I can't even see any stars. I must have dozed off at some point because I forget most of the night but there's still no sign of a sunrise. Did I sleep through the whole day?

There's knocking at my door. I looked through my peephole but it's completely black.

I can hear Debbie's voice outside the door. How does she know I'm in here? I didn't make any sound.

WE LOOKED AT EACH OTHER UNDER THE DOOR. I DON'T KNOW WHAT THAT IS.

HELP ME

It's banging on my door. Asking me kindly to open it. Debbie says she's worried sick. But it's not Debbie.

It sounds like that police officer again now. I know it's not though. I saw it and it's not that.

Why are you banging on the door? I knew you'd come get me eventually. You're kind of scaring me though with how aggressively you're knocking. Let me just come get that for you.

Mike Franklin reportedly entered Stronghand Hall for cleaning on July 13th. He saw nothing out of the ordinary, vacuuming and tidying up the lobby and first floor. On July 15th, Cory Jenkins notified the police that [REDACTED] has been missing for several days and may be inside the Hall. The police thoroughly investigated the area to find no one. A manhunt search began shortly thereafter. On July 20th, Mike Franklin again entered the Hall, cleaning the second and third floors. Again, nothing out of the ordinary was reported or mentioned after interviews. On July 27th, Deborah Washington found several torn out letters and pictures from a book on the third floor hallway. After initially throwing them away, she began cleaning the rooms until discovering a large bloodstain coming from Room 360, unlocking the door to find the mangled remains of [REDACTED] inside of the miniature refrigerator. The room itself appears untouched after being vacated on June 14th, 1996. The remainder of the book and the polaroid camera has not yet been recovered. A murder case was opened on July 27th, 1996, but no outside evidence besides that listed here has been uncovered. Room 360 has been closed off to student inhabitation for

investigative purposes, but the rest of the Stronghand Hall was reopened in January of 1997. Dated July 27th, 2001.