

Mouse or Maniac by Matt Danielson

There once was a deserted house at the end of the street, just by the edge of the forest. My brother and I used to go there to hang out and play, despite -- or perhaps because of -- mom's wishes for us to stay away.

One warm summer evening we grabbed flashlights and headed over there. It was really creepy, but we egged each other on and crawled in through the kitchen window, as usual. We had brought a deck of cards and were playing a bit of poker at the kitchen table when we suddenly heard a scraping sound upstairs.

"Probably just a mouse," my brother said. The house had been empty for years so it seemed quite possible.

A minute later we heard another scraping sound, only this time it was coming from the stairs on the other side of the house. My brother and I looked at each other for a few seconds, then both nervously giggled because we didn't want to let on that we were getting scared. We dealt another hand of cards and kept playing.

Then there was a clank of metal against metal, just outside the kitchen door. We could see nothing in the darkness out in the hallway, but we knew *something* just made contact with the old metal fireplace guard out there.

"Ok, that's no mouse," I said. "Let's get out of here!"

My brother and I flew to our feet and ran to the window. I got there first and jumped out. He followed a split second later, jumping out with both feet first so fast there was a whooshing sound. We ran like our pants were on fire all the way home, where mom was standing on the porch wringing her hands.

"Thank goodness you're home," she said. "There's a maniac on the loose. He escaped earlier today, and he's got a big butcher knife looking for young boys to kill. Well, come inside, it's time for bed."

My brother and I looked at each other, still panting from the mad rush, then we followed mom inside.

"Hey, what happened to your shirt?" she asked as we made our way to the bedroom. "Did you get it snagged on something again? Wow, this is quite a rip. What could have caused this?"

She pointed at a long gash across the back of my brother's shirt, from the shoulder almost all the way down to the waist.

What caused the whooshing sound when he jumped out the window? All we know is the maniac was caught a week later after having sliced open five young boys in town, all in deserted houses just like the ones we'd been in.

