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Father closed the rolling door on the moving van and thanked the driver. Father went inside where his family was organizing their possessions. Mother was busy unpacking dishes and silverware, while Son and Daughter had found the boxes that their toys were in. “Well, that’s all of them” Father said to Mother. Mother smiled and the two embraced.

Father pushed the shopping cart through the hardware store as Daughter walked beside him. “Father, what is this?” Daughter asked, pointing to an item on the shelf. “That is motor oil,” Father explained. “You put it in a car to keep the engine from getting worn down, basically.”

“Ok,” Daughter replied.

“Back when I was stationed out in the sandbox sometimes me and my friends would take the empty motor oil cans and—” Father looked at Daughter and saw that she was not paying attention. Father elected to not finish the story. Father and Daughter continued their search of the hardware store until Father found what he was looking for. “Father, what’s that?”

Daughter asked as Father took a package off the shelf. “These are mouse traps, they catch mice” Father said.

“We have a net at home, why don’t we just catch the mice with a net?” Daughter asked.

“If you would like to catch mice with a net, you are welcome to try,” Father said jokingly. “But I bet it would be a lot of waiting.” Father put the mouse traps in the shopping cart.

“Well, look who it is,” a warm voice from behind them said. Father turned around to see his friend Daryl. Daryl was the manager of the hardware store and was wearing his usual green apron and store uniform. Daughter cowered behind Father at the sight of the stranger. Father had a long conversation with Daryl about the irregular sounds Father’s lawnmower was currently making, smoking meats and the best woodchips to use, and the best pesticide to use for the fireants in Father’s lawn. As the conversation dragged on Daughter became increasingly bored. After what seemed like an eternity, Father and Daryl parted ways.

After picking up some pesticide, Father and Daughter made their way to the cashier. Father bought Daughter a chocolate bar from the checkout aisle on the condition that Daughter would not tell Mother. Father’s friend Benjamin was manning the cash register, and the two had a long conversation about the pesticide Daryl had recommended for the fireants in Father’s lawn.

Father opened the cabinet under the sink and reached inside. “BOOM!” Father said emphatically as he pulled out a sprung mousetrap with a dead mouse in it. The mice had been harassing the family since they moved in, but now their numbers had increased significantly despite Father’s efforts at eradicating them. Son and Daughter watched intently. Father knelt down to show his children the mechanism and its victim. Daughter saw the mouse and ran away; Son stayed and observed closely. The trap had clamped down on the mouse’s back. The

mouse's eyes bulged out of its skull as if they had been inflated, and its mouth had wrenched open into a silent scream. Its body was oddly stiff. Son watched as Father threw the mouse into the garbage. Father reloaded the trap with a dollop of peanut butter, armed it, and set it back under the sink.

Father reached into the space between the refrigerator and the wall. He pulled out another sprung trap and another corpse. Father checked the remaining traps: behind the garbage can, in the cupboards, and a menagerie of other places that Son would have never thought to look. Father's enthusiasm increased with the discovery of each new corpse, but it eventually plateaued. Son watched. "You gotta put the traps against the walls," Father said to his boy. "Mice like to move against the walls." Son looked into the garbage can and saw a total of five mice. Each corpse looked like it was frozen in time. Some appeared as though they were killed instantly, but two of them held a haunting expression. A grimace? A scream? A cry for help? Son did not know. All he knew was what his Father told him: "They can't get into our food anymore."

When the collection was over, Son went to the playroom upstairs to play with his toys. He reached for a small stuffed monkey, his favorite. He picked it up off the floor and was shocked by his discovery. The monkey's stomach had been torn open and his filling had been pulled out. Son went to Mother and showed her the carnage. Mother consoled Son and told him that she would fix the monkey. Mother asked how the monkey got damaged and Son said that he didn't know. At first, Daughter was blamed for the incident and Daughter pleaded innocent. Soon Mother and Father found mouse droppings in the playroom and told the children that the mice were the culprit. Father laid a single mouse trap behind the bookcase in

the playroom and told the children not to touch it. Son checked the mouse trap often, eager for the invader in the playroom to be caught and justice to be served.

That night Mother tucked the children into bed and gave each of them a kiss on the forehead. "Mother," Son asked, "Will the mice chew up all of our toys?"

