

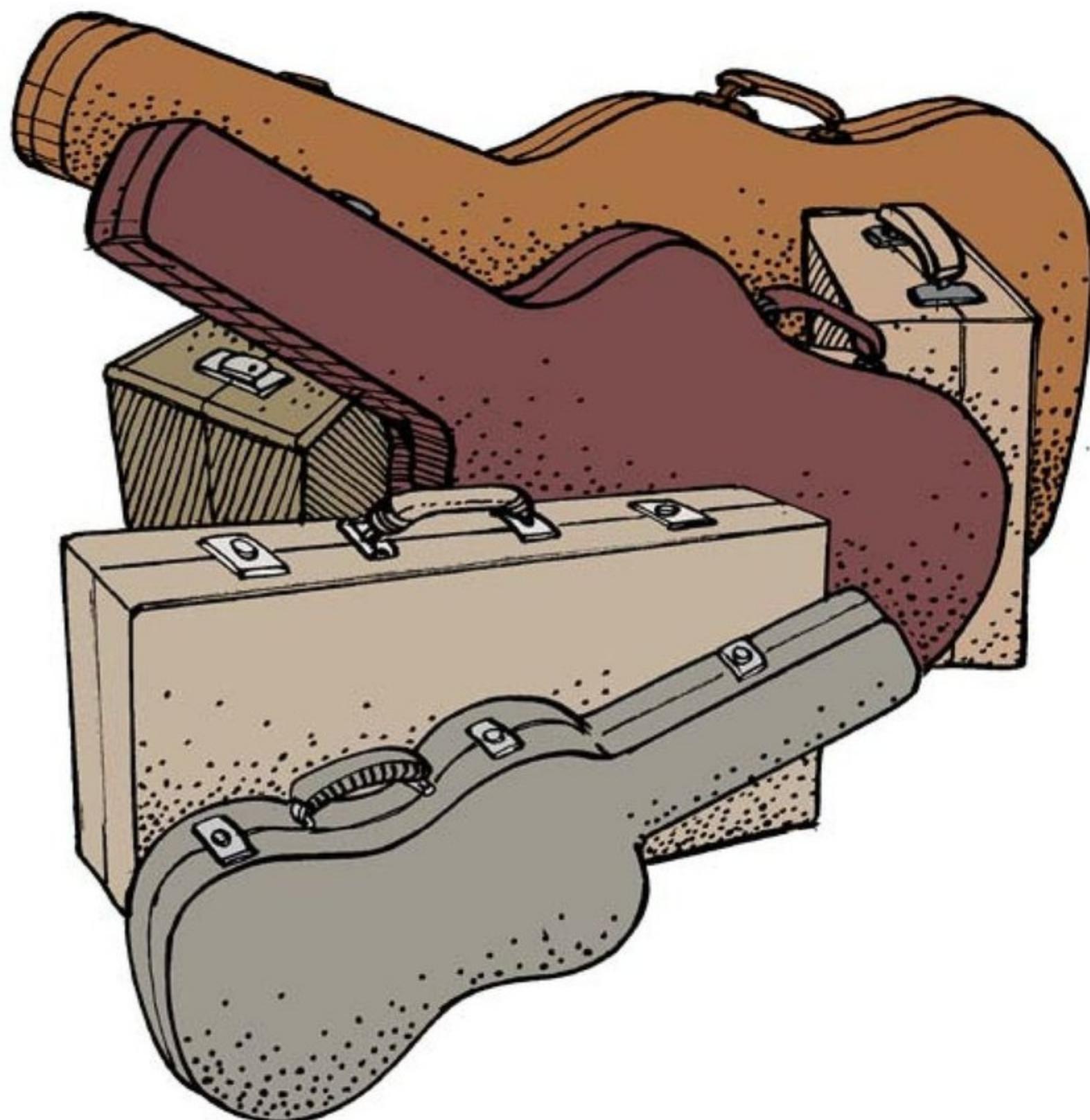
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# Neighborhood Mystery

