

Wake Me

I go and work at the Fairview Apartments in Fairview. My uncle Silas he owns the building. There are twenty four apartments. He calls them units and he calls the people who sleep in them renters. I go to work there every night. My job is to wake up the renters and stop them screaming.

Uncle Silas pays me cash money and he says Audie you're doing a good job.

That makes me feel good.

The apartment building has three floors. You can take the elevator or you can walk up the stairs to the second floor and up to the third floor. The renters on the first floor like the Pascals and Mr. Dimitri they don't have to take the elevator or the stairs.

I go to the apartment building at midnight and I leave at six o'clock in the morning. Uncle Silas says I am working the night shift.

I take the bus from my mom's house. We live across the river. The bus driver stops at Grand Avenue and I walk to the Fairview Apartments on Barnum Street. It is not far.

I have a key to the office and a key to the office desk. I set my sandwich bag on the desk. Then I look at the clipboard. It hangs by the door. I look at it to see if there is a note for me to do something before the screaming starts.

I sweep the floor of the office and take the trash bag out of the trash can and I tie it up and drop it in the dumpster behind the apartment building. That is where the renters park their cars and trucks. Then I water the fern plants outside the elevator doors. Sometimes a light bulb goes out and I go to the utility room to get the ladder and a new light bulb. These are chores I do.

After my chores I go into the office and I open the desk drawer and take out the code card. It has the numbers to unlock the doors of every unit. Lateesha's code is 714. The Duarte's code is 555. I know every renters code numbers but I bring the card with me in my jacket pocket if I forget.

Then I go and walk the hall on the first floor and then the second floor and then the third floor. I know there will be a piece of paper outside unit 303. It is from Asha. She writes on the paper— will you wake me? I put the paper in my pocket and walk the halls again and listen for groans.

That is how it starts. The sleeping renters they groan. It is not snoring. I know the difference between groaning and snoring.

It starts with squirms and groans and then one or sometimes two or maybe three of the renters start to shout No! No! They twist in their beds and shout like they can see it coming after them.

The scary thing.

Now I need to unlock the doors to all the units and then wake up the renters as fast as I can because I know the shouts will

soon turn into screams and the screams will spread to the renters on all three floors. Whole building.

Every renters scream is different. The loudest is Mamood in 202. He is a big man. Bigger than me. Tonya in 117 her screams sound like a boiling tea kettle. And there is Boris. He screams in short blasts. Agh! Agh! Like that.

When they are all screaming it is louder than a fire engine. It is loud as five fire engines.

I run into the bedroom of one unit and wake the renter and then run in the next unit across the hall. Many of the bedrooms are dark. Some have night lights. Most of the renters can't see my face. Their eyes are closed. I poke a shoulder. I wiggle an arm. Wake up now it is okay I tell them. I know all their names so I will say Maren wake up it's me Audie. She wakes up crying. I keep tissues in my jacket I give to her. She wipes her eyes. She says you're an angel Audie.

Some are screaming so loud they can't hear me so I have to shake their bodies.

Mr. Otis in 310 he punches the air like he's fighting something. I have to hold his wrists and lift him. That works. He says I'm strong.

I don't know most of the renters faces but I know their smells. Salvatore smells like beer. He grabs my arm and says is that you Audie? I say yes. He lets go of my arm and he wakes up his screaming wife Lisa.

If I can wake up the third floor while they are shouting that is good. Then I have fifteen units to wake up out of the twenty three. There would be twenty four but the Hassan family moved out. I was sad to see them go.

I take the stairs to the second floor. It is faster than if I go down in the elevator.

When I wake up Mr. and Mrs. Kim she says bless you Audie. I don't know what that means. I tell my mom. She says it means thank you and a lot more.

Mr. Gaines in 207 he is solid like freezer meat. I have to tickle his arm pit. I tried smelling salts. I tried splashing cold water on his face. He did not like those. The tickling works.

Gertie's bed in 203 smells of pee pee stink. She slaps me in the face when I wake her up. Sometimes hard. She don't know. I say it is me. She says oh Audie and she tells me there is a chocolate cookie for me next to the stove.