"No," Mother said. "The mice will not chew through all of your toys."

"How do you know?" Son asked.

"Mice only chew up things that are food. Or things that have food inside of them," Mother explained.

"Then why did the mice chew up my monkey?" Son asked.

Mother didn't have an explanation. "Maybe the mice thought your monkey was food," Mother said. "Tonight, I will put your monkey up on a high shelf so that the mice can't get it." Son seemed satisfied with the answer. As Son began to fall asleep, he heard a sound and listened. A paranoid thought entered his mind. Mice. He listened closely. He thought he could hear them scurrying about the house, rooting through cabinets, chewing through toys and containers of food. Son thought that his mind was just playing tricks on him, but he could not shake the feeling that the mice were everywhere. Every creak of the house could be a mouse. Every electrical or plumbing appliance could be a mouse. Son got up and turned on the night light.

The next morning Father woke the children up and made them breakfast. Father drove the children to school, and Mother left for work. Father made sure to honk the horn when he

dropped them off. He knew it embarrassed them in front of their friends. Father went back home; he was a freelance carpenter and welder who made custom furniture and other oddities in the garage which he had outfitted as his shop. Upon arriving home Father checked his email and his website to see if he had any new orders. Father was excited to see that he had received two new requests.

Father checked the first message. A man in Arkansas wanted to know how much a new knob for an antique dresser would cost. The old knob had some carvings in it that were originally made by hand. Father replied saying that he had done work like this several times before and knew that he could have this done in a few hours and shipped out the next day for around 20 to 30 dollars.

Father opened the second message. A woman in Vermont wanted a chair shaped like the Eiffel Tower for her sister, who just got back from Paris. Included with the message were a few crude drawings of what the client wanted the chair to look like. Father groaned. He did not mind doing intricate pieces, but he was not fond of doing weird ones like this. Father leaned back in his rolling chair and pondered the situation. If Father made the piece with a lot of detail, he would feel obligated to increase how much he charged for it, which could make the customer unhappy. If Father made the piece with too little detail, the customer could be unhappy and feel like they did not get their money's worth. Father was busy writing a response when he heard a noise.

*SNAP*

Father whipped his head around towards the open door of his home office. It took Father a moment to realize what the sound might have been. Mice. Father walked to the kitchen to check the traps. He looked under the sink and found that the trap had been sprung and the peanut butter eaten, but no mouse. He checked the other traps. He only caught a total of two mice this time. He wondered if their numbers were decreasing or if they had just gotten smarter. Father went upstairs and checked the mouse trap in the playroom. He was disappointed to find that the peanut butter had been eaten off and the trap had not been sprung. "Got ourselves a fuckin' Houdini huh?" Father said to himself.

Mother was busy writing up a sales report when her cellphone vibrated. It was her husband. She opened the message: 'caught 2 mice.' Mother stared at the text and then shrugged. 'Great,' she responded. She put her phone down and was about to get back to work when her phone vibrated again. She opened her phone and read: 'One of the traps went off while I was on the computer.' Mother rolled her eyes. Mice. Mother did not see eye to eye with her husband's enthusiasm for catching mice. She was glad that mice were getting caught, but she felt that Father was too fanatical about the whole ordeal. 'That's weird' she replied, hoping to humor her husband.

Father entered the garage and turned on the light. He went over to his workbench and was annoyed to see that some of his paperwork had been chewed on. A few mouse droppings scattered around the about the workbench illuminated the culprit. Father slammed his fist

down on the table and held his head in his hands. The paperwork consisted of a series of drawings he had done by hand and various other documents. Some of the paperwork could simply be reprinted, however one of his more damaged drawings would need to be completely redone before he faxed a copy to the client. Father took this as a personal offense.

Mother parked the car. Her children got out and ran inside, happy to finally be home from school. Mother found Father in the living room drinking beer and watching NASCAR. Father made a ritual of doing this; he was even wearing his NASCAR baseball cap. Mother gingerly took the beer from her husband who was transfixed on the television. "Isn't it a little early for this?" Mother said to Father, referencing the beer bottle in her hand. Father looked at her in surprise; he had not heard her enter the room. Father shrugged and vaguely gestured towards the television. "What? I'm just having one. Besides, the pre-show is on," Father said. "The pre-show?" Mother asked.

