

To Report Strange Behavior

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The following story is an alternative short story to how the world may respond to such a thing as a "Zombie Attack". It does not follow the usual panic and action-hero cliché. This story shows a rather dim, confused, subdued world, that is very frightened.



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Listening to the news in an idling car in the company parking lot did not qualify as the best use of company time. Josh should have been at his desk, not rooted to the driver's seat leaning towards his radio. The news remained the same, except for the words they used. People still frightened with the police still overloaded.

Authorities are asking people to refrain from taking the law into their own hands. City sheriff Homes made a formal statement asking the people not to form any sort of militia or engage in any other militant activities. He also stated that any act of vigilantism would be treated as a crime during this spree, the same as looting or assault. Authorities further stated that the use or distribution of Bath-Salts would be treated as a major drug crime and punished to the full extent of the law.

He turned the key and the engine sputtered out to a stop as he muttered the words 'Bath-Salts'. Nothing else quite made sense. Uncomfortable in his seat, Josh pulled at his buttoned jacket which fit tighter around his middle than he wanted to admit. Getting out of the car he leaned on the door as he watched another car drive into the parking lot. The autumn sun was still stifling hot, even this early, and the collar of his shirt pressed uncomfortably tight around his neck.

Anthony, his co-worker, got out of the car and took a moment to run his hands against the front of his shirt, trying to smooth the wrinkles out of it. He hadn't ironed either. They made eye contact and greeted each other with a nervous smile.

Ironing your clothes; just one more thing that had seemed to be mattering less and less. Josh almost felt accomplished that he had showed up on time. As ridiculous as it seemed he still felt nervous crossing the apartment parking lot to his car. He had actually allowed himself five minutes this morning to watch the lot from his window for...for what? For anything he didn't like he supposed. Other people were late or had not shown up at all yesterday. It would likely be the same today- most called in sick, others simply didn't show. Josh tucked his shirt in more tightly so it pulled straight as Anthony came over, giving a short resigned wave.

Another day, he said.

Josh nodded plainly but didn't say anything as they walked in. Anthony seemed content keeping his thoughts and concerns to himself as well. They parted ways at the elevator, Anthony going up to the other project managers for their morning meeting, Josh onward to the manufacturing floor.

The work day commenced as it would any other day. The company was clearly understaffed and the employees almost sulked up and down the hallways. The day went on, business as usual.

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the case was the same as most previous. The two officers called for the man to stop, and deadly force was only used when one officer's use of mace as well as warning shots were ineffective. Both officers accounted for their use of firearms stating the man did not stop approaching at a steady pace until he had been shot several times, including the neck and head

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To Report Strange Behavior

Josh paced in his living room, holding his cell phone in his hand. He traced the perimeter of his apartment in circles, always glancing out the windows, almost subconsciously. He could not quite make up his mind. Josh always felt himself to be sturdy, a little shy, maybe, and while soft spoken he spoke and acted in a deliberate way. What he hated most were rash decisions and over-reacting.

Is this really what I saved that food for? Is the world actually coming to this? Looting, killing, cannibalism?

He crossed his living room to the kitchen and opened the corner cupboard by his sink. Canned foods, mostly Spam and baked beans, some vegetables as well as a gallon can of peeled tomatoes sat quietly tucked away. He shut the cupboard and walked across his living room again to the back slider. The food had originally been saved for a shortage or something like an economical crisis.

The clock on the wall read 7:45pm in the dimming evening light. Since getting home from work, he had done nothing but walk- very quickly across the dim lot, and back and forth through his home.

The phone in his hand vibrated under his tight grip. He checked the name sighed, answering after the second vibration ran up his arm.

â Josh?â Came a quiet voice.

â Yes honey.â

â â Are you still coming over?â

â I was planning on it.â

â Iâ d really like that.â

Josh sighed and stood by his back slider. She wasnâ t made for this. He didnâ t even think he was. How had everything gotten so bad so quickly? Was he really thinking about taking his food storage to his girl friends house? And his guns? Or bringing her out to him to hole up and wait out the storm in the streets?

This is the weird justification I always used when I wanted to buy another pistol. And my hunting rifle.

â Just in case of a break-in honey.â Or, â You never know what might happen, honeyâ . That's what I always said, but are things that bad?

â Are you there?â

â Yes, Iâ m here honey.â

â When are you coming over? You got off work a long time ago.â

â Iâ ve been... thinking.â

â Thinking?â

â About what to do. Iâ m coming over, but Iâ m not sure we should go to the grocery store.â

â Oh good! I donâ t want to go either, Josh. But I donâ t have much food saved or anything. Just some canned soup I think. The news just said there have been fights and things at all stores. Not just the grocery stores. But I donâ t think weâ re getting the full story here. My mom and I talked on the phone, there are

To Report Strange Behavior

full on riots where she lives in Chicago. Like, the National Guard is mobilizing or something? It's not just...them. Regular people are fighting the police now too. And more and more people are in the streets, walking aimlessly then chasing people...and... her voice caught in her throat and she sounded on the verge of crying.

Josh wanted to ask her, 'What is there to hide on the news? That things haven't gone quite to hell as it all seems?' but refrained. Upsetting her more would not help at all. I have some meat in my freezer. I'll bring that over with me for us to eat tonight.' He said instead.

You're thinking we should eat frozen food first?

I don't know, he said carefully. I told you, I've been trying to think about what's best to do. He found himself walking in his bedroom now. Looking under the bed he saw the hunting rifle and hunting shotgun. Neither were loaded, but he had a box of ammo for each of them in his desk. He didn't want to mention the guns to her.

