

Hi. I'm Tonia Ransom, creator and executive producer of NIGHTLIGHT, a horror podcast featuring creepy tales written and performed by Black creatives from all over the world.

This week's story comes to you from one of our best voice actors. Cherrae Stuart has been working with NIGHTLIGHT since the beginning, and it turns out that she's just as amazing a writer as she is as an actor. Her story about the darker side of realizing our dreams is as captivating as it is chilling.

Before we get to the story, just a reminder that all episodes are brought to you by the NIGHTLIGHT Legion. Thanks to our newest members Sophia, Sarahmeh, Christina, Momo, Brianna, Lee, Blep, Rose, L. Jordan, and Aakanksha. Thanks also to Irette and D. Emmett for making a one-time donation via PayPal. You all have my eternal gratitude. Again, NIGHTLIGHT is 100% listener supported, so we need your help to keep bringing you new episodes. Just go to patreon.com/nightlightpod to join the NIGHTLIGHT Legion and get a shoutout on the podcast.

Now sit back, turn out the lights, and enjoy 3115 Wicker Street by Cherrae L. Stuart, narrated by Josh Carter.

#

Equal parts excitement and anxiety thrummed in Dion's ears. He picked up his pace, repositioning his backpack onto both of his shoulders. He normally wore it slung casually over one, but today he had a heavier than normal load and he didn't want to take any extra risks.

He shoved his hands in his pockets to brace from the cold. His left hand closed around the lighter he kept there, cradling it. The smooth metal warmed in his palm. He ran his fingers over its engraved surface. *To light your way home* etched into the steel, a gift from his father to his brother Trey. Now it belonged to him. Normally something

like that would be confiscated at school, but Dion was a good kid and under the circumstances, his teachers looked the other way. It helped him stay calm and focus his grief. That's what mattered to them.

He walked fast and with purpose, trying not to draw attention to himself. The sun had yet to crest the horizon and a kid out this early—especially a black kid—and so far from any school was bound to arouse suspicion from the 5-0 even though the cops who worked this neighborhood knew Dion; they knew his family. His parents owned Daily Bread, the small bakery-coffee shop three blocks down. Their shop marked the change-over on Wicker Street where the industrial warehouses ended, and the storefronts began. They had good coffee and the best pastries and sandwiches in the city. It was the perfect pitstop for beat cops to break up their long shifts.

Blue flashing lights lit up the sidewalk behind him. Dion took a deep breath. He'd expected this, planned for it. He turned slowly, carefully letting go of the lighter, lest the cops catch a glint of silver and jump to conclusions. He raised his hands, and in one fluid motion, eased the hood of his sweater back off his clean-shaven head. Despite the early morning chill, a fine mist of sweat broke out across his brow.

"Please be Evans and J.T.," he whispered under his breath, silently praying to Trey, his patron saint. He'd chosen this particular day and time to line up with their schedules. But anticipating police rounds was a lot like predicting the weather, not an exact science. Crime was as variable and volatile as the wind. The two men in uniform exited the vehicle and walked towards him. Dion breathed a sigh of relief.

“Thanks, Trey.” He whispered under his breath.

Officers Marcellus Evans and J.T. Pierce were the newest cops on the beat, but they knew Dion better than most. They went to school with Trey. The three of them had enlisted in the Marines and deployed to Afghanistan together. Evans and J.T. came back and joined the force. Trey came back in a wooden box.

“Jesus, D-bear, it’s the ass-crack of dawn.” Evans used the baby nickname they had for him. Nine years younger than Trey and his friends, they never seemed to notice that he had grown up. He didn’t mind. Not today anyway.

“Yeah I know.” He tried to make his voice sound extra pitiful. He *was* sad, but he really needed to sell it. “Momma has a hard time on this day, so I thought I would go in to help before school.” He pretended to absently finger the dog tags he wore around his neck, hoping they’d reflect in the strobing blue and reds.

“Oh shit, that’s today.” J.T. rested his hand on Dion’s shoulder. It was a thick meaty hand, good for catching footballs and collaring suspects. J.T. had excelled at both. Dion held his breath. “You want a ride?”

