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About 1920 words

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The Noise

by Tracy Altvater

I couldn't sleep. No, it had nothing to do with my big chemistry test in the morning or that my friends text me so late every night to talk about the latest download of their favorite game. I had been awake all night, for several nights in a row now. My patience was growing thin. There was a noise, an annoying thump over and over again, just above my head, every single night. I had to find out what it was, and it needed to happen soon.

Night started to fall again. I knew it was only a matter of time before the noise began. I tried to tell my parents about it, but they looked at me like I was crazy.

"Jacob, there is no noise. It's all in your head. And besides, let's say there was a noise, you are not permitted to go into the attic for any reason. Understood?" My mom looked at me with that look that simply said never to disobey such a direct order from her.

"Yes, I understand," I replied.

I pushed my mom's facial expression out of my mind as I decided I didn't care what my punishment would be, I had to find the attic and the noise. I also didn't care if they didn't believe me. I knew what I heard.

We had lived in this house since I was born. After seventeen years, I couldn't recall a door or room I hadn't explored. So where was this elicited attic? Why had I never seen the entrance? I took a quiet tour through the house, looking along the walls, feeling for hidden doors. There was nothing I hadn't seen before.

I went into my dad's study. This was a room I rarely ventured into because when Dad was in here, he liked to be alone. I glanced down and there was a drawer partially open. A rolled-up piece of paper was sticking out. I grabbed it and unrolled it onto the desk. It was a blueprint of the house. I started looking it over. There it was, a place in the house I had never seen before. It just had to be the attic I was looking for. It was time to explore.

"Jacob," said Dad.

"Yea?"

"Can you take out the trash before you are down for the night? We are heading to bed."

"Yea, I can."

"Night sweetheart. We love you," said Mom.

"Goodnight." I heard their bedroom door close. I knew I had to get started searching right away.

I turned on the back porch light and headed out to the garage where I knew there would be working flashlight. I was careful not to let the screen door slam. The night air was thick. A dense fog was rolling in. A chill ran down my spine and I shivered. I quickly found the flashlight and headed back into the house. Just as I slipped inside the screen door, I heard a dog howl in the distance and I accidentally let go of the door. A loud bang echoed through the air landing in the middle of the dew-covered yard. I held my breath, waiting to hear a sound from the top of the stairs that led to my parents' room. I didn't hear a peep, so I continued into the house. The murky house made it hard to see anything, even with the flashlight. The more I prowled through the darkness, the louder the thumping above my head seemed to get.

I had no idea what I was in for. What would I find behind that room? And would I be able to come back from whatever I saw? The thought of it shook me to my very core, but I continued on. I crept as slowly as I possibly could, avoiding every chattering floorboard beneath my heavy feet. I made it into the kitchen, knocking my ankle against the corner of the island. I held in my yelp as I rubbed it until the throbbing stopped. I moved onward through the dining room. THUMP! THUMP! Whatever it was seemed to sense that I was coming to find them. The thumping now acted as a warning to stop dead in my tracks and go back, but I couldn't. I kept going until I reached the laundry room. According to the blueprint, the entrance to the mystery noise was just beyond the linen closet.

“Jacob,” said a voice I had never heard before. The thumping grew faster now. It continued in a pattern. Two thumps, then three, then two, then three. Louder and louder it grew. My heart pounding so loud almost drowned out the noise.

I hesitantly opened the linen closet door. There was nothing but towels, toilet paper and darkness. I fumbled for the light that I knew was on the left side, but it was gone. Fear formed a huge lump inside my throat.

“Mom! Dad!” I screamed. But before I could holler their names again, I was sucked into another room as if a giant vacuum was on the other side pulling me in.

The noise now surrounded me.

There was nothing but darkness. Somewhere between the laundry room and this place I had lost my flashlight.

“Mom? Dad?” I was careful not to be too loud. I had no idea what the darkness held. Heck, I had no idea if my parents would even be able to hear me if I yelled. I moved slowly towards more darkness, but I held my hands out in front of me so I could feel whatever was there.

I could hear the thumping. I wasn't far from it now.

Suddenly, the room was lit up like a Christmas tree in December. I could see a storage room. Shelves lined the walls. Paint cans and jars of nails adorned the old pine racks. There was cobwebs everywhere. I had to fight my way through a couple. I was so confused. This didn't look scary at all. What was going on?