Still pacing in silence she again asked quietly, Are you there?

Yes." he said more confidently now, his mind made up. "I'm coming over right now. We're not going to the store, but I'll bring the sausage and the noodles I have. We'll stay there through the night. In the morning, you'll come with me to the Valley, out of the city. You should bring any food you have, sensible clothes, good shoes.... He visualized himself going through a list he had made in his mind.

The Valley is still a city.

You know what I mean. Out of the downtown area where it's more crowded. You'll just start staying with me here.

I'm glad you're not going to work tomorrow.' she said. When he told her she was wrong, her only reply, I'm scared, Josh.

I know. It's pretty strange out there.' he said now looking at his fridge.

What are we going to do?' she asked after another long moment of silence.

We're going to eat sausage. While we can.

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Authorities are saying the best thing people can do is try and maintain a level of normalcy. More attacks and sightings of cannibalism have been reported, though governor Chercamp is calling for calm in the local community, echoing the President who called for the nation to remain calm.

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This morning his car idled to a stop in the middle of the road as Josh stared at the parking lot. His expression remained blank as he slowly put the car back into first and rolled into the parking lot. He took the time to count the twenty cars in the lot. Only twenty people or so had showed up for work. He looked at the clock on his dash. It read 8:38AM.

To Report Strange Behavior

Today he joined the late comers. An unexpected delay had been caused by arguing with his girlfriend about leaving her in the apartment alone. The points of the argument varied but their decisions remained the same. The guns are loaded. I hate guns. Fill the Tupperware with water. Why can't you stay? Don't eat anything canned. Should I be calling people? Lock the doors. Is it really that bad? Isn't it really that bad? Stay away from the windows? Don't be ridiculous. I want you to stay. I have to go to work.

And on, and on, and on.

When Josh walked through the double wide doorway into the manufacturing floor, the lights were out and the machinery sat deadly silent. He peeked around the corner into the dark room, suddenly frightened. He looked up and down the empty hall way. He turned on his heel away from manufacturing and made way towards the offices where his production manager Ramone would be. Half way to the elevator he nearly shouted when they turned the same corner nearly walking into each other.

“ Oh, Josh.” Ramone seemed legitimately surprised and not just by fear. Then he laughed, a little too hard. “ Strange times, huh?” All Josh could think to do was nod and bite his tongue. He took a deep breath, as if to say something, but Ramone beat him to it, “ Well, we sent home manufacturing. There weren't enough people to safely work the machines. Paid vacation on us.” He smiled, too broad.

Josh could only imagine what affect people's fear was having on companies like his own. People staying home, being sent home, companies trying to maintain their profit margin and business hours, but admitting people had a good reason to be afraid.

He felt the bath-salt attacks and their disruptions were being treated like a large storm. Frightening? Maybe. Temporary? Certainly.

“ Ramone, should I even be here?” he asked slowly.

Ramone sighed, “ You know, we shut down power to the whole floor trying to save energy and all since it isn't being used. Not my call, mind you. Your work station is in there?” Josh nodded and looked over his shoulder down the empty hall way.

He looked Ramone in the eye, feeling fairly confident now he said, “ I'll check in again tomorrow, boss.”

“ You know, could I get a ride, Josh?” His manager asked eagerly as if he were at a party that had grown dull or out of control.

In the car again, 9:02AM, Josh pulled out of the parking lot and down the road. The road stood rather empty, aside from the truck that flew by way over the speed limit. It was a strange thing to know that the police were so over taxed, and yet he could not find a single cop car or any person on the street at all, really.

“ Josh, would you pull over here.” Ramone said, pointing at a Zips restaurant.

Josh looked at him, frowning, “ Really?”

Ramone shrugged not looking back at him, “ With everything falling apart, I want a cheeseburger while I can get one.”

Strangely, Josh couldn't argue the logic. He pulled up to the first window and no one stood ready to greet them and take their order. He pulled up to the second window and after a moment reached out and knocked

To Report Strange Behavior

on the smooth glass. A short silence passed- he and Ramone looked at each other. As he pushed the car into gear, the window opened.

The young, slight girl who peeked through the window was almost straight from a poster board. She had straw blond hair complete with pigtails, her yellow Zips visor pulled down just above her eyes. She even had freckles and a mousy voice to complete the picture.

“There’s no one here but me. I’m the only one who showed up today.” came her slightly scared, slightly embarrassed mouse voice. Josh immediately sympathized with her but only silence came from the car in response. The girl continued, “I couldn’t open the register, but I did make a few burgers, I can give you guys a few. Maybe pay when my manager comes back? Maybe later today or tomorrow?”

Josh nodded and said, “I could give you money to slide under the register, for later,” but the girl only shook her head with a grim frown as she disappeared back into the kitchen area.

“That was a nice try.” Ramone said looking at him. Josh only shrugged.

The girl returned with a small brown Zips bag, “Here are four burgers. The fries have gone pretty stale.” She handed over the bag and Josh took it handing it further over to Ramone.

“Thank you, Ria,” Josh said reading her name tag.

As if to finish the interaction in a reassuring way she said a little more loudly, “I’m going to stay a while longer. I’m just going to pass out burgers until I don’t have any more. Then I’ll go home.”

Josh gave his signature nod, at a loss for words, and rolled up his window as she shut hers.

The car hummed as it drove down the long stretch of vacant road. Ramone clicked on the radio while he unwrapped his burger.

“Normalcy. Police dispatchers are requesting that even though you may be put on hold for up to an hour, to please remain on the line. Everyone is to report any strange behavior.”

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