“Naw, I just wanted some time to walk and think. You know what I mean?” Dion dropped his eyes and shuffled his feet. The tell-tale signs of an adolescent boy about to cry. He thought he would have to act out this part, but now that he was here, he could feel the hot swell of emotion burning in his chest. His voice sounded thick and heavy to

his own ears. Sudden tears prickled behind his eyes. He blinked hard, willing them back. He focused on his ratty shoelaces that wouldn't stay tied.

The two young officers looked at each other. The three of them stood there in a triangle of unexpressed masculine emotion, sharing grief over a man they'd all loved and lost. The crackle of static broke the spell. Dion barely heard as the dispatch call came in over the radio.

"You be careful and go straight there. No stops." J.T. swiped his eyes with the back of his hand, his voice watery. "And tie your shoes D-bear."

Evans nodded in agreement, but he didn't say anything. His throat moved up and down as if he had something caught in there. Unsaid words snared like a rabbit unable to make it past his bobbing Adam's apple.

Both men returned to the squad car. Dion stood still watching until they peeled out. His body relaxed. He had been standing ramrod straight and as still as he could, terrified the spray cans in his bag would clank together, giving him away. Being caught with spray cans would land even a good kid like Dion in a world of hurt.

The squad car sufficiently out of ear-shot, he continued down the block picking up the pace. He should reach his destination before those guys came back around, but he didn't want to take any chances. Some other cops on their way to an end-of-shift shit and breakfast would not be so lenient. That he had a legit reason for being out this early was only mostly true. His mother did have a hard time on this, the anniversary of her

eldest son's death. That was true. She'd spent the last one walking around in a daze gently leaking from the eyes, baking bread from muscle memory alone. Dion hated seeing his mother like that and wanted to do as much as he could to help. So, against her wishes, he would go in early and help prep; he just had one little stop to make first.

His parents didn't like him coming in the bakery during the school year. They insisted he focus on school and studies, reserving the summer months for him to help out around the shop, learn the family business and earn a little pocket money. But putting in extra time to help his grieving mother? That reason alone would satisfy any officer who stopped him, not just J.T. and Evans. Well, almost any.

Officer Linella in particular, came to mind. A crusty old-timer who called him son, with a venomous sweetness, whenever Dion handed him his change and steaming Styrofoam cup.

Thank God that wasn't him in the squad car. That guy had a real hard-on for criminal activity. He probably eyeballed his wife at dinnertime, like she'd just as soon stab him as put down a plate. Who knows, with a husband like that, maybe she would. Linella made Dion uneasy. He only smiled with his mouth, showing all his teeth, top and bottom, like a shark. And like a shark, his dark eyes were cold and suspicious. Guys like that were hard and untrusting, and they could catch a whiff of bullshit a mile away.

That he was not currently headed to the bakery was inconsequential. His target destination was on the route. 3115 Wicker Street, the abandoned warehouse, loomed low on the horizon, a squat building with dark walls untouched by any previous graffiti or

taggers. If Trey was still alive, it was guaranteed that building would have held one of his masterpieces. Trey was the best street artist in the city. His pieces both legal and illegal held people in thrall. They could stop traffic. Dion marveled at how his older brother with just a simple flick of the wrist could create whole worlds, transforming the drab brown and grey masonry, cinderblock and bricks into something alive, transcendent.

Dion was convinced that their parent's bakery did as well as it did, partially due to the steaming piles of fresh bread and pastry painted on the side. The deep brown crusts and pillowy interiors swimming with melting pats of golden butter worked their magic, luring in customers off the street. Over the years of his brother's deployment, the mural began to lose some of its luster and with it, Dion noticed a marked drop in their non-police customers. Every few weeks, he and his father washed it carefully with mild soap and water to remove the road grime. They buffed out any errant tags, harsh scribbles in fat magic marker left by young bucks on the street timidly trying to deface the work of a true O.G. Despite their care, it had begun peeling at the edges, and without a true refresh it would eventually fade away. Dion knew he couldn't let that happen. But he'd never so much as tagged a bus stop, and he was terrified he'd ruin it, destroying one of the few tangible pieces of his brother still left.