Last is Mr. Dimitri. If I don't make him get out of bed and walk around then he goes back into the scary place and starts screaming. That is not good because it can make everyone scream again.

Some don't want to go back to sleep.

Cecilia in 105 says and face that? I'd rather die!

My mom says don't bring it home.

After I wake up everybody and stop all the screaming I need to sit down. I like to go up to the roof and be there when the pigeons come back. I sit on a wooden pallet and eat my tuna fish

sandwich and the cookie Gertie left for me. The pigeons coo as they settle.

Last night and the night before I feel a tingle in my feet when I walk the halls. This happens before the groaning starts. So this is new for me.

I think about the renters on the bus ride back to Mom's. I think about Tonya. Her boyfriend left her and she's heartsick. I think about little Owen. He has assma. I think about who I would want to wake me and I think of Mamood and Mr and Mrs. Kim. They are kind. And Asha. She smells sweet like the flowers outside my mom's kitchen.

Yesterday Uncle Silas calls me and he says there are people who want to talk to me tomorrow at one o'clock.

So I come to the apartment building. There is a man and a woman in the office. I don't know them. They carry folders.

I sit there as they talk to my uncle. They call the screaming something with a long name. They tell Uncle Silas they can fix it. They give him a folder to read. It has pictures on it.

He listens to them talk.

They don't give me a folder.

I hear the man say the words finger clip and zap zap. The woman points to the folder and says "premeum." I don't know what that is. There are other words the man and the woman say I don't know. I will ask Uncle Silas what the words mean later.

I think I need to know these things to do a good job for him.

They ask my uncle if he handed out sleeping pills to renters as a curtsee. He says yes but it didn't change anything.

Then the man and woman look at me. They ask me if it happens every night.

I say the screaming?

She says yes.

I say not every night. I say most nights. But I am ready every night. I watch the clock in the office. When the short hand goes to the 4 I know there is no screaming that night. But I never know before that.

Is it five nights a week? Four nights a week? She asks me.

I say I don't count.

Does it start with one renter or many? If many how many?

They talk fast. It makes me nervous. I don't know how to answer how many. I say it starts with groaning.

The man writes something on a pad of paper.

The woman asks me what time of night it starts when it happens?

I say around 3 o'clock.

Standard she says to the man.

Then she asks me if any of the renters are afraid to go back to sleep. I start to say yes Owen in 108 he is just a boy and Cecilia in 105 doesn't want me to leave. The man and woman stop me there.

How many? The man asks me.

They want the number. They don't want the names.

I count with my fingers and I say nine.

I start to tell them about how each renter is woken up. Like Elise in 209. I put my hand on her forehead and she calms down and gets up and wakes her mom Lateesha in the other bedroom.

The man and woman stop me again. I feel like they don't want to hear what I tell them.

How long have you been doing this? The woman asks me. I look at Uncle Silas. He says two months I shake my head. I know it is more nights than that.

The man and the woman look at each other. They tell my uncle about a place called East Haven. They point to a picture in the folder.

Uncle Silas looks at the picture.

I feel cold all over.

The woman asks me if I ever had to call 911 for help?

I am about to say no when Uncle Silas says that was before Audie started.

I hear a ding ding. The man looks at his phone. He says there's a new insedent.

Where? she asks.

A development he says. Harmony acres.

Uncle Silas shakes his head.

The man turns to me. He wants to know if I ask the renters what they are afraid of.

I don't like these two people so I stop talking.

Do they say what scares them the woman asks me.

I keep my mouth shut. I don't tell them Mr. Dimitri says it's the new normal Audie. I don't tell them Lateesha's daughter Elise says it got inside. The bad shadow.

Uncle Silas walks me to the door.

Did I do okay? I ask him.

You did great he says. He pats me on the shoulder and takes cash money out of his wallet and he gives it to me. Then he goes back to talk to the man and the woman with the folders.

I will put the money in the suitcase I keep under my bed.

Someday I'm going to buy my own apartment building.

I go outside and stand next to the blue Fairview Apartments FOR RENT sign. The sun is bright. It is still the afternoon. I don't know what to do. I did not bring a sandwich.

Do I take the bus back across the river to Mom's or stay here and wait for my night shift?