

BAD THINGS HAPPENED IN QUARANTINE

Flashfiction horror: Delivery Man.

We ordered a lot of things in quarantine. Like, a lot.

We didn't need to go anywhere. This was the advantage of not living in 1918. You felt like a lonely king. You came to yearn for the arrival of the delivery man, the only person we ever got to see in person.

Ours was a little odd.

I don't know how, really. What it was about him. He was normal looking, in fact, I think most people would say he was very handsome and definitely cordial and did his job right, but I guess it was how official--almost unfriendly--he was.

And he made you feel in the strongest, fiercest way, that you could not refuse him.

We had to be especially careful because my husband and I take care of his mother in the house. She's 75 years old and has a breathing problem, oxygen tank, that awful rasping sound all the time, but it is what it is.

The delivery man--at first we laughed about him, my husband and I, I made a joke of our almost-weird desire to see the guy, to have someone to talk to, and being a bit of a flirty female myself, I have to say I did try to have some fun with the man. He didn't react at all.

But he seemed to take a liking to us because he started delivering things we didn't order.

It seemed like he was just giving us stuff off the truck that no one claimed.

Or something.

Along with all the regular items--cleaning solvents, batteries, light bulbs, groceries, a new desk lamp, a special screen for the computer to make it less bright--he left us other things.

He dropped off a weird gadget that looked like a handvac. It came in a fancy plain-black box. It said on it, "Attach to wall and step clear to remove dust and grime from the home," and that's it. So we did. I put it up against the wall and it suctioned to it without me doing anything. I hit the button and it cleaned the house. I mean, it cleaned everything. The walls looked intensely white, it was amazing, and the carpets were pristine, the dog hair drawn up away and into the small space at the base of the unit on the wall.

It cleaned crumbs from your plate. They would just float away, sucked onto the wall. Even our skin became very strange feeling because I think it had pulled all the germs and little whatevers off it.

When the sink got plugged, a few minutes later, the delivery man brought this doohickey that looked like a wine corker but big. We put it over the drain like the directions said. The clog was gone. It was the scariest looking shit that came out of that drain, pulled up and trapped by the delivery man's gadget. It looked like a skinned animal. I'm not being poetic.

My husband threw it away wearing gloves and an apron.

We asked the delivery man why he gave the appliance to us, why he was bringing us all this stuff and he just said, *it's just some things you seem like you need.*

One thing he gave us was like a little flashdrive, flashstick thing, whatever you call them. We plugged it into the TV. For awhile, it was amazing, you could watch anything, these great shows and movies. Then it started showing us things that, I mean, I don't know how to explain them--they were terrifying, horror movies I never heard of.

We turned off the TV I guess for good.

Then, just before we came out of quarantine, the delivery man brought this box that was stained, like something was leaking from it.

I'm telling you, it just did not seem like you could refuse him.

Or even question him.

So he drives off and we open this cardboard box, and inside were these human faces.

They looked exactly like human faces that had been removed and dried off like leather... not at all like masks... my husband was sure that these were medical supplies, probably for experiments in facial transplantation or something, but there was no phone number to call someone about it or anything.

We asked the delivery man that night when he came back and he said the address was right. And he left us this other box.

What was in that was pretty disturbing, too, because it was like this bundle of hair and looping bloodless fleshy things that to me looked like cleaned-up entrails, you know, like guts thrown into a box.

It was so weird. Still, we didn't say anything, just put the box outside on the back porch.

The next day he drops off this bigger box. That was the kicker. In that one, there was a mass of this fleshy substance, big, like a beanbag chair made out of human beings... I mean, it was disgusting. There was the

beginning of hair growing on it, and what seemed like arm stumps.

We just sat in the living room and stared out at the boxes on the back porch. Listening to my mother-in-law's wheezing and the oxygen machine hissing.

The dog ran away. It scratched and yelped to get out and it just left, we couldn't find it.

Third day in, we could see something assembling itself on the back porch, through the gray day's light rainfall. I mean, that's what it was doing. Drawing itself together.

The flesh pod began to quiver and, like, flex muscles. And the arms began to develop. It took about three hours, and we just watched in fascination. My mother-in-law slept through it, but we felt like we couldn't move.

We even said so. Talking didn't help.

Legs began to move out of this thing, but twisted into unuseable positions, just flexing and flopping, vile, and from the other box the faces began to slump out and slowly migrate toward the white corpse of conjoined bodies. The faces, stretched and distorted and drooping, seemed to almost stitch themselves into the mess.

When it came toward us from the back porch it was a mess of tongues.

It had mouths and they were gasping, tongues wild, and the thing, which was like a crawling deceased animal made loosely out of many people, an artistic accident of trying to manufacture something natural or human, slid open the glass door and came in.

And we just watched it crawl slowly over to my sleeping mother-in-law, crawl with grasping hands and stumps, and pull her with its muscled white flesh into its many mouths, and expand until there was nothing there but a huge white growing blanket of skin, draped and stretched over her wheelchair.

We were just kind of dazed and left the room, and I heard a strange peeling sound that I'll never forget, and when I looked back, the fleshy parachute of shuddering tissue was shrinking, pulling in on itself, condensing into nothing, until it got so small it was like a manta ray made of white skin and a veneer of hair.

The appliance on the wall sucked it slowly up and we never saw it again or asked any questions about it and just let it go.

We have a new delivery man now, I notice.