

BAD THINGS HAPPENED IN QUARANTINE

Flashfiction horror: Bad Things Come in Small Packages.

It's interesting. I've since learned how to make dioramas of my own.

See, Dad had a distant cousin he hadn't seen in a thousand years and when quarantine came on, the economy went south on him fast, and he had nowhere to live and since we had so much room we agreed to take him in the guest apartment over the garage for a little while.

He was a weird guy because he always had this unjustified smirk of amusement about everything, like he was playing a mean joke you didn't know yet.

Anyway, he filled up the little apartment and the free space in the garage with these tiny diorama models... these little glass-box scenes of historical events like Attila the Hun killing people, or Napoleon standing amid corpses in Russia, and sometimes houses and little libraries and whatnot. They were always creepy as hell and he'd smile at us, staring and staring at us, wanting a reaction, when we'd look at them.

He loved freaking me out because I was only **10** then.

When we saw on the news how many people were dying of covid, he started to make little replicas of the New York hospital where the worst deaths occurred. He painted little miniature people in their hospital beds.

But it was insane. Because what he would do is, he put personal objects, tiny ones, next to the miniature toy people in their beds—and they were true to the real person.

He had magazines for some of the old ladies, painstakingly re-created. He had the exact kind of eyeglasses some of the dead old men had in their hospital cabinets.

He got so obsessed with making it accurate, he made regular visits almost daily to the hospital to get information. And this was when it was hard to get to a hospital because no one knew if you might get the disease.

So he paid a hospital worker to take pictures, and collect information on the patients, all of them that died. There were a lot.

Cousin Don never said it, but we got the impression he might be threatening people to get the information about the dead patients. He wrote up these tiny biographies that he put inside the hospital nightstands.

The miniature hospital was now filling up the garage.

So you can probably guess that he had already got a big kick out of making a diorama of our house and our family. And what he did with that was, he kept adding more disturbing details--it was really very distressing even

though he kept on like it was all a big joke-like, first he made a tiny replica of dad strangling mom in the kitchen. Then he added me getting attacked by a pack of stray dogs. When he added in my sister in the shower, all cut up from what appeared to be a broken bathroom mirror, my mom had enough and asked him to leave.

He didn't finish his hospital replica, and you could tell it drove him nuts that he would have to leave it, but it was just too huge to move.

We said we'd keep it for him just to get rid of him.

Finally we did get rid of him. But we were really disturbed for months after. The most troublesome thing was that we had lost our cat Creeper and could never find it. And a few weeks after that, we lost our dog Chuff. This did not seem like a coincidence, and when we came home one time to find my bedroom window open and my birdcage doors unlatched, we were pretty sure someone let my parrots out. Dad bought a gun.

But nothing came of it. And as time went on, we read in the news about some guy who would not leave the loved ones of those victims from the hospital alone. He was hounding them for information. We knew who that was.

And then there was someone out there, across America, who started infecting people with the virus using a syringe. And we started to be pretty sure we know who that was, too. The description was too close.

Whenever I went into the garage for where we kept trash bags, I would see that huge hospital, and the morbid little glass boxes that Cousin Don had made. Dioramas of an alleyway where a woman had been knifed and had a grocery bag on her head. Another tiny body had a pitchfork sticking out of its chest after apparently being shot—a corpse in a little cornfield. We contacted the FBI but I think it went into a file and got forgot.

That was about it. We finally decided to get going, dismantled and boxed up all the dioramas into a crate in the garage, not having the nerve to destroy them. But then we got a letter from dad's cousin wanting the dioramas back.

So, worried about this, we went and got them in the garage. And when we looked more closely at the diorama of our house, we could see that he had left the collection of little figures representing us gathered outside near the garage, looking at a dug-up gravesite.

And in the open grave were little skeletons.

My dad had a kind of inspiration, so we went over to that place near the real garage and we started digging. And would you believe we found the skeletal remains of my cat, my dog, and all the birds I had lost as well.

I felt sick.

And I remember being so upset I could hardly register it when I realized the little toy diorama grave pit had revealed a glimpse of other tiny bodies that matched with each of us, what looked like a mother, a father, a daughter, and a son.

I couldn't make any sense of it.

And then we heard a rustling in the bushes near the fence and dad's cousin came out of there, very fast and angry-looking with just the twilight allowing us to see his eyes, and he was headed first for mom.