Trey had always promised to teach him.

"When you're older," he'd say, "I'll find you the sweetest heaven spot in the city." As a kid Dion used to dream of helping his brother paint something glorious, hanging from

ropes precariously balanced under the tallest bridge, or highest building, A mural so astonishing, so inaccessible, it would become a landmark, a tourist destination.

Those dreams died with Trey, at least he thought they had.

Ever since he spotted the place back in July on his way to the bakery, he was drawn to it. Strange he hadn't noticed it before. Probably because before this year he rode in a car with his mom to open the shop. His head pressed against the window, and bleary with sleep he didn't notice much of anything. That day Jocelyn was running late and rather than make a big fuss, she took pity on Dion. She'd let him sleep in if he promised to stay late and help his father sanitize the mixers after closing.

He'd finally roused around 11 and riding his bike the mile from home to the bakery, he'd be there well before the lunch rush, as promised. Wide awake he skidded to a stop in front of the old warehouse, shocked that he had never seen it before. It was strange, if you'd asked him any time before that day, he would have told you a grassy vacant lot stood on 3115 and he wouldn't have been wrong. But here it was in all its abandoned bare-walled glory, looking like it had always been there, which wasn't exactly wrong either.

Every day after, he rode his bike in at four a.m., offering to let his mom sleep in an extra half-hour while he started the morning prep. He would slow down around the building, careful to spend only a few minutes soaking in as many details about the property as he could from the sidewalk. Like the Dion-sized gap in the chain link fence on the eastern edge, or the simple padlock on the door next to the loading dock. He

imagined how the morning sun from the windows on that side would play across the interior.

When he returned home each afternoon, he studied the pages of Trey's black books. During his last call with his brother, Trey told him where he had hidden his most valuable possessions, the written records of every tag, sketches of pieces he'd thrown up, and rough drafts and ideas for future murals, all in one incriminating place. At the time Dion was excited, thinking his brother was on his way home, finally keeping his promise of teaching him. After the funeral, however, he realized that whatever mission his brother was on, he must have known then that he might not make it back. The phone call was his last will, the books, his legacy.

Dion was so angry at his brother for putting himself in harm's way. Angry at his parents for letting him, and most of all angry with himself for not seeing the signs in what would be their final conversation. He would have said more. I love you, at least. Instead of their usual insults.

"Talk to you soon rock-head" Trey had said.

"Takes one to know one." Dion replied, laughing, hanging up the phone before Trey could get in another word. The next day he would be gone. Dion couldn't bear to look at Trey's unfinished works, hard proof of his unfinished life. So, he didn't retrieve the books, at least not then.

The day he spotted the building on 3115 it was like a light switch flipping on inside him. A renewed sense of purpose burned brightly. He wouldn't let Trey be forgotten. He would learn how to fix the mural on his parent's bakery and the abandoned building at 3115 would be the perfect place to practice. On his tablet, he experimented with colors and designs, he tried to extrapolate what the light must be like at different times of day. In the black books—uncovered from their hiding place behind a loose cinderblock in the back wall of the bakery's dry-goods storage—Dion memorized all of his brother's designs.

He poured over page after page, marveling at the rapid evolution of Trey's talent, from the bubble letter beginnings to the delicate shading and linework in the later books. For the remainder of the summer he planned his own masterpiece, a memorial to Trey that he hoped to one day attempt. Even once the school year started, he found a way to shift his route to bring him past the building. It took him nearly an hour to get there, versus the 20 minutes it would have taken on the bus, but he was possessed. Every day Dion visited and studied the warehouse at 3115 Wicker Street. And every day 3115 Wicker Street watched and studied Dion, waiting.

Dion was a practical kid, however. He didn't want to risk being stopped with a spray can or two every time he wanted to practice. So, he planned one big supply drop. He would leave everything there, that way he could come and go as he pleased without the added pressure of carrying contraband. He spent the remainder of the summer months gathering supplies and practicing on paper with markers and blow pens, hardly the same thing, but he had to start somewhere. He ordered special spray can caps online,

fine tips for sharp lines and fat head caps for wide swaths of color that would blend together. He watched hundreds of video tutorials, as he slowly acquired enough cans to risk a drop.

