

## **BAD THINGS HAPPENED IN QUARANTINE**

### **Flashfiction horror: Do We Have a Bad Connection?**

Everyone starts appearing in those stupid little video squares and at first everything is working normal.

There are some audio problems, nothing big.  
I'm not a tech person but the meeting is going okay.

And then, I would say, the first sign of it was pretty subtle. It took a while for me to get really freaked out.

Jasmine from Human Resources puts a bunch of weird emoji things in the chatbox. Spider icons. And so all these black spiders just keep getting printed all through the chatbox and nothing else.

*Jasmine? I go. Are you doing that?*

*--Doing what?*

*--The emoji thing.*

And then Javier just talks over me, and says, *If the quality control people can't speed up on the third-quarter releases, I don't see how any snakeskin is going to represent the particulate matters we have to multiply.*

Which doesn't make any sense.

But everyone just responds to him like it *did* make sense.

Kelly goes, *It depends. If there's ripe fruit and it can be harvested without provocation, then it could have a dual effect on the outcome. Not that we haven't been through the ringer on the racial hurricane before.*

And everyone laughs. Like this was a joke that made sense.

*--I'm sorry?*

*Well, Kelly answers me, I'm just saying if there's 20 to 1 against a tide sweep, and a half dozen other baseballs being thrown in unison, I just see no reason not to put forward an agenda of cultural harmony.*

So I'm getting very disturbed. They are not the kind of people to pull pranks in a videochat for business during a crisis.

But no one admits it's a joke. Which is really mean. But I'm not sure what to do. So I just go along with everything, nodding and staying quiet.

It's when one of their faces distorts that I begin to think, it's me.  
Something with me.

The chat just keeps going, but Dennis Byers looks distorted, like his flesh

on his face is all drooping and deformed but he's just talking like normal.

Mary has a pet rat, a white one, and lets it kind of run around her arm and so on while we're talking, which gives me the creeps, but no one complains. And then--and I barely noticed it with everything--she puts the rat in her mouth and just consumes it.

I'm feeling sick, and then Dennis goes back into the distance on the videochat where you can't see him very well, and Kelly is droning on and on, making no sense whatsoever, and then I see Dennis.

Dennis, on the webcam but way back, blurred in the background, is murdering a woman, throwing her around, and we can't see what is really going on but, I mean, you can tell. I could tell. This was... not right...

*Oh my God, I hear myself say, Are you guys seeing this?*

Kelly reacts sharply to my interruption, *We are trying to get some work done in the middle of a pentagonal circumscription, so if you could just foliate impersonally, that would be great. Don't be a margaret.*

Then several of them echo this, all annoyed with me, *Don't be a margaret.*

I'm just in horror. I try to protest this insanity but my words are not understood, and Dennis comes back up the webcam and continues the chat, kind of moodily, but just behaving like it's all normal.

*Dennis, I bark at him, what the hell were you doing back there? Someone needs to call the police.*

And he stares at me while everyone keeps going, and it's just so evil, his head down, this vicious stare.

And he says, *I'm coming to your house right now, Addie, and I'm going to show you once and for all just what a fucking Margaret you are.*

The videocall is still going on, as if it means nothing that Dennis has just walked out.

I stumble toward the window, so shaken I can't believe it, and I just sort of look out there and I know Dennis is coming for me, and I can't get the door of the house open.

I'm in total terror that I'm losing my mind. If it's a dream, I can't wake up, and it's so real. And I look outside and there's nothing in the city. No one. I break the window, and I run out, and there is no one anywhere, no one anywhere at all, but I look back at my house and I can still hear the Zoom call going on, that conference is the only thing in the universe, and I swear I hear Kelly saying, *I think he left the call. He's going to show Addie. He's going to show Addie that she is nothing but a fucking Margaret.*