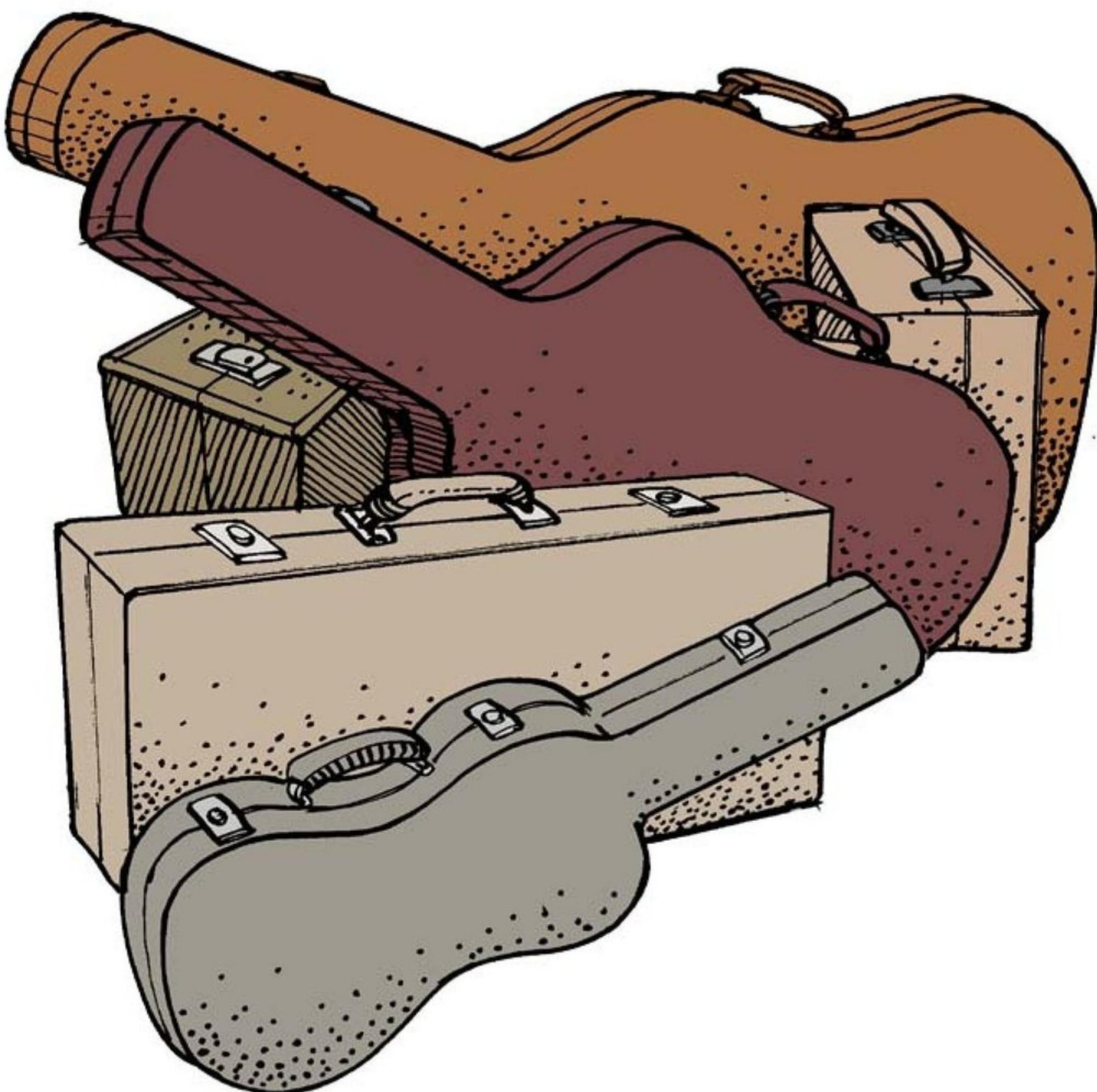


Written by Roy Ramos • Illustrated by Joel Snyder

# **Neighborhood Mystery**



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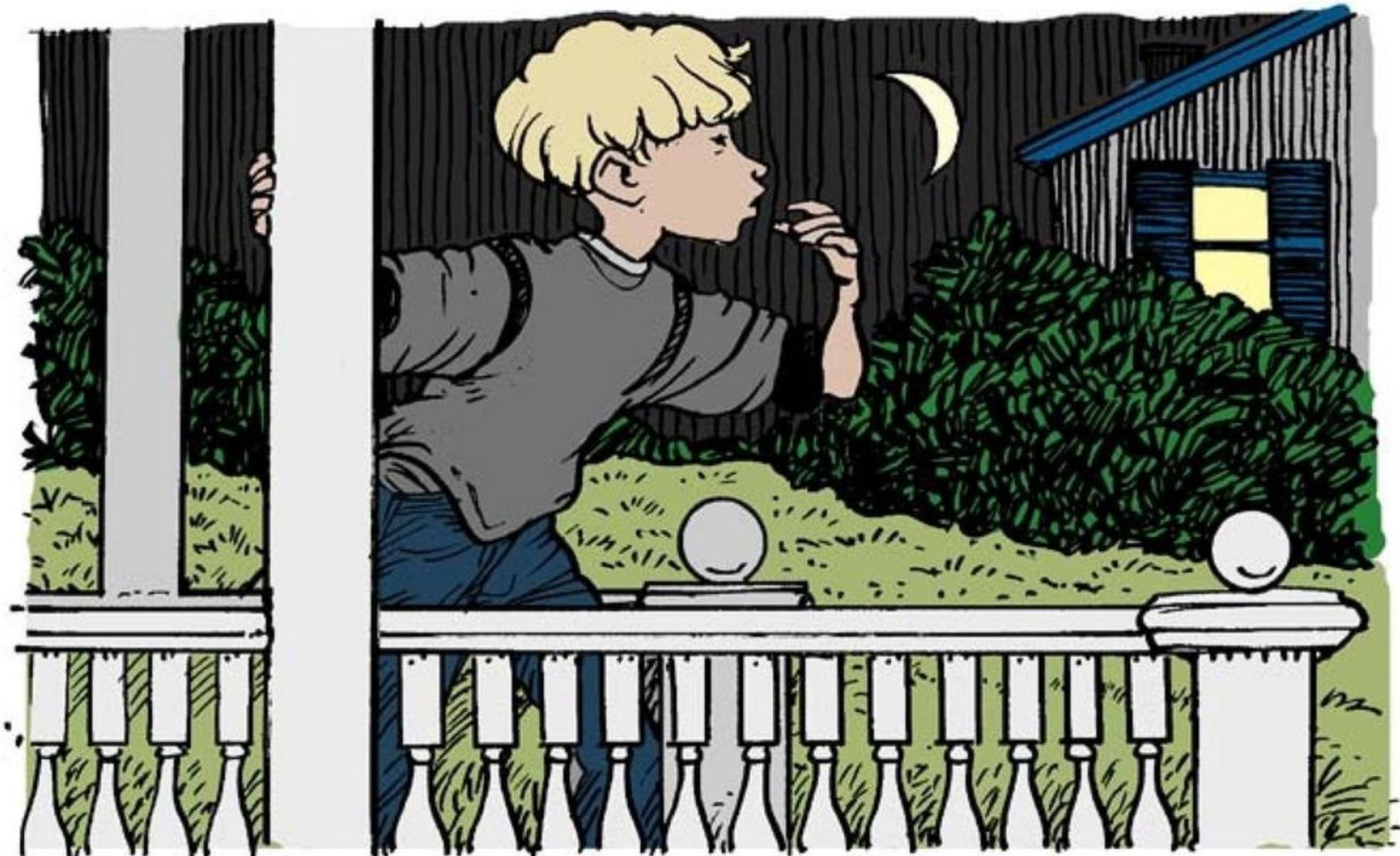
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## Strange Cases

I have seen it at the same house, at the same time, every Sunday night for the last three months. A group of individuals, some of them slim, some of them stout, most of them male, but some of them female, entering this house across the street from me.

Each of them wears a similar looking uniform and carries some kind of case.





I know they are not carrying luggage. Most of the cases are too small for that. One of the cases is huge! Only some are square while others have a weird curvy shape. At 7:00 p.m., it is hard to see anything clearly—especially if your neighborhood does not have streetlights.

Aside from the porch lights and the passing cars, I can't see much of anything in the darkness.

All the people walking into the house seem to be wearing the same dark color, but down along their sides, there is a line of shiny buckles, catching flickers of light from the porch light. I wonder what it all means.

I never saw anything like this while living in Boston; but I do remember seeing strange reports on television that might help explain things. At first, I was afraid to tell anyone at school about my neighborhood mystery because I was afraid they would think I was acting strange. But then, I got up the courage to ask my friend Maria, who lives in my neighborhood, if she knew anything about the strange happenings.





I caught her in the hallway after school as she was opening her locker and reaching inside. She pulled out a small case.

I froze.

She turned to look at me and saw my startled face. “What?” she exclaimed. “Haven’t you seen a violin case before?”

