Welcome To Spooktown – Ken Cheng

[Spooky music]

ED EASTON: [screams] Ah, a real ghost now!

[Wind blowing, footsteps]

KATH HUGHES: Where have you been?

ED: Oh, sorry, I’m late. I don’t really want to say what I’ve been –

KATH: No go on, what have you been doing?

ED: I don’t really want to say.

KATH: You’ve got shit all around your mouth.

ED: Just finished a whole Viennetta.

KATH: A whole one?

ED: Yes.

KATH: Christ.

ED: What am I meant to do, eat half of it and let the rest of it defrost?

KATH: Yeah, fair. Okay. Okay, fair.

ED: Come on, let’s go see Ken.

KATH: Well as long as you’re not sick it’s fine.

ED: Don’t police my behaviour.

KATH: Okay, I just don’t want you to embarrass yourself in front of Ken, that’s all.

ED: I think if I threw up Viennetta – a whole Viennetta in front of Ken, he would be like, ‘that’s the coolest thing I’ve ever seen.’

KATH: Hm.

ED: ‘Do it again.’ But I can’t do it again, I’ve only had one. Maybe I should go and have a second. Just in case he wants to see me throw it up twice.

KATH: Just do it after.

ED: Have you had any nightmares this week, Kath?

KATH: Oh yeah, I’ve had a weird one where within the dream there’s like this – I can only describe as a like 16 legged tarantula appears. But every time – like it’ll be a completely normal setting and then it will appear. And then the next night I’ll go to bed, dream, normal setting, tarantula will appear again.

ED: You’re being hunted by a nightmare spider.

KATH: I don’t – I think so. Because the last time it happened I woke up. It was of like sleep paralysis. I was in my room and it was on the wall.

ED: What?

KATH: But it’s not real. Oh god – it’s not real. No, I’d have to burn the house down if it was real. Maybe the next time I’ll try and communicate with it.

ED: Maybe.

KATH: I hope there is no next time, I’ll be honest.

ED: I hope there is no next time. I hate that this is in my life.

KATH: You hate this in your life? Oh, sorry.

ED: Yeah, yeah. Keep it to yourself next time. I wish I’d never asked.

KATH: How about you, any nightmares?

ED: Uh, no.

KATH: Great.

ED: Well actually yeah, again. Your spider thing has – has turned into my nightmare. Horrible. Yet again. Oh, it’s Ken.

KATH: Hey, Ken!

KEN CHENG: Oh hey there.

ED: Hello, Ken.

KEN: Hey.

ED: Thank you so much for inviting us to this, the last or second to last Blockbuster in the world. Certainly the last one in – in England.

KEN: Yes, definitely the last one in England. And, um, it’s not recognised officially as one of the remaining Blockbusters. But it’s kind of flown under the radar.

ED: Oh.

KATH: Oh, okay.

KEN: And but that’s – that’s probably the mainstream media. They don’t recognise the great achievements of Spooktown, I’ve noticed.

[All laugh]

ED: Thank you.

KATH: Right? Thank you. Thank you so much for bringing that up.

ED: Finally, someone’s pulling up the ‘Times’ and the ‘Telegraph’. Absolute bullshit.

KEN: Yeah.

ED: Um, I used to fucking love a Blockbusters when I was a kid.

KEN: Yeah, me too.

KATH: Same.

ED: Blockbuster’s, KFC, toffee popcorn, Viennetta. Viennetta?

KEN: That’s a good combo.

KATH: Ooh, that’s quite like – we’d have – Viennetta we’d have at the end of like a – that’s a posh thing, that.

ED: Yeah.

KATH: You’d have a Viennetta at the end of like a – ‘ooh a dinner party, let’s get the Viennetta out.’

ED: Yeah, it was a posh thing. It was always like, ‘ooh, maybe can’t get a Viennetta.’ And then I saw it in the shop. Like they’re 2 quid.

KEN: What?

KATH: Really?

ED: Yeah. They’re so cheap. It’s like two – it’s like £2 or £1.50 or something.

KEN: It is one of those things that’s fake posh, but isn’t actually posh?

ED: Yeah.

KATH: Maybe.