THUMP. THUMP.

The noise sure was though. It seemed to be getting louder and louder. I could feel beads of sweat forming on my forehead as I walked down what seemed to be a hallway that held a set of stairs at the end. There were lights on each sides of the walls. This was so strange to me. How had I not known this part of the house existed.

I stopped at the foot of the stairs. I glanced up to a distressed red door at the top. I pulled in a huge breath, let it out slowly and put my foot on the first step. Moments later I was at the top. I held my ear to the door.

THUMP. THUMP.

I wrapped my cold hand around the metal knob. I turned it heavily. Once the knob was unlatched from the doorframe, I pushed open the door. I wasn't expecting to see what I saw on the other side of that old, red door. My head was expecting monsters, ghosts or vampires. I was expecting to see a torture chamber with saws and knives galore. But I wasn't even close.

“Jacob!” shouted my uncle Fred.

“Fred?”

“You are not supposed to be in here.”

“What is going on?” I asked.

Fred stood in the middle of what appeared to be some sort of housing. There were several rooms, paint cans scattered everywhere, and he was standing up on a ladder wearing a toolbelt as he painted the ceiling an off-white color.

“How did you find this room? Your parents made sure you never were told about it.”

“I found the blueprint in dad’s desk. Can you tell me what is going on? I feel like I am losing my mind.”

Fred came down from the ladder. He pulled his cell phone from his pocket and dialed a number.

“Yea, we have a problem,” he said. He put the phone back in his pocket and stared blankly at me in silence. Moments later my dad walked into the room.

“I am so sorry you had to find this out this way Jacob,” he said. I couldn’t find the words to say. I was so lost and confused.

“What do you mean, Dad?”

“You came to your mother and I about the sound you were hearing, but we played it off like we had no idea what you were talking about, but we knew exactly what you were talking about.”

“You did?”

“Yes, because we were trying to surprise you.”

“Surprise me?” I was more confused than ever.

“Yes. You are almost eighteen now. About to graduate high school. We know your college plans. We overheard you one night talking to one of your buddies about how you wanted to go to college but wasn’t sure how you would afford housing. This is going to be your apartment, son.”

I looked around. I was standing in what I thought would be a living room. The beige walls freshly painted. The new carpet barley walked on. The white trim hadn’t known a single fingerprint yet. I looked past my uncle and saw a refrigerator and a sink. Marble counter tops and laminate flooring filled my sight.

“The thumping all night long?” I asked.

“Yes, uncle Fred works during the day and could only ready your apartment during the night while we slept. He must have not realized how loud he had been.”

“The secret entrance?” I asked.

“We created this part of the house the summer before your senior year while you were at school. We kept the entrance hidden so you wouldn’t ruin the surprise we had planned.”

“But...but...I was sucked into the hidden room? The light switch was gone?”

“We rewired the light switch to the other side about a month ago, and I think you just mistook the sucking in for falling into the dark room. Once you were inside the motion lights kicked on and illuminated the storage space we set up.”

“Dad?”

“Yes?”

“I love it. Thank you so much. I had no idea you and mom were doing this for me. Everything makes sense now. You are the best parents ever!”

I walked over and wrapped my arms around my dad's neck. I buried my face in his shirt and cried. How could I have not seen that they were doing this for me? They were amazing parents. I was beyond blessed.

“We love you. We didn't want you to stress any more than you need to. It might not be a fancy dorm, but it's yours for as long as you need it.”

“Thank you. And thank you uncle Fred.”

“You are more than welcome. When your dad asked me to help, I couldn't say no.”

All three of us embraced. Fred returned to the top of the ladder, paint brush in hand as I walked, arm in arm, back through the hallway to the room that was once filled with darkness and the unknown. Once back in the laundry room, I hugged my dad good night. I watched him disappear to the top of the stairs. I heard their bedroom door close. I walked through the murky house to my bedroom.

THUMP. THUMP.

This time I wasn't scared. I wasn't worried and I wasn't alone. I knew above my head was my uncle Fred. I knew the noise now brought happiness and for the first time in a long time, I slept the whole night through.