"Yeah, the pre-show. It's, um, a little show before the race starts," Father meekly explained. Mother looked at the television; it appeared to be highlight clips of previous races. Mother sighed and sat down next to Father, handing him the beer back. Father looked back towards the television and cheered as the runner-up overtook the lead; he had already seen this clip before. Mother did not understand what was so interesting about cars driving in circles.

Mother was reading a book in bed when Father entered the bedroom. Father put on his pajamas and got into bed himself. "So, what's on tap for tomorrow?" Father asked Mother. "Not much, just a few meetings," Mother replied, still focused her book. "Well, I was planning

on going down to the hardware store tomorrow,” Father said. “Anything you need?” Mother shook her head. “You going to get more mousetraps?” Mother said snidely.

“No, I was going to get some paint. Paint for one of my projects. Silver paint,” Father said defensively. “Did I do something wrong?”

“I just wish you would stop obsessing over those mice so much” Mother said, putting down her book. “It’s weird and it sets a bad example for the children.”

“It’s just pest control,” Father said, “It’s not weird!”

“Pest control is not weird,” Mother said, “but what *you* do is. You act like it’s some big achievement or something every time you catch a damn mouse.” Father opened his mouth to say something but found himself at a loss for a proper response.

“I mean, they’re *just* mice. They’re animals, they’re hungry. I don’t know why you get such a kick out of catching them but cut it out around the children” Mother said, picking her book back up. Dejected, Father laid down on the pillow and turned off his lamp. As he closed his eyes, Father heard a faint sound. Somewhere, in the dark corners of the house, an executioner’s axe swung down.

*SNAP*

Father was reading the morning paper and drinking a cup of coffee when Mother approached him. She was wearing a bathrobe and her hair was wet. “Father, there is a mouse in the bathroom,” Mother said, clearly displeased.



“The bathroom? Which bathroom?” Father asked, looking up from his newspaper.

“*Our* bathroom,” Mother replied.

“Well, what do you want me to do?” Father asked plainly.

“Get rid of it. Catch it or something,” Mother said impatiently.

“Catch it? Well I suppose I’ll just go get a net,” Father said snidely. Mother rolled her eyes. Son and Daughter entered the room, dressed and ready for school. Father stood up and grabbed his keys. “Well, I can’t do anything about it before taking the children to school,” Father said dryly, “But I am sure you can take care of it right? It is *just* a mouse.”

Father pulled out his measuring tape and made a mark on the wood with a pencil. He measured again to double check and then fired up the table saw. He lined up the board and made his cut. Father had been working for several hours and went to the kitchen for a glass of water.

When he returned to the garage a blur of movement caught his eye. A small gray mouse was hopping across his workbench. Father watched as the mouse hopped onto some of his paperwork, looked around, and urinated. “You little fucker, this is my house!” Father said. The mouse saw Father and began frantically searching for a way down from the workbench. Father quickly set his cup of water down and searched his surroundings. His eyes landed on an old leather belt. The mouse hopped down and began running along the wall towards a stack of boxes. Father raised the belt over his shoulder and swung at the mouse. Father missed and the

belt only clipped one of the mouse's front legs, but it was enough to break the small delicate bones in the mouse's paw. The mouse squealed and stumbled towards the stack of boxes more hurriedly than before. Father raised the belt again and swung at the mouse. The belt shattered the small fragile bones in the creature's back; its hind legs were now completely paralyzed. The blow knocked the mouse into the wall, rolling it onto its side. Father raised the belt and brought it down again and again. Eventually, Father slowly crept over to the creature and picked up the mouse by its tail. The mouse let out a whispery cry and struggled to get free. By some miracle, the mouse was still alive. Father stared at the mouse in his hand and then looked at the belt in his other hand. He had never done anything like that before. Using the belt had been such a spontaneous, almost primal act, only now that he was holding the mouse in his hand did he realize what he had done.

Father knew the mouse was still alive, but what should he do with it? The right thing to do would be to put it out of its misery, right? Maybe he should just put it in the garbage can and forget about it. An intrusive thought entered Father's mind. He looked at the squirming mouse in his hand, and then he looked at the sledgehammer sitting on his workbench. Father put the mouse in a plastic bag and dropped it in the garbage.