

## **BAD THINGS HAPPENED IN QUARANTINE**

### **Flashfiction horror: Let Go.**

He never had a lot of friends to begin with. Wasn't a people person. But he did his job. Insurance adjuster. Got along with his co-workers just fine.

When quarantine came, they let him work from home, same as everybody. He was alone all the time. They didn't even connect online visually, so he started to quit worrying about dressing.

He ordered everything. Stuff left at the door. Never saw anyone.

Out of boredom, he started eating.

Fact is, he let himself go. His hair grew. A patchy beard began. But those were the times. Everyone was kind of like this.

It was when he stopped bathing that he might have made a mistake.

It was just, what was the point, really?

So there was a smell.

He knew it. Nothing motivated him much, though. So there was the weight thing and the smell. But there was also such long stretches of nothing to do, so even he thought it was surprising he never did anything about it.

He would look out his window. Neighborhood dull and dry as bone. There were two old people who lived separately at opposite ends of the block. He worried they might need help getting things in quarantine. One of them, he had a phone number. He checked in. Shirley was doing okay. The other one he had to go see. He was surprised to find a young woman open the door.

She was shocked to see him too. She knew him from backyard barbeques years back. He could read her face: *you really let yourself go, my God.* And then she actually said, you... you used to be so good looking.

Anyway, the elderly man was being looked after.

After awhile at his house, he started to resent paying for some things. He stopped paying the pool service. He didn't do it himself, though. Things around the house started to go wrong, too. Little sewage problems here, little cracks in the ceiling there.

It was amazing how little he cared about now.

On Thursday, he went out to the pool and found a film of white flaky dust-like particles all over the surface.

Fascinated, he touched them. Watched them break up and sink. What was revealed were a small fist's worth of squirming aquatic somethings, pale shrimp-like insects or arachnids or whatever you want to call them. He reached out in fascination and cupped one in his hand.

It swam in the water of his palm. Then it dove straight into his flesh. Didn't even hurt.

It was gone.

Puzzled, he went inside the house to go look up what the hell just happened.

It took him awhile to get to the back door. He was getting close to 300 pounds now, he figured. Could be more.

He knew when he touched the doorknob, already something was going on inside him.

Couldn't find anything on the internet.

The next few days, he found he was just preposterously hungry. He had already been spending a small fortune on groceries, but he bought more, and the food headed toward the processed, salty, fatty nasty things you shouldn't buy.

Wasn't two days after, he felt this slithery motion on his stomach. He pulled open his old Hawaiian shirt and there it was. The first one. A thin white fleshy tentacle about two inches long that had grown out of his chest in the night. Huh. He stared at it in what even he would call dumb fascination.

Next day there were a couple more.

They were getting bigger.

His taste in food changed. He started eating things raw.

Then he picked up the phone and called that young woman who was at the old man, George's, house. Listen, he said, I hate to ask this but I'm having some trouble getting around and I could use two seconds' help in pushing my washer back into place where it shook loose of the plug on a heavy rattle cycle like it does sometimes. Would only take a blink of an eye.

While he waited, he had second thoughts.

He can't imagine what came over him.

He sat there in the darkness of day pondering it. The words whirled around in his head like some song on the radio from a long time ago.

Would only take the blink of an eye.