Of course, I had seen one before. After all, I was born in Boston, hometown of one of the most famous **symphony orchestras** in the world—the Boston Pops. My family heard them play on every Fourth of July. Last year, I counted 30 violins in that orchestra! So, yes, I’ve seen my share of violin cases.

In fact, my dad rented a violin to see if I would like it, but I really wanted to play the guitar. The violin, now that I think of it, came in a case just like Maria's. Maybe I was too busy thinking about the mystery to make the connection.

"Did you need something?" she asked.

"Never mind," I said as I walked away confused and deep in thought . . .

*Who were those people with the cases?* I could not be sure. The only way to know would be to solve the mystery myself—like a detective.





## My Stakeout

On Sunday, I made my plan and gathered up a flashlight, **binoculars**, a whistle, dog biscuits, and my dog. I waited by my window for the sun to go down. When I saw 7:00 on my clock, I knew that my detective work would begin.

I waited until the whole group of people had gone inside because I was afraid of what might happen if anyone saw me. When all was clear, I got my things and my dog and sneaked over to the house across the street.

*It's a good thing that there are big trees and bushes for me to hide behind, I thought.*

I went from tree to bush to tree until I got close enough to a window to hear something. I started to hear some talking. Yet I could not understand the language. *Maybe they were talking in code?*

Then, there was laughter. One loud, deep laugh shook me like a leaf. It sounded like some kind of **eerie** Santa Claus. It must have come from a very big man.





My dog growled like he was about to bark,  
so I gave him a biscuit to keep him quiet.  
Then I heard deep string-plucking sounds  
that vibrated the windows of the house. Some  
screeching sounds followed.

These sounds reminded me of the violinists  
in the Boston Pops just before they performed.

Now it was starting to make sense. *They must be musicians of some kind; but with so few of them, they could not be a symphony orchestra.* My dad once told me that the Boston Symphony Orchestra has more than 90 musicians. My thoughts were interrupted by a sudden sound, like a car horn.

## My Discovery

I was sure it came from inside the house even as another car drove up. My dog started to bark like crazy. He jumped out of the bushes and pulled me with him. I accidentally turned on my flashlight. It shined on someone right in front of me. It was Maria!

"Alan? What are you doing here?"

"Uh, I, um."

"Did you come to hear the **mariachi** at my uncle Eduardo's house?"

"Mah-ree-AH-chee? What is that?" I asked.



"It is a Mexican **folk band**. Want to come in and listen?" *Mystery solved! Case closed!* I said to myself.

