

# Noises in the Night

## (or: A? B? C? D? E?)

A Theory Story by Richard Farr (richardfarr.net)

Alberto lived in an old house in the country. He was used to lots of noises: the doors squeaked, the windows rattled, and the stairs creaked. It was no big deal.

One day he was invited to a birthday sleepover with his friend Bradley. Bradley lived on the tenth floor of a brand new apartment building in the city.

Alberto noticed something immediately. “Wow,” he said, “it’s so quiet up here!”

It wasn’t so quiet a minute later: there were loud shrieks of “HAPPY BIRTHDAY!” from the elevator. Three other friends, Calvin, Dillon, and Ethan, had arrived.

Alberto, Bradley, Calvin, Dillon and Ethan had a big dinner, with *way* too much birthday cake for dessert. (Alberto’s stomach made a lot of interesting noises.)

Then Bradley opened his birthday gifts. Alberto gave him a flashlight. Calvin, Dillon and Ethan knew Bradley liked scary stories, so they had put their money together to buy him one big book: *Creepy Tales*, by U.R. Shrieking.

After dinner they piled into sleeping bags in Bradley’s room and read *Creepy Tales* to each other. Whoever was speaking got to hold the flashlight. They put it under their chins so that they would look extra-spooky. But the stories were not really all that scary, so mainly they just giggled a lot — though Bradley did look a bit worried, Alberto thought.

Eventually they settled down and went to sleep.

It seemed like only five minutes later when Alberto woke up. In fact it was the middle of the night. Bradley was frantically poking his shoulder. The others were awake too. Calvin was waving the flashlight around. He seemed to be searching for something.

“Listen”, Bradley whispered. “What’s that?”

“What’s what?” Alberto said, shielding his eyes from the flashlight.

“That... that *noise*. Can’t you hear it?”

For a few seconds there was silence. Alberto was about to say “No, I can’t hear anything.” Then there it was: CLANK. CLANK. SCRAPE. SCRAPE. CLANK.

It was hard to tell where the sound was coming from. But Alberto yawned and laughed at the same time. “You guys!” he said. “It’s the plumbing. The metal pipes change temperature and rub against each other. My house does it all the time.”

“No,” Bradley said, gripping his arm. “You’re wrong. It can’t be the plumbing. This is a brand new building. All the pipes are plastic and they never make any noise.”

Calvin had been to Bradley’s apartment before. “I bet it’s that old lady who lives upstairs from you. Mrs Ashplant. Your Dad says she has insomnia — and she walks with a metal-tipped cane. That makes sense.”

“No it does not,” Bradley said. “It can’t be her. She’s away, visiting her grandkids. Nobody’s up there.”

Alberto shrugged. “So it’s crows pecking at the gutters. At my house we get that all the time too.”

“No,” Bradley said again. “I can’t be crows pecking at the gutters. The gutters are on the roof, and the roof is another five floors up.”

“Anyway,” Dillon said, “Crows aren’t nocturnal. They’re all asleep now, like we’re supposed to be. I have a better theory. It’s not a real noise; it’s coming from a TV.”

“That’s still a real noise,” Calvin said.

Dillon rolled his eyes. “I mean it’s not someone in the building making that noise. It’s a soundtrack.”

“I don’t buy that either,” Bradley said. “If we’re hearing a movie or something, where are the voices? Where’s the music? All we can hear is that one thing — ”

And there it was again: CLANK. CLANK. SCRAPE. SCRAPE. CLANK.

Bradley gripped Alberto’s arm so tight that Alberto realized he was frightened. “You know what I think?” Bradley said in a small voice.

“What?”

“I think it’s... ghosts.”

Finally Ethan spoke. “Bradley, don’t be silly! Ghosts don’t even exist! Get real.”

“They do!”

“They don’t! That stuff in the book is *stories*, remember? It’s not *real*.”

“That doesn’t mean ghosts aren’t real.”

“But they’re not.”

“So what is it then? I suppose you have a better idea?” (You could tell that Bradley did not think Ethan had a better idea.)

“I do,” Ethan said. “But you’re not going to like it.”

“What?” the other four said, all at once.

“If it isn’t the plumbing, or Mrs. Ashplant upstairs, or crows, or a movie soundtrack, or ghosts, then I’m afraid there’s only one other possibility.”

“What?” the other four said again, a bit louder.

Ethan opened his mouth to speak but he was interrupted by another, even louder CLANK. CLANK. SCRAPE. SCRAPE. CLANK.

He took the flashlight and pointed it at a space right above Bradley’s pillow. “It’s obvious, really. The most likely explanation is — ”

“What?” Bradley squeaked.

“It’s a common problem actually.”

“WHAT?!” the others shouted.

“A family of frimboolie are living inside your apartment walls.”

“What’s are frimboolie?” Dillon asked.

“They’re a dangerous kind of invisible leprechaun,” Ethan said.

“That’s the most ridiculous thing I ever heard,” Calvin said.

“On the contrary,” Ethan said. “Frimboolie are quite common, and it’s a well-known fact that when they’ve eaten dinner their digestive systems make noises exactly like that.”

Alberto grabbed the flashlight and opened his mouth.

But he too was interrupted by another CLANK. CLANK. SCRAPE. SCRAPE. CLANK.

And anyway, he had no idea what to say.