



# The Chirping Mystery

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Deep in the cozy quiet of 2:17 a.m., Mark was sound asleep, dreaming of fluffy clouds and giant cookies. Suddenly, a soft, sharp 'chirp' sliced through the silence, not a loud shriek, but a single, annoying peep. It was the low-battery warning from his smoke alarm.



Mark groaned, burying his face deeper into his pillow. He squeezed his eyes shut tight, hoping the noise would simply vanish. 'I'll deal with it in the morning,' he mumbled to the ceiling, determined to ignore the little sound and drift back to his sweet dreams.



Just as he was about to doze off, exactly one minute later, the 'chirp' came again, clear as a bell. With a dramatic sigh, Mark kicked off his warm blankets, his feet thudding onto the cool floor. He shuffled sleepily out of his bedroom and into the dim hallway.



He found the culprit mounted high above the guest bedroom door. Grabbing a wobbly chair, Mark carefully climbed up, his sleepy face scrunched in concentration. He twisted the alarm's cover off, only to find a shiny, brand-new battery inside, looking perfectly fine.



A puzzled frown creased Mark's brow as he checked the battery's date, then snapped it firmly back into place. The alarm fell silent, and a wave of relief washed over him. He carefully climbed down, ready to return to his warm bed, when he froze mid-step.



The guest bedroom door, which he was certain he'd closed earlier, now stood slightly ajar. A faint, dusty smell wafted out, and Mark shivered, not liking that room at all. He stood for a moment, listening intently, but heard nothing but the gentle hum of the house.



Taking a deep breath, Mark cautiously stepped forward and firmly pushed the guest bedroom door shut with a soft click. He turned to leave, feeling a tiny bit braver, when suddenly, right behind him, the smoke alarm chirped again. Just one single, startling 'chirp'.



Mark's stomach did a flip-flop as he spun around, his eyes wide, staring at the innocent-looking alarm. Then, he noticed something he hadn't seen before: a thin, black scorch mark, like a shadowy finger, creeping slowly down the wall directly beneath the alarm.



The chirp came once more, a lonely sound in the quiet hallway. But this time, it wasn't alone. From inside the guest room, right behind the door Mark had just closed, a soft, almost polite, breathing sound answered it. Mark's heart began to thump-thump-thump.



Mark's eyes were glued to the guest bedroom door, his breath catching in his throat. And then, very, very slowly, with an eerie, deliberate grace, the polished brass doorknob began to turn. It rotated silently, as if an unseen hand was carefully twisting it.