

BAD THINGS HAPPENED IN QUARANTINE

Flashfiction horror: Last Thing We Need Right Now is a Crimewave.

T-finity Cable provides its customers with the finest service and most reliable network in the world, is what I say with a smile at every single repair stop I make, even though, as a woman, you can't be too friendly or the men start in with all that.

These guys here, I don't know. One of them looks straight out of some hillbilly horror show with those teeth of his, and the other one is carrying around--I swear to you--what looks like a bloody clarinet from some high school band carnage we haven't heard about yet.

I just need to get into the back of your TV set here, I explain as I do it.

Black folks like you, the older guy says, we don't see repair people like that much.

Well, I sort of laugh, We're out there. How many repair calls did you have to make in quarantine?

Can't stand quarantine, the younger one says, in kind of a weird snarl.

Yeah, no one can, I answer, checking the cable, adding, But it's pretty much over now, the stay-at-home order is lifted.

We don't feel good going out there, says the older one.

We are staying put, says the younger one, pronouncing it in such a way that he seems like he might be mentally disabled, or maybe just with a speech impediment.

The cable's bad. I switch it with a new one as quickly as I can.

It might be good for you to get out, I say without really thinking.

It might be good for you not to, the older one answers.

I look up, finished with my work.

This thing is not over, says the older one.

Okay. I say, and I try to smile nicely and get my things and go.

But they are standing in my way, very clearly blocking me.

We'd like you to stay in case something goes wrong out here, the older guy says, and he's not acting like this is his sense of humor.

I'm going to go, I say forcefully, but as I move forward, the two of them fully thrust themselves at me, grasping my arms, and trying to push me

down.

I'm eight years in martial arts, and it is not a fucking fair fight. I knock these assholes back and I go running through the house hoping for a rear exit. The thing is dark as hell, and there's junk everywhere--and I mean junk--fucking old TVs, a radiator, but the back door of this hellhole is locked. I feel someone yanking me back by the throat, and I twist free.

I'm running, body like a freight train, headed back to the front door but one of them dives on me--I fumble, get back up--

But the younger one comes at me with a huge Bowie knife, and I can't even tell you what my body is doing, but that blade is out of his hand and in mine before you know it.

Both of those nightmares are lying flat out on the floor, one dead, the other whimpering.

I stumble back against the wall, and as soon as I can, I call the police.

It can't be five minutes and they are coming through the door.

What happened? The first cop, a heavysset white guy with a winemark on his face, asks me.

These guys wouldn't let me leave, I tell him, dazed.

We got to write a report, the second one says. He's a giant cinderblock tower of a guy with a permanently pissed-off look.

Okay, I'm thinking, you got to write a report. What the hell is this? There are two guys laid out on the floor, I don't even know if they're dead, why are we talking about paperwork?

Just step over there for a second, the first cop says. He points toward the wall.

Can I get out of here? I ask. I don't want to be in this room with...

No, he says harshly. Get over there like I asked you.

So I do. I'm all bewildered and out of it. They check the men on the floor. No pulse, one cop says. Neither one of them.

The two cops come over and look at me a long time. I'd like you to tell us what went on here.

So I do. It's not a long story.

That's a little hard to take, the bodybuilder monster says.

I'm sorry, I say to him, what do you mean?

I just think it doesn't sound right.

What doesn't sound right about it?

The cop keeps looking at me, as if pretending concern, or searching for the lie. He says, I'm not sure. Go over it again.

Go over what again? There's nothing to go over. Can I get out of here and we finish this somewhere else?

Hey, listen, don't get hostile, the older one cautions me. We are here to help you, we work for you, okay?

Okay.

So I'm just going to ask you to go over it one more time.

Go over...

What happened, yeah. Just so we get it clear.

These men attacked me.

What I want to understand is why.

Why?

Yes. You don't have to act like we are the enemy, ma'am. I'm trying to ascertain the circumstances.

They called me out here on a repair visit, and then they wouldn't let me leave.

Why is that? Did you provoke them?

I didn't provoke anyone--what are you talking about?

I'm just trying to understand. A Black woman comes into the house, presenting herself as an expert...

A what? I'm a repair person, that's my job, I'm a repair person. They called me.

Right. Right. (The cops sound reasonable but they're pacing around me a little bit, fully checking me out. I'm not just uncomfortable at this point. I'm feeling shivers start to come.)

I'm not sure this has to become an 'incident,' the older cop says.

I think it's already an incident. (I'm very upset, the tone of my voice. I don't want to sound like this.)

I'm sorry, the bigger one says, I'm not seeing any reason to write this up.
Unless they have family that wants to press charges.

Unless *they* have family that...? (I trail off. Cannot make sense of this.)

The older cop says, I'm going to recommend to you that you come with us
and get some dinner, maybe. Make you feel better. Let all this go.

Then he looks down at the bloody bodies here and he just says casually, we
have people who can take care of all this for us.

And I realize I'm in the for the weirdest night of my life.