ED: That’s exactly it. We’re not After Eights here, we’re not talking real posh. It’s like pretend posh.

KATH: Well my childhood was a lie then.

ED: Yeah, sorry guys.

KATH: Because Viennetta was always pulled out. Oh, what a shame.

ED: So delicious though. Bad chocolate with bad ice cream. What a combo.

KATH: Yeah, that is what it is, isn’t it?

ED: Yeah.

KATH: I don’t know why I didn’t – didn’t realise that sooner.

ED: Yeah. Bad chocolate? Rubbish. Bad chocolate and bad ice cream? Fucking hello.

KEN: They cancel each other out.

ED: Yeah, they do.

KEN: If you put two –

KATH: Yeah.

KEN: Any bad two foods together, they – they’re two negatives.

ED: Bad bread and bad cheese? You got yourself a nice cheese sandwich.

KATH: Yeah.

[Spooky music]

[Birds chirping, children playing]

ED: How was your journey here to Spooktown?

KEN: Uh, it was fine, you know? I don’t mind getting the train.

ED: Yeah, yeah.

KEN: I’ve – I’ve got the train a lot in my – in my times as a comedian. And you get used to it, don’t you? Lone – lone journeys on a train.

ED: Yeah.

KATH: Yeah.

ED: It’s also quite nice getting the train these days because there’s not many people on them.

KEN: Yeah.

KATH: Yeah.

KEN: Yeah, I – especially to Spooktown. There’s not a huge amount of, uh, people – people coming in.

KATH: No.

KEN: Um, I – I’m not saying that’s a bad thing. That’s just the – de-industrialisation of – of England.

KATH: Yeah.

ED: Yeah, that’s – that’s heavy, man.

KEN: The old industries in Spooktown are being neglected. Under-funded, really.

KATH: Oh, wow.

ED: Yeah. Yeah, managed decline, is it?

KATH: Managed decline, yeah.

KEN: Managed decline.

ED: Yeah.

KEN: It’s sad, really.

ED: Yes, it is. It is very sad.

KATH: Yeah.

ED: It’s very sad.

KEN: Yeah, the way that they put that on the train, ‘Welcome to Spooktown: Managed Decline’ –

KATH: Yeah.

KEN: You pass it. You pass the sign when you come in. On the train station.

[All laugh]

ED: ‘Welcome to Spooktown, population yikes, managed decline.’ ‘Managed decline five years in a row.’ I always think of that – there was a – there was an article about Blackpool where the – the mayor said, ‘you can turn up to Blackpool with a carrier bag full of clothes and a £20 note and get a flat,’ or something like that. There was just something really disparaging about Blackpool. And like fucking mean for the person who runs it. You’re like, ‘right, okay.’

KATH: Oh god.

KEN: That is a very cheap flat.

KATH: Yeah, it really is.

ED: It’s a very cheap flat, yeah.

KEN: Or they’re expecting you to have really expensive clothes that you’re bartering.

[All laugh]

KATH: Yeah.

KEN: A bag of Armani suits.

ED: Yeah. Just sell one of your Alexander McQueen shirts. Yeah. So how many ghosts have you seen this week?

KEN: I think in a dream I dreamt about Casper the friendly ghost.

KATH: Nice.

KEN: That’s probably the closest I’ve got. I don’t remember why and how they came up. I think Casper in the dream was actually quite a bad figure. It was probably a dark re-telling of Casper.

ED: Oh wow, yes. That would be fucking great to watch.

KATH: Like ‘Casper after dark.’ Like when ‘Hollyoaks’ do a late – late-night one.

KEN: Yeah.

KATH: And they swear in it.

KEN: Yeah, the gritty reboot.

KATH: Yeah.

ED: The Christopher Nolan Casper.

KEN: They need to do it.

ED: They do need to do it. Had you watched ‘Casper’ recently? Or is it like – yeah.

KEN: No, I haven’t seen ‘Casper’ for – since I was like maybe six years old.

KATH: Gosh I wonder why – why he popped up in your dreams.

ED: That’s wild, man.

KEN: I don’t know. It’s odd, isn’t it?

KATH: Yeah.