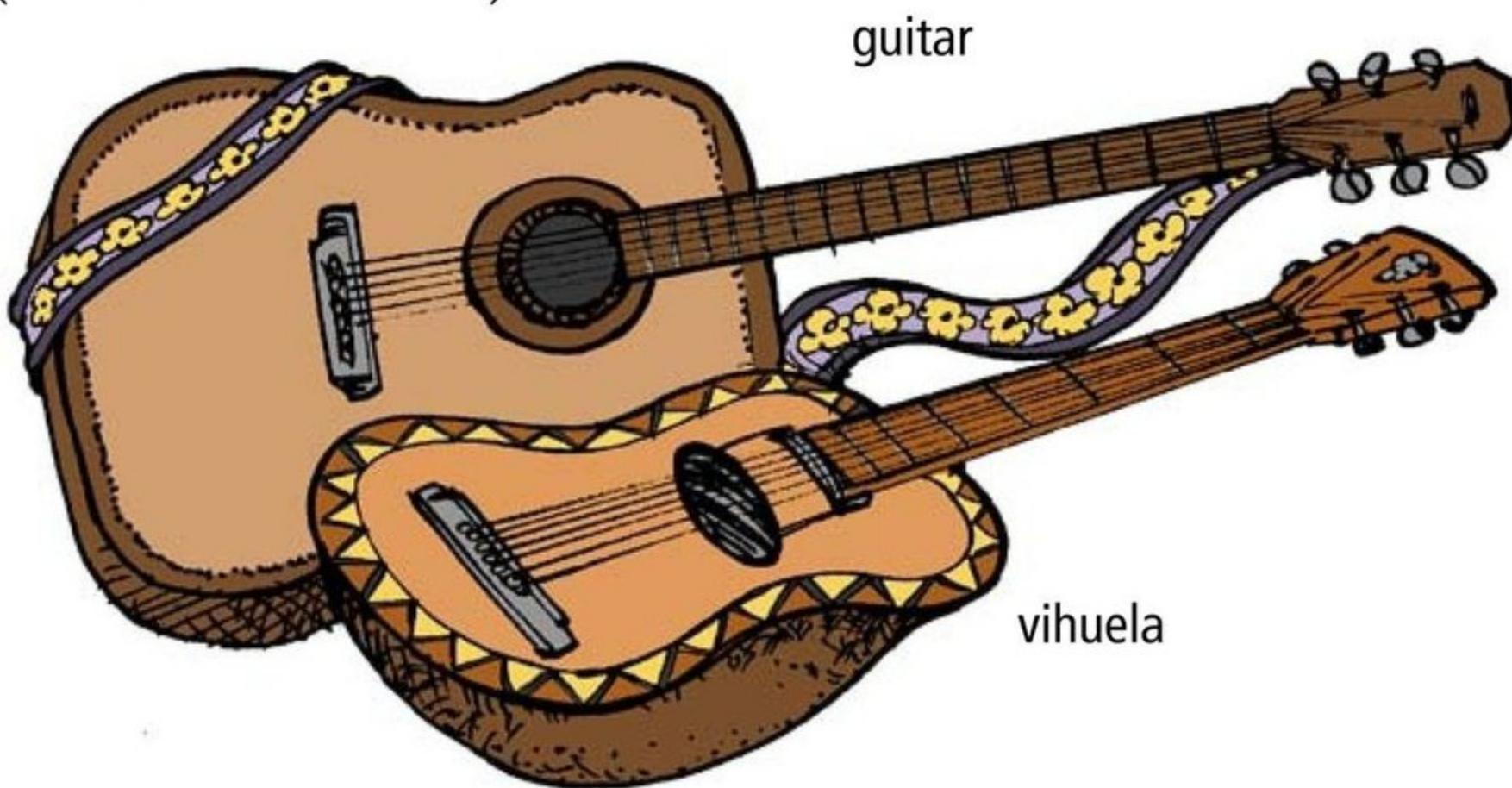
Just then, my dad came out of the garage of our house across the street to take the garbage can out to the curb. I yelled out to him, asking if he wanted to hear the band of Maria's uncle, too. He smiled and yelled back to us "*¡Sí!*," which means yes!

Soon, we were inside, sitting on the couch as we watched and listened to the mariachi group playing their **instruments**. Three members of the group played violins, another three played guitars, and two others played trumpets. One of the violinists sang, and the others joined in for the chorus. We heard many mariachi songs that night. They sounded fantastic.



Mariachi songs are in Spanish. Before that night, there was only one word other than ‘yes’ that I knew in Spanish, and that was the word *gracias*, which means thank you. That is what I told Maria when she led my father and me into the house.

I learned many new Spanish words that night. The words *violín*, *guitarra*, and *trompeta* were very easy to memorize because they look and sound a lot like the English words *violin*, *guitar*, and *trumpet*. The name of the huge bass guitar, *guitarrón*, was a little harder to remember. I think it funny that the smallest guitar had the most difficult name to learn—**vihuela** (vee-WEH-la). This instrument is smaller than a regular guitar but larger than those tiny guitars from Hawaii called **ukulele** (u-keh-LAY-lee).





As it turned out,  
the mystery led me to  
discover new things  
about another culture.

I want to learn  
more. So I hope  
Dad will let me

take guitar lessons at school next year. When I get good enough, I want to learn songs like the one called *Las Mañanitas* ("The Little Mornings"). Then I may buy a **sombrero** and go **serenade** Maria—just like a real mariachi!

## Glossary

<b>binoculars</b>	a device used to see far distances with both eyes (p. 9)
<b>eerie</b>	strange or frightening (p. 10)
<b>folk band</b>	a group of people who play their culture's traditional music (p. 12)
<b>instruments</b>	devices used to make and play music (p. 13)
<b>mariachi</b>	traditional Mexican folk music and one or more members of a band that performs it (p. 12)
<b>serenade</b>	to perform a love song to someone (p. 15)
<b>sombrero</b>	a large hat with a broad brim worn by ranchers in Mexico and in the American Southwest (p. 15)
<b>symphony orchestras</b>	large groups of musicians who play string, woodwind, brass, and percussion instruments (p. 7)
<b>ukulele</b>	a small Hawaiian four-stringed guitar (p. 14)
<b>vihuela</b>	a small five-stringed guitar with a domed back (p. 14)

Neighborhood Mystery  
Level R Leveled Book  
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