At the gap in the fence, Dion removed his backpack and placed it on the ground. He then removed his hoodie, carefully folded it and placed it in the bag next to his uniform oxford shirt which was also lightly folded. He couldn't take any chances. Oxfords weren't cheap. He slipped between the gap in the fence. It was barely big enough for him to fit without snagging his undershirt. He was relieved at the last moment he decided to walk. It was riskier, but his bike never would've fit.

He shivered at his exposed skin in the early morning air, in anticipation, excitement, fear and grief. All of these things forming a pungent cocktail of emotions that radiated off him in delicious waves. He hurried to the loading dock, not noticing the gap in the chain-link fence close behind him.

When he reached the padlocked door, he was pleasantly surprised. The lock was much smaller and flimsier than it looked from the street. A few taps with the hammer he filched from his dad's tools and the twisted lump clattered to the ground. As Dion swung back the latch, the door pushed open practically on its own. It was almost like it wanted him inside. He put the hammer back in his bag and adjusted the straps.

He stepped inside the warehouse, fishing out his lighter. *Zip-ting*, he flipped open the top simultaneously exposing and igniting the wick underneath and held it out in front of him. He took a few more cautious steps into the building. His eyes adjusted quickly

however, and not wanting to waste fuel, he snapped the lighter closed, and stuffed it back into his pocket. The main room was dim but not nearly as dark as it should have been. Not even close.

It was large and cavernous with smooth bare walls, painted a rich black and just as he had hoped, they were free from any previous graffiti. The place was not just abandoned, it was completely empty. There was no discernable machinery or tools left behind, no traces of work done. He couldn't rightfully say what this building was used for, or if it was ever used. No signs of homeless squatters, or back alley drug deals either. As if this building only existed just for him. On the heels of this thought, his shoes crackled on debris and broken glass. He looked around again, there was debris everywhere and a rusted conveyor belt of some kind hulked in a corner. Funny he didn't see it before, as bright as it was.

He walked over to the large western wall. In a few hours the morning light from the east windows would spill in, cascading over it like a spotlight. It was the perfect canvas. Too perfect. He set down his heavy backpack and removed all the cans lining them up on the floor. He had precious few minutes to waste and still beat his mom to the bakery, but the black wall was so beautiful, so smooth. It was almost irresistible. He decided to try a small angel tag he'd been practicing. A looping stylized version of Trey's signature that was accented with a commemorative halo. After the funeral, they'd popped all over town. Other artists showing their respect to Trey's talent. Dion took pictures of them and printed them out, studying their deceptively simplistic lines, before finally settling on his own version of the design. He'd made it over and over in his book, perfecting it. But

drawing on paper with a marker was not the same as spray paint on a wall and Dion hesitated.

“I don’t want to mess it up,” he said quietly.

“You got this D-Bear.” He imagined his brother’s reassuring voice, feeling his heavy hand rubbing the top of his bald head. An affectionate gesture picked up from their father.

Dion reached into his backpack and pulled out a plastic pencil box which held the rest of his supplies. Opening it, he removed a pair of latex gloves. As he tugged the tight glove over his fingers, a trail of dust shook loose from the ceiling pattering his face. He sneezed, yanking on the glove with a jolt, breaking the thin latex. It was useless. Frustrated, he pulled the glove apart and threw it on the floor. He managed to put on the other glove unmolested, but when he ran his hand across the surface of the wall it snagged, ripping to shreds across the palm. Dion pulled off the other ruined glove and dropped it to the floor as well.

