

**The Best-laid Plans of House Mice**

by

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In case my body is discovered cruelly dismantled and ignobly consumed, I hope this confession absolves me of crimes against vagrant mice. I'm not a superstitious being, nor am I terribly pious, but I believe in karma and I think I might be in a bit of trouble. I have good reason to believe I'm being haunted by the restless and irate spirit of a little mouse I may have injured. Or worse.

I'm not sure exactly what happened, but I kind of remember hucking it out of a window onto a slab of concrete some twenty feet below.

The mouse had been living in my old, decrepit house for some time, judging by its proficiency in navigating the hidden spaces between the ancient walls. For all its faults and countless safety violations, the house isn't without its charms; a soothing waterfall manifests every winter in the basement, giving birth to a serene pond that makes tromping over to the laundry machines an act of futility. The fulcrum point of the house's support structure rests atop two crudely stacked rocks. Nothing is sacred.

Apparently, it's also a pretty enticing place for a mommy mouse and daddy mouse to shack up, steal bits of food and raise an army. It's like playing host to a bunch of cute, furry vagrants, except they won't leave when you call the cops.

I'm a pro-animal person. Humans are animals, right? And I loathe hypocrisy. Yet despite my lack of enthusiasm for the mice's food-for-droppings trading scheme, I just couldn't bring myself to orchestrate their deaths by setting up traps – much to my roommates' chagrin. I cringed as innocent-looking gobs of peanut butter were smeared on spring-loaded deathtraps.

“They won't even know what happened,” one coaxing roommate offered.

“Oh, they won't?” I replied. “This is like promising a seven-year-old a trip to the candy store and – surprise! – leaving him for dead at a landfill.”

Their traps proved useless against our cunning houseguests, leaving my cowardice vindicated. But realizing we still had a mouse problem, I took tactical initiative and fashioned some secondhand Tupperware containers into a series of moats to place at the feet of our pantry's shelves. When those foolish mice went a-traipsing for some food, they'd instead be confronted by a vast sea of *incredible death*.

But I was wrong. Cutting off their food supply didn't drive them away. It only gave them a taste for blood.

Undaunted, the tenacious rodents stormed the remainder of the house in search of sustenance. No doorframe, heating vent or cabinet door could halt my fuzzy enemies.

I was living in a state of unrelenting terror. The slightest blur at the corner of my eye set me on the defensive. I knew a tiny shogun assassin was watching, prowling toward my death.

\* \* \* \* \*

4:50 a.m. I awoke to a distinct rustling sound across from my bed. I clutched the covers in horror, knowing my fate was sealed.

I timidly clutched an empty water bottle and crept toward the source of the noise.

The trash can shook.

“Good lord,” I thought. “It’s eating my cheesy crackers.”

With a revived zeal for vengeance, I darted toward the garbage can, ready to strike.

I'm not much of a naturalist, and I've never owned any pet rodents for long,<sup>1</sup> but what I saw defies explanation.

A black missile of a mouse ricocheted its tiny frame off the edges of the garbage can, utilizing some otherworldly combination of centripetal force and feral insanity, in order to mount an escape – and, presumably, end my life in a brutal montage of blood and squeaks.

I figured it out. This little bastard lives off of *fear*.

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<sup>1</sup> I once owned a couple of virulent dwarf hamsters who grew obese and eventually fought to the death. It wasn't until I saw the classic post-apocalyptic film *Mad Max* that I realized they were recreating the Thunderdome in their hamster ball – two enter, one leaves.

Abject horror seized me. Like any self-respecting adult male would have done, I screamed a high falsetto unmatched since my awkward playground days. I gripped the garbage can, not daring to put it down yet fearing to hold onto it, as I was certain the little fiend would gnaw my fingers off one by one just to demonstrate how wholly and truly screwed I was.

With trembling strength and a cowardly yelp, I jettisoned the mouse and minimal contents of my garbage can out of my second story window, returning the fell creature to the murky depths of the night.

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An hour after I went back to sleep, I sensed something amiss – a sort of tingling feeling.

That doesn't make sense, I thought to myself. There's something nibbling.

My subconscious replied: *What is nibbling, Nick? Is it you?*

*Are you nibbling?*

No. I'm the nibblee, not the nibbler.

*Oh. Huh.*

PANIC.

I flung the sheets off in terror – and found nothing. No teeth marks, no scratches.

But I know it was there. The mouse came back for me. And when an undead rodent is seeking blood, there's not much left to do but count the hours.