Stephen King - The House on Maple Street
by Stephen King

Although she was only five, and the youngest of the Bradbury children, Melissa had very sharp eyes and it wasn't really surprising that she was the first to discover something strange had happened to the house on Maple Street while the Bradbury family was summering in England. She ran and found her older brother, Brian, and told him something was wrong upstairs, on the third floor. She said she would show him, but not until he swore not to tell anyone what she had found. Brian swore, knowing it was their stepfather Lissa was afraid of; Daddy Lew didn't like it when any of the Bradbury children "got up to foolishness" (that was how he always put it), and he had decided that Melissa was the prime offender in that area. Lissa, who was stupid no more than she was blind, was aware of Lew's prejudices, and had become wary of them. In fact, all of the Bradbury children had become rather wary of their mother's second husband. It would probably turn out to be nothing, anyway, but Brian was delighted to be back home and willing enough to humor his baby sister (Brian was two full years her senior), at least for awhile; he followed her down the third-floor hallway without so much as a murmur of argument, and he only pulled her braid -- he called these braid-pulls "emergency stops" -- once.

They had to tiptoe past Lew's study, which was the only finished-off room up here, because Lew was inside, unpacking his notebooks and papers and muttering in an ill-tempered way.

Brian's thoughts had actually turned to what might be on TV tonight -- he was looking forward to a pig-out on good old American cable after three months of BBC and ITV -- when they reached the end of the hall.

What he saw beyond the tip of his little sister's pointing finger drove all thoughts of television from Brian Bradbury's mind.

"Now swear again!" Lissa whispered. "Never tell anyone, Daddy Lew or anyone, or hope to die!"

"Hope to die," Brian agreed, still staring, and it was a half-hour before he told his big sister, Laurie, who was unpacking in her room. Laurie was possessive of her room as only an eleven-year-old girl can be, and she gave Brian the very dickens for coming in without knocking, even though she was completely dressed.

"Sorry," Brian said, "but I gotta show you something. It's very weird."

"Where?" She went on putting clothes in her drawers as if she didn't care, as if there was nothing any dopey little seven-year-old could tell her which would be of the slightest interest to her, but when it came to eyes, Brian's weren't exactly dull. He could tell when Laurie was interested, and she was interested now.

"Upstairs. Third floor. End of the hall past Daddy Lew's study."

Laurie's nose wrinkled as it always did when Brian or Lissa called him that. She and Trent remembered their real father, and they didn't like his replacement at all.

They made it their business to call him Just Plain Lew. That Lewis Evans clearly did not like this -- found it vaguely impertinent, in fact -- simply added to Laurie and Trent's unspoken but powerful conviction that it was the right way to address the man their mother (luckily!) slept with these days.

"I don't want to go up there," Laurie said. "He's been in a pissy mood ever since we got back. Trent says he'll stay that way until school starts and he can settle back into his rut again."

"His door's shut. We can be quiet. Lissa n me went up and he didn't even know we were there."

"Lissa and I."

"Yeah. Us. Anyway, it's safe. The door's shut and he's talking to himself like he does when he's really into something."

"I hate it when he does that," Laurie said darkly. "Our real father never talked to himself, and he didn't use to lock himself in a room by himself, either."

"Well, I don't think he's locked in," Brian said, "but if you're really worried about him coming out, take an empty suitcase. We'll pretend like we're putting it in the closet where we keep them, if he comes out."

"What is this amazing thing?" Laurie demanded, putting her fists on her hips.

"I'll show you," Brian said earnestly, "but you have to swear on Mom's name and hope to die if you tell anyone." He paused, thinking, for a moment, and then added: "You specially can't tell Lissa, because I swore to her."
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