He leaned in close inspecting the wall. Nose nearly touching the surface, he couldn’t see whatever burr had snared his glove. It was so smooth and dark, velvety like the hide of a panther. He gingerly pressed his bare hand to the wall. Emotion swelled in his entire body, and his eyes glazed over. He ripped open the pencil box and selected a fat head cap for his first strokes and furiously went to work. His arms flailed wildly making something much bigger than a simple angel tag, but he couldn’t stop himself. The wide nozzle of the cap deposited gentle washes of teal over the black. He’d gotten the teal

cans from Mr. Peterson, whose patio furniture he painted in late July. With an expert flick of the wrist he made the highlights in Electric Red and Hot Orange taken from a construction site last week. He struggled against his own body, trying to stop himself. His bones began to vibrate with the effort. A low humming echoed from the back of his throat.

Am I making that noise? He couldn't tell. By the time he picked up the Appliance White he'd used on Mrs. Walton's garage freezer, he was nearly screaming. He knew it would barely take half a can, but when she'd asked him how many she should buy, he said three without hesitation or trace of a lie. It wasn't like him. Stealing from his neighbors wasn't in his nature, nor lying to his parents, or stealing from construction sites, he barely remembered doing any of it. The compulsion to get into this building had clouded his judgement. This need that started months ago was dangerous and unhealthy; he could see that now. But he could also see that it was too late.

He couldn't stop even if he wanted to. His amplified emotions flowed from the pit of his groin through his chest and into his arms. The building shuddered in an almost erotic satisfaction, drinking him deeply. He barely registered the pain when he pinched his palm slamming the fine outline tip onto the can of black taken from the school supply closet. Dion didn't notice the tears streaming down his face as he carefully lettered Trey's name and serial number, his older brother's blood type and gas mask size into the giant dog tags now floating across an infinite galaxy. It was the memorial he planned

on the last page of the black book. He was far from the skill level it took to pull off a piece this intricate, yet here it was manifesting before him at breakneck speed.

Snot and tears and blood from his hand hit the floor in near equal measure, sucked into the concrete faster than water in a desert. Dion painted and screamed and screamed and painted. Grief and fury flowed out of him and into the wall. He hated J.T. And Marcellus for coming home alive when Trey did not, for allowing him to sacrifice his life to save theirs. Dion was on fire, sweat pouring down his back. He hated his father for suggesting the military to keep Trey out of trouble and away from the dangers of hanging off bridges.

“He’s dead either way Gerald!” Dion raged into the void. He hated his teachers for looking at him with pity, for letting him keep a lighter against the school policy. A daily reminder of his loss. Why didn’t they take it away from him?!

The wall pulsated and glowed with siphoned energy. It drank his rage and grief and angst and fears just as greedily as it drank his tears and blood. Equally nourishing, equally tasty. It wanted more, needed more. The building flexed and sucked harder.

Dion’s life flashed through his mind, a muddy mash of pain. He hated Officer Linella with his sharkey teeth and dead cold eyes. He remembered the time when he was nine and Linella pinned his arms behind his back and threatened to arrest him for dropping a sugar caddy on the floor. He hated his mother for not being there to defend him. She

was glazing donuts or mixing dough, or whatever fucking thing that kept her from seeing her baby boy being terrorized by this asshole who pretended to be their friend.

He hated feeling small and powerless and sad and lonely and lost without Trey. Trey, he hated him most of all for leaving. For not coming back like he promised, for dying a Goddamned hero instead of living like a normal person, no future running Daily Bread, no getting married, or having kids, never to become a famous underground artist. His friend, his protector, his big brother—gone forever.

He screamed and cried and bled and sprayed a beautiful, terrible, marvelous galaxy of stars across the velvety blackness so deep and so real he wished he could fall into it. Fall and fall forever.

Dion swooned and fell to the ground. The can of white clattered on the concrete. It and his thin body, both spent. The building rumbled around him. His galaxy loomed above, glowing in the dimness. Thin streams of dust poured from the ceiling, and glass shattered from window panes. Wires snapped and twang, whipping loose from their mountings. The thick grinding scrapes of cinderblocks coming apart, roared from all directions. The building was collapsing around him. He wiped his face with his arms and tried to stand. Something grabbed at his feet and yanked him around dragging him across the floor. He tried to crawl away, his hands grasping the smooth floor finding no purchase.

It flipped him onto his back, pulling him away from his brother's memorial. A deep rhythmic rumbling shook the walls and the floor.

