

News and Weather

by Iain Rob Wright, 1984–

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“This is Jane Hamilton, signing off for Midlands-UK News.” Jane handed her microphone to a production assistant and let out a shiver. She was wearing a huge pink ski-jacket but the cold was still getting through. “Was that okay, Steve?”

Her cameraman, Steve, gave her a thumbs up. “Perfect. There might have been a slight issue with snow on the lens, but nothing we could do with things the way they are. “

“I know, it’s crazy, right?” Jane looked down from the motorway bridge and examined the tipped-over transit van. She had no idea what the contents were, spilled all over the snow, and each second only shrouded them further in layers of fine white powder. As a professional news reporter, Rule One was always to remain unaffected by the stories she was reporting, but this one gave her the willies. All of the meteorologists back at the studio were flummoxed by the recent weather—a few went so far as to say it was impossible. She took their expert opinions very seriously and had some serious anxiety about what the coming days would bring. People had already started dying and she couldn’t help but worry that the toll would continue to rise substantially.

“You okay, Jane?”

She let out a breath and watched it steam in front of her face. "Yeah, Steve. Thanks. I just don't like this cold."

"You want me to get one of the guys to fetch you a coffee from the van? There's still a bit left in the Thermos."

Jane cringed at the thought of the stale taste of lukewarm coffee from a flask. "No, thanks, that's okay. I just want to get back to the studio. There's going to be other things to report before the night is through, I can feel it."

"You're probably right," agreed Steve. "We'll get going in a few minutes. Mike and Tony are just trying to dig the van loose."

Jane's eyes widened. "What?"

Steve tutted. "Hard to believe, but in the short time you were reporting, the snow was heavy enough to cover the wheels."

"Oh, hell!"

Steve waved a hand. "Don't worry about it, Kitten. We'll be gone in a jiffy."

Jane narrowed her eyes. "I told you to stop calling me that. We're not together anymore."

"Pity," said Steve. "You look hot in that ski-jacket."

Jane laughed and decided to head for the van. The snow was beginning to melt through her boots and her thick socks were becoming soaked. It was hard to walk and, after only a few steps, her calves began to ache. She wanted nothing more than to wrap up warm at home with a DVD and her cat, Thompson, but she knew the night would be long. At times like this it was all hands on deck. The freak weather conditions would keep every news channel in the world busy until its cause was known.

"Hey, Mike, how's it going?"

Mike was kneeling next to the van, mini-shovel in hand. "My hands are so numb you could put them on a pair of tits and I wouldn't even know."

"Charming," said Jane, laughing. "I guess I should stay out of the van until you're done. My weight would probably make it harder to get the van free?"

"Dunno," said Mike, "but don't worry about it. I'll manage."

"You're a dear," said Jane. She patted him on the head and stepped into the van via the side door, then slid it shut after her. The van was slightly warmer than outside, but was still uncomfortably chilly. A bank of blinking monitors lined one side and she sat on the stool in front of them. The monitor on the left showed the studio feed that was currently going out live to the nation. The monitor on the right showed the feed from Steve's camera outside—the images were still streaming but were not being recorded. Back at the studio, one of her colleagues was interviewing an ecology expert. He was currently refuting claims that a damaged Ozone layer could be the cause of all the snow.

Something caught her attention on the other monitor. The camera mounted on a tripod outside had picked up the image of Tony, the other production assistant. He was currently taking a piss off the top of the bridge to the deserted road below.

"Nice," Jane commented, shaking her head. Steve was in the picture too, speaking on his phone. He was probably checking in with the studio to confirm it was okay to come in. Beyond both men was something else: a dark shape in the background, partly out of focus and obscured by the snowfall.

What is that?

The shape seemed to be coming closer, heading towards Steve and Mike at the centre of the bridge. Jane leant closer to the screen to try and make out some further details. The dark shadow didn't seem like another person. It was closer to a small vehicle than anything else—perhaps a motorcycle.

As Jane continued watching, the shadow continued getting closer. Inch by inch, the shape revealed itself. When it became clearer, Jane was even more confused.

“What the...?”

It appeared to be an animal of some kind; a huge dog maybe—but too big and too hairy. It was creeping up slowly behind Tony, who was still taking a leak.

Jesus, is that guy part-camel or what?

Jane kept waiting for Tony or Steve to notice the creature, but they did not. She tried urging them through the monitor to look around, but of course she knew it was hopeless—she wasn't telepathic. Just when she was about to lean out of the van and shout for their attention, the creature made itself known to the two men outside.

The over-sized hound pounced at Tony from behind, crushing him up against the bridge's railings. The monitor didn't give out sound but Jane could hear his startled cries from inside the van anyway. The bloodcurdling screams that followed were unpleasant enough, but twinned with the disturbing images on the feed monitor they were horrifying. The beast outside had pinned Tony to the ground and was ripping and tearing at his back. The snow turned red all around.

Steve realised the situation and made a run for it, most likely heading for the van. He exited the view of the camera and Jane was left wondering how close by he was. A second later her stomach turned as she watched the hound-beast leaving the mutilated corpse of Tony behind to give chase to Steve.

Jane stared at the monitor and tried to control her breathing. Steve's screams were coming closer and it wasn't long before she heard Mike's join them. Outside of the van the two men were being attacked by something she couldn't describe—something unnatural.

Banging at the van door.

“Jane, let me in. Open the door.” It was Steve.

Jane stared at the door handle and found herself unable to move from her seat. Every part of her mind screamed at her to let Steve in, but every fibre of her nerve-endings refused to let her move. Steve continued to scream as ripping sounds began. Whatever was out there was ripping him to shreds. Mike was probably already dead, and here she was, hiding like a coward while it all happened only inches away from her.

I just report the news. I don't take part in it.

Steve's screams finally stopped and Jane sat in silence, listening only to the sounds of her own panting breath. She turned back around to face the monitors. The live feed from the studio had gone black, but the camera outside was still recording. On it she could see the snarling face of a jagged-toothed demon appear from off-camera. Then she saw its jaws gape wide and the video feed was no more.

Jane waited in terror for what seemed like an eternity, hoping against all hope that the beast would go away. But it didn't.

The van began to rock as the creature attacked it, trying to get at the prize inside. Jane Hamilton cowered in the rear of the vehicle, knowing it was only a matter of minutes until she joined the recent death toll.