ED: I feel it’s very pandemic – like you’re – you haven’t done anything in a year so your mind’s going, ‘fucking what else can we talk about?’

KEN: Casper.

ED: ‘Casper I guess?’

KATH: You know if you’ve not watched ‘Casper’ for such a long time.

ED: Yeah. Yeah.

KATH: And you still dreamt about it, I’m like, ‘well, was there some sort of ghost interference there in the dream?’

KEN: Yeah, I think you’re right, Kath.

ED: My final question is –

KEN: Yes.

ED: What, Ken, is the spookiest thing that’s ever happened to you?

KEN: I live a very spook-free life, I have to say. In general. Maybe I’ve repressed something. And that’s spooky in itself, that I don’t even remember –

KATH: Yeah.

ED: That’s very spooky. Yeah.

KEN: The spookiest thing.

ED: Yeah.

KATH: I think that’s –

ED: The human mind’s the spookiest thing –

KATH: Yeah, that’s pretty dark.

KEN: I used to be afraid of everything when I was a kid, so it’s kind of – probably something very, very mundane, like a dark room. Just a room – a pitch black room. That’s really spooky to me. I used to be afraid of literally everything you could be afraid of, I think.

ED: That’s amazing.

KEN: I used to always sleep with the nightlight off – on.

ED: That’s an amazing – that’s an amazing answer to what’s the spookiest thing that’s ever happened to you. ‘My whole childhood.’

KATH: Yeah yeah yeah. ‘My deepest darkest memories that I’ve repressed.’ Pretty spooky.

ED: Pretty spooky.

KEN: Oh, I remember something that I was spooked out – spooked out by. I was on a long walk when I was staying in I think – somewhere in Norfolk by the beach. And there was just like this little random bench. And it just had this map of something on it. And then everything was really dark. And I was with some friends. And we just kind of walked up to this bench and there was this like – this random map. And I don’t know why that was – there was something that was quite spooky about that. Because it wasn’t like attached to like a sign or anything. It was just on – on the bench where you sit.

[All laugh]

KATH: Yeah, you’re right. You are scared about everything. Um –

KEN: Yeah.

ED: It sounds like the start of something spooky that never actually turned in – you’re just with your friends and it’s quite nice.

KEN: Yeah. Yeah.

KATH: Sort of sit down.

[Spooky music]

KATH: Woman in Black, Lady of the Lake, Lady in Red. Shag, marry, kill.

KEN: Okay. Let’s think about – so Lady in the Lake is the one from like Arthurian legend, right?

KATH: Yeah, spot on.

ED: Big time. Fucking big time.

KEN: Yeah, what does she do again? She gets – she gets like – she tells him about the sword or something?

ED: She lives in a lake.

KEN: Yeah.

ED: That’s probably across – next to her.

KEN: I can’t swim.

ED: Yeah, well there we are. I think we’ve found the kill.

KATH: Yeah yeah yeah.

KEN: Yeah. Well I might – I might have one – one shag and then –

KATH: Okay.

ED: Okay.

KEN: We don’t know. We don’t know about the other two. I don’t want to rule out anything so far.

ED: I guess you can get those armbands on.

KEN: Yeah. She can also come meet me. We could meet halfway. Meet in the middle. Meet on a boat. She’s still on the lake.

ED: Bang on the sort of – what’s it called? Like it’s not a beach, is it? Lakes don’t have beaches, do they?

KEN: Do they? Yeah, what is – what are they called?

KATH: Shore?

ED: The shore?

KEN: Is it shore?

KATH: The lake side?

ED: Lake side.

KATH: Lake side.

ED: Bang on the lake side. Nice. That’s – that sounds hot, man.

KEN: Yeah.

KATH: Ooh, but if you did have armbands on, you’d just be – you’d just – head and shoulders would be above and anything else would be below.

KEN: Yeah. Yeah. That’s – that is true.

KATH: So she’d still be in the water.

ED: Yeah.

KEN: It’s kind of cool. Kind of cool. Okay. What are the other two? Um, Woman in Black.

KATH: The other two were Woman in Black, um, and then the other one was Lady in Red. Of Chris de Burgh song fame.

KEN: Ooh.

ED: Yeah.

KEN: What does she do? Give me – give me the low down. The important –

ED: Uh, she dances with Chris de Burgh cheek to cheek. Um –

KATH: Yeah, she’s wearing red, presumably.

KEN: Which – which cheek and which cheek?

ED: Very good question.

KATH: Really good question, because that could change everything. Um –

ED: I think her face cheek to his ass cheek.

KEN: Yeah.

ED: Is always how I’ve always pictured it.

KATH: Yeah, I think that’s how – how Chris wanted it to be read, you know?

KEN: Left to right.

ED: Left – yeah. Her left cheek to his right butt cheek.

KATH: Yeah.

ED: Her left face cheek to his right butt cheek.

KEN: Okay, yeah.

ED: Unless I’m getting something wrong there. Maybe if Chris de Burgh’s listening he can – he can tweet us and clarify that. And if he doesn’t tweet and clarify it, then I’m right.

KEN: Yeah, if he – if he lives here in Spooktown –

ED: Chris de Burgh moved here. Definitely.

KEN: Yeah.

ED: This is really his vibe.

KEN: Yeah, because of the low prices.

KATH: Yeah.

ED: He’s – I’d say he’s the spookiest –

KEN: A lot of cheek to cheek locals here.

ED: So that’s sort of her vibe. I think she’s – I think she’s, uh, an absolute smoke show by all accounts. Is also the vibe. Or at least in Chris de Burgh’s –

KEN: Interesting. Interesting. And the Woman in Black, what’s her deal?

KATH: Um –

ED: She is a violent spirit.

KATH: Yeah.

ED: Uh, she – she’s furious because I think her children died in a horse and carriage accident on Sands Pit.

KATH: Yeah, so she’s just sort of knocking about a house over there, isn’t she?

ED: Yeah. Screaming, yelling, being horrible.

KATH: Yeah, so I think if you married her you would have to move into the house. Yeah, I don’t think she can leave the house, is my understanding.

ED: But it’s a lovely house.

KEN: Oh.

KATH: Nice house though, yeah.

KEN: That’s interesting.

ED: Or you could live separately.

KATH: Yeah yeah yeah.

KEN: Yeah. Absolutely.

ED: You could be married and live separately. That’s fine.

KEN: That’s true. Like a Tim Burton and, uh, Helena Bonham Carter.

KATH: Yes. Yeah. Yeah.

KEN: Who’ve lived in houses side by side until they separated.

ED: That’s wild. Side by side?

KEN: Yeah.

ED: So like shameless?

KEN: Yeah, they lived in two massive houses. I guess when you’re that rich you can just do anything. Live in any combination of houses.

ED: Yeah.

KATH: Yeah, good point.

KEN: They should’ve had one house in between it and it’s a random person that they kind of auction – auction out to the public. Or maybe sometimes it’s Johnny – Johnny Depp. And –

ED: That would be such a wild AirBnb. I’m – I’m sad they’re not together anymore.

KATH: Yeah.

KEN: Yeah, I mean think of all the films they could’ve made. Is that what you meant?

ED: Yeah.

KEN: Think of all the ‘Alice in Wonderland’ sequels they could’ve made.

KATH: Oh wow, yeah, what a shame. What a shame.

ED: Yeah. Oh wow.

KEN: What a shame. Real hit for that genre of film.

ED: Uh, so shag, marry, kill, please.

KEN: Okay, um, the thing is if we’re killing, do I have to go in and kill her myself?

ED: Ooh, we’ve never been asked that before.

KATH: Really good point. No, yeah. I think – yes, I think so. I don’t think you can like hire someone in.

ED: Yeah.

KEN: That is also quite scary, to go in and kill this ghost woman.

ED: I think you have to do it but you can sort of choose your – your weapon.

KEN: I’m just saying potentially the Lady in Red is the easiest to kill, because you could just like get into a very rigorous cheek to cheek dancing accident.

KATH: Yeah. Yeah.

KEN: It just gets too – it just goes too wild and that would be easier than killing a ghost or some kind of sword – sword lake lady.

KATH: Yeah. Yeah.

ED: Yeah. Yeah. I suppose The Lady in Red is just a normal human woman.

KEN: Yeah. Yeah, no, I get you shouldn’t take the option that is the physically easiest one. That isn’t the spirit of the question, but – but given how difficult the other two are to kill, it is tempting. So I’d probably end up having to kill the – the scary Woman in Black.

ED: The Woman in Black, yeah.

KEN: Because – because I don’t want to marry her.

KATH: Yeah.

ED: Yeah. Great.

KEN: And I’ve already – I’ve already decided to have the weird water sex.

ED: Oh, great.

KATH: Yeah.

KEN: Weird sex. Yeah.

ED: I thought that was still up in the air, but you’re 100% on board with that.

KEN: No. And I’ll marry, uh, cheek to cheek. And we’ll just dance the nights away together.

ED: Great. I think she would be very sad to hear that it was a toss-up between killing or marrying her.

KATH: Yeah, yeah.

ED: There was no shag.

[All laugh]

KEN: There’s very few people who are a 50/50 toss-up between kill and marry. And shag never enters the equation.

ED: Great, yeah. Solid answers.

KATH: Great answer, yeah.

ED: Wonderful. Um, now we’d love to hear the story you say you have about this here Blockbuster in Spooktown.

[Spooky music]

[Ominous sounds]

KEN: It’s the morning of March 7, 2019. Brandon Curry, a man in his mid-40s, is waiting to open up shop while checking his computer on the counter by the cash register. [beeping] Suddenly he enters a fit of rage. [growling] He had stumbled upon an article headline on technology news website ‘The Verge.’ And before he had even clicked on the contents of the article itself, his old CRT monitor had hit the floor, leaving an audible crack. [thudding]

‘God dammit, there’s no way I’m going to find another one of these,’ Brandon says out loud, for the benefit of no one. And he reaches for his bottle of Fruitopia and a bag of Calippo shots. [bag opening] The headline he saw read, ‘the last Blockbuster in America is now the last in the world,’ which Curry took issue with, as he fervently believes that his store is the last remaining Blockbuster in the world.

And a curious store it is. Outside, surrounded by semi-detached housing far away from the main high street, this Blockbuster video has somehow survived all these years unnoticed. Its logo bright blue and yellow, unmistakable to anyone over 30 who passes by, would leave kids and teens standing outside confused and slightly horrified by the tacky graphic design.

While Brandon’s clearing up the mess, there’s a knock on the door. [knocking] Laurie Evans, a young woman in her early 20s, is there. Wrapped up in a dark red puffer coat.

Brandon walks up to the glass and says, ‘we’re not open yet.’

Laurie points to a sign on the window that said, ‘help wanted.’ Brandon sighs, opens the door, and lets her in. The interior is not what she expected. It’s much smaller on the inside than the outside, like a reverse Tardis, and the place feels frozen in time, also like a reverse Tardis. [hissing, mysterious sounds] All the video rental charts are still set to a single week from April 2000, and A1 posters of ‘The Matrix’, ‘The Sixth Sense’, and ‘The Spy Who Shagged Me’ hang up on the walls. And all the shelves only contain VHS tapes.

‘So I’m interested in that job you’re advertising.’

He interrupts her. ‘Oh, I’m very sorry,’ says Brandon. ‘That’s not actually a help wanted sign. It’s a minimalist movie poster from 1998.’

‘Oh, I’ve never heard of “Help Wanted.”’

‘That’s because the movie wasn’t actually called “Help Wanted.” It was called “Guns for Hire” starring Steven Seagal and Lee Evans. It only sold 700 tickets at the box office.

‘Wow, sounds amazing. I’d quite like to see it. I’m really into cult films.’

His face lights up. ‘Really? Have you seen “The Victorian Secret?”’

‘No way, that’s one of my favourite movies. I love horror.’

‘Wow,’ he says, ‘I’ve never met a woman who’s into horror.’

Usually a comment like this would set off alarm bells, but luckily Laurie had internalised a lot of misogyny over her teenage years. ‘Me neither. None of my girlfriends at school liked it.’ She’s also very prone to confirmation bias. They both shuffle awkwardly for a few seconds, smiling nervously.

‘So is there no job then?’

20 minutes later Brandon’s retrieving an old, dusty Blockbuster uniform from the store cupboard. After shaking the dust off and unfolding it, [shaking clothes] he holds it out in front of her. It’s obviously far too small, even for a 5’3’’ woman.

‘Uh, sorry, this is the only one we have.’

‘Yeah, was your last employee a small child or something?’ She giggles slightly, even though it was at her own joke.

But Brandon doesn’t laugh. He goes eerily silent and stares over her shoulder into the middle distance. [ominous sounds intensify]

‘Okay, well when can I start?’

Brandon suddenly snaps out of his trance. ‘Tomorrow. You can start tomorrow.’

‘Sure, okay. I’m Laurie by the way.’

‘That’s Jamie Lee Curtis’s name in “Halloween.”’

‘Oh, yeah. It is. Cool. What time tomorrow?’

‘9 am. And don’t be late.’

‘Okay, I won’t,’ she says. And then she pauses. ‘I don’t want to have to pay a late fee.’

This time Brandon does laugh uncontrollably loudly. ‘Hahahaha. Hahahaha. Hahaha. Hahaha.’ A real proper belly laugh. He begins hunching over and holding onto his sides. ‘Hahahahaha, oh my god. A late fee. Hahaha. Oh my god. Hahaha. Oh good.’ This goes on for a good three minutes while Laurie watches on, unsure whether this is an ego boost or not. He stops to regain his breath and is now drenched in sweat, all down his face and pits.

‘Seriously though, don’t be late or I will fire you.’

The next day she settled into working there by the afternoon. The clientele were either septuagenarians who didn’t know VHS’s had become obsolete and only ever rent films starring either Harrison Ford or Tom Cruise, or they were a small niche of retro hipsters who were trying to make VHS a thing again. Around 2pm a frail old man dressed in an old 1940s style brown suit and cap slowly shuffled up to the counter and said, ‘I would like to return “The Fugitive.”’ [ominous music intensifies]

‘Yes, certainly.’ Laurie confirmed. And the man very slowly reached into his knapsack and retrieved the case and put it on the counter.

‘Uh, okay, thank you. Anything else?’

‘Yes,’ said the old man. ‘I would like to rent “The Fugitive.”’

‘Uh, okay, sure,’ she says. The man takes ‘The Fugitive’ back off the counter and places it slowly into the knapsack once again, pays for it, and shuffles out of the store.

Laurie, a bit stunned by the man, knocks some coins onto the floor. [coins jangling] And as she reaches down to pick them up, she feels something sharp. ‘Ow!’ [groaning] It was a bit of glass. It’s a piece of glass from the monitor from earlier. She gets up and realises she’s now bleeding down her hand. [gasping] She quickly goes into the back to find Brandon.

‘Brandon? Brandon?’

‘Yes, Laurie.’

She’s startled by his sudden appearance. ‘Uh, where did you come from?’

‘Oh, I was just – I was just over there.’

‘Okay.’

‘How old are you by the way, Laurie?’

‘Uh, I’m 20. Why?’

‘That’s the same age Jamie Lee Curtis was when she made “Halloween.”’

‘Oh, was it?’

‘Yeah, it was.’

They just stand quite awkwardly for a few seconds.

‘You would make a great scream queen,’ he says.

Laurie laughs nervously.

‘You’re bleeding.’

‘What?’ Laurie remembers her hand. ‘Oh yes, shit. Do you have a first aid kit?’

‘Yeah, there’s one in my office.’ The office is at the end of an unnecessarily long corridor with walls covered in mould, both of the wall and food variety. She hesitantly makes her way down into the office, which just has a desk and several cupboards, as well as an old rusty sink. With her good hand she begins looking through different cupboards, [opening cupboards] before her eyes meet a corkboard above the sink. On the board were newspaper cuttings from the local Spooktown Gazette. She can barely make them out, squinting to see them in the dark. She mouths the words to herself quietly. ‘Local father loses son in tragic accident. Blockbuster CEO visiting Spooktown: missing. Missing Blockbuster CEO declared dead. Local Blockbuster owner acquitted.’ She notices these are all from the month of April 2000. She turns to see a small boy behind her.

‘Hello.’

‘Ah!’ She screams and backs away from him. He’s entirely dressed in Victorian clothing. ‘Have you seen my daddy?’ The boy says creepily. And not at all similarly to the episode of ‘Doctor Who’ with the boy looking for his mummy.

[gasping, footsteps running] She darts out of the room, down the long corridor. And as she’s halfway down, Brandon appears at the end, holding a large shard of glass. Sandwiched between him and the spooky Victorian boy, she sees on her left a door that says ‘do not enter.’ Assuming these are mitigating circumstances, she barges her way through. [door opening] The room is stacked full of props from various 80s horror films. Freddy Krueger’s glove, a William Shatner mask, the titular chainsaw. She sees an old, ornate wardrobe and starts to jimmy the door open, and it begins to budge. A cold, lifeless arm pops out, throwing her onto the floor. [screaming] She starts screaming. She turns. She sees Brandon now entering through the only exit to the room, holding the piece of glass with zero expression on her face. She lets out a prolonged scream. [screaming]

‘See? Told you you’d make a great scream queen.’ He breaks character entirely. She’s still in shock. ‘What’s wrong? I thought you liked “The Victorian Secret.” You said it was your favourite movie.’

‘What?’

‘The glass, the fake arm, the wardrobe. They’re all references to the movie. Sigh, another fake fan I guess.’

‘You set all of this up? All of it? Why?’

‘Well – well the thing is it was my son’s favourite movie too. I guess I was just excited to meet someone else who had seen it. I’m really sorry, Laurie, I got carried away.’

‘Uh, no. it’s – it’s okay. I understand. I’m not like other girls, tm, and I don’t mind being horribly traumatised for the sake of devotion to the horror genre.’

‘Well, that’s great.’ They smile at each other.

‘Wait. How did you find an actor to play that creepy Victorian boy?’

‘What Victorian boy?’

They turn and see the small figure at the door. [ominous music intensifies]

‘Daddy?’

The end.

[Spooky music]

ED: What!

KATH: Yes. So – so is this Blockbuster still open?

KEN: Uh, yeah. Yeah, it goes on to this day.

ED: Actually I knew that because I always go there – you know when we have our movie nights?

KATH: Yeah. Is this where you get them from?

ED: I always get the VHS’s from – from here, yeah.

KEN: VHS’s, yeah. It’s –

KATH: Oh, great.

KEN: Have you not wondered why he only watches VHS’s?

ED: Yeah.

KATH: Honestly no.

ED: Yeah, fair. And why we’ve never seen ‘The Fugitive.’

KATH: Oh, because it’s always out.

ED: It’s because it’s always out.

KATH: That bloke’s always got it.

ED: And you’re always like, ‘please can we watch “The Fugitive” this week?’

KEN: Yeah. Yeah.

KATH: Yeah.

ED: And I say, ‘I’ll try my fucking best.’

KATH: I thought you were just – I thought that was just you just being like, ‘I don’t want to watch “The Fugitive.”’

ED: It’s 50% me. If it was in stock, I wouldn’t get it.

KATH: Well –

ED: Sorry, mate.

KATH: Maybe I should just come and rent it myself.

ED: Good luck.

KATH: When that guy, um, dies. I don’t know.

ED: Yeah.

KATH: I think that’s the only way anyone else is going to rent it really, isn’t it?

ED: Um, one thing I’ve written down and circled about Brandon: incel.

KEN: I didn’t want to say it. It was hard to – it’s hard to describe someone as an incel without using the world incel. Or it’s actually quite easy, but it’s hard to do it without being really offensive to some kind of look or age or maybe like –

KATH: Yeah.

KEN: Length of hair, amount of hair.

ED: Yeah.

KEN: On either head or face. And that’s the problem. I – I was going to put a deep physical description, but I thought it might – it might be very, you know, it might just be harsh.

ED: You did a wonderful job of – of describing an incel without using the word ‘fedora’ or ‘Monster energy drink’.

KATH: Yeah.

KEN: Yeah yeah yeah. So for all we know, actually, he’s very good looking. He’s – he could be at this point. There’s nothing to suggest that he actually – he