It's laughing at me? The thing pulled him by his shoelaces. Dion swore under his breath, if he got out of this, he would never leave his shoes untied again. It yanked him in and Dion slid forward towards the crunching metal and wood.

"Trey!" he screamed

Tug-slide. Further in. His undershirt bunched up as he slid across the floor, exposing his bare back.

"Treeeeeeey!" the building screamed back mocking him with its grinding cinder block voice. It was playing with him.

Tug-Slide. His skin burned as he scraped across the broken glass and debris on the hard concrete.

"I'm sorry! I love you!" He screamed into the void wild with fear. Grief had made him angry, but he wasn't about to die without saying these words out loud.

Tug-slide-snap! His worn lace gave way, snapping in two. The force of it sent him backward a few inches. Dion wasted no time. He kicked off his shoes, crawling on his back towards the wall, his right hand finding the nearly full can of black.

The building roared in fury. Beams tore free from the ceiling and the walls collapsed inward. The back side of the building had transformed itself into a huge hungry mouth. A

razored maw lined with nails and broken glass caked with grime, infected with tetanus and hungry for him. The mouth pushed closer puckering the walls. Dust and masonry rained down on him. It was ripping itself apart to get at him. The cavernous hole, so black it threatened to drive him insane if he looked too long, bore down on him.

“To light your way home!”

It was Trey’s voice ringing in his ears. Not realizing what he was doing Dion reached into his pocket and pulled out the lighter. *Zip-ting!* he flipped the lighter open. Dust rained into his mouth and nose and into his eyes. He slammed his eyes closed ignoring the searing pain. And held his breath lest an errant sneeze extinguish his meager flame. He reached around with the spray can still in his right hand and pressed down on the nozzle.

The chemical stream of paint and accelerant blasted through the tongue of flame transforming into a righteous lance of fire. Burning and cleansing the evil of this demon. The building shrieked. The inhuman screech and scream of nails pulling from wood, of copper piping twisting itself apart, of rebar ripping from concrete, all mingled into a symphony of pain and destruction. Dion held the lighter firm despite his scorching thumb. He gripped the spray can tighter despite his cramping hand. He kept his eyes closed despite the maddening urge to look.

He was flying. Disoriented, his stomach flipped with the sensation of weightlessness. Perhaps he was meant for the black hole of the creature's mouth after all, and he made his peace with that.

Thud! Air blasted from his lungs as he hit something solid. The impact left him dazed. His hands hurt but they were empty. Dion flexed his fingers, feeling softness, not the hard concrete, nor the sharp wet mouth he was expecting. He opened his eyes.

He squinted against the late morning sun. It was high in the bright blue sky. That wasn't right. He had at least two hours before sunrise. Dion sat up. His back was damp with morning dew. His hands rested gently in the too long grass of an empty and slightly unkempt lot. The warehouse was gone. The concrete parking lot was gone. The chain-link fence with the hole big enough for him to squeeze through, was gone.

He got to his feet slowly, his knees trembled. He spied his backpack a few feet away and went to it. He picked it up absently. The traffic on Wicker was slowing down. Everyone who needed to be at work by 9 was already there. He checked himself. His t-shirt was ripped and filthy. His khakis were dirty but not destroyed. *Oh Damn*, his shoes were gone. Dion groaned. His mom was gonna kill him. He could tell her he got jumped on the way to school. It'd be about the only thing she would believe. Looking the way he looked, it wasn't much of a stretch.

The hair on the back of his neck raised and his heart rate picked up. A hard ball of ice froze his bowels. Instinctual animal fear threatened his cognition as he felt a cold penetrating gaze following him. The building may have been gone but that thing was still

there somewhere. He'd hurt it for sure, but it was far from dead. The soft grass under his feet felt dirty and malevolent. Thousands of little tongues licking him, tasting him. Dion hustled to the sidewalk. He couldn't bear to touch it any more than necessary.

His guts relaxed as his bare feet slapped the sidewalk. It was warm and solid and with each step away from the lot, he felt a little more grounded.

Whatever lived in the vacant lot on 3115 Wicker Street was a predator. It showed you what you wanted to see. Whatever you needed to see to lure you in, and since Dion had gotten away, it was still hungry and now it was angry too. What was he gonna tell them? He had to tell them something. What if someone else wandered into that lot? But what could he tell them that they would believe? Each step away from 3115 pushed the horrors of that morning into a fog. Nobody would believe a word of it, and the further he got, the less sure he was about what had happened.

Something happened he was sure of it... well fairly sure. Wasn't he? Yes, there was a thing, a horribly hungry thing that lived in the warehouse on Wicker. No that wasn't right. Dion stopped walking. He shook his head to clear his thoughts. The warehouse was the thing. 3115 was a vacant lot with a monster that pretended to be a building. It tried to eat him. He laughed suddenly. What was he thinking? Monsters weren't real.

He must have gotten jumped on his way to school. Why else would he be barefoot? They took his shoes. He didn't really remember getting into a fight, but maybe they threw a brick at him; he probably had a concussion. He dragged his backpack, not wanting to hoist it over his bruised shoulders. Dion continued walking, slow and steady

steps. Trey's dog tags rhythmically tapped against his chest, as he made his way down the block towards the warmth and safety of Daily Bread.

Any cops in the shop would press him for details but he didn't have any. His dad would shake his head and take him home to shower and sleep. His mother would freak out. Today was the anniversary of his brother's death and she couldn't bear to lose a second son. *I was going in early to help her open!* He suddenly remembered a detail he hoped would be helpful. He wanted to make things easier for her. He hated to see her grieving and was thankful that he wasn't adding to her heartache. He'd have to be more careful in the future. The sun was warm on his bare head. Dion winced as sweat rolled down his back, stinging his scrapes. His body hurt all over but his heart was light. The grief and anger that sat on his shoulders weighing him down, was gone. He still missed his big brother, but for the first time in two years he was at peace.

Julia's breath hitched in her throat. It was her Holy Grail! Practically screaming against the drab brown lawn, a cheerful red and white rectangle gleamed in the mid-morning sun. 3115 Wicker Street was finally for sale! She'd been eyeing the place for weeks. And for weeks, 3115 had been eyeing her.

The Victorian style home on the corner didn't really belong in this neighborhood. Former industrial warehouses turned trendy shops in the city's rapid revitalization efforts lined most of Wicker Street. This was the last Victorian in the city-proper. She was surprised it hadn't already been torn down to make way for the expensive loft condos

that would surely follow the shops. She stepped off the sidewalk and onto the lawn to get a closer look at the sign.

Julia's eyes welled up. Bittersweet tears spilled down her cheeks, lapped up greedily by the blades of grass at her feet. She and Jeff had always talked about doing something like this. Crazy pipedream pillow talk, they both knew there would never be enough money. But now Jeff was gone, leaving her with enough life insurance to make their dream a reality. She could do this, for him. The large ornate home could be the jewel of the block. Perfect for a yoga studio or a pottery and wine place, luring in the wealthy wine-mom crowd, or a cute bed and breakfast maybe. She might even be able to get it registered as a historical landmark.

The grass strained upward, lengthening. It caressed her ankles tasting her grief. Their gentle touch on her skin pulsed a current through her body. Her heart pumped faster. The sudden rush of blood to her head drowned out the waning street traffic, sharpening her focus. The front door was open a crack. She hadn't noticed that before. Maybe the real estate agent was still inside. Julia checked her watch, she didn't really have the time, but the pull was just too strong.

Just a quick peek couldn't hurt.

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us on Facebook @nightlightpod. Reviews are also a huge help, so be sure to leave a few kind words on your podcast platform of choice.

Audio production for this episode by Evan Shelton.

And to thank you for listening until the end, we have a creepy fact for you.

One-third of murders in America are unsolved. That's down from 90% in the '70s, despite advances in forensic technology. Police blame it on a "no-snitch" policy, especially in poor communities, but we can't help but wonder—could it just be that non-human entities are responsible for more modern murders?

We'll be back in 2 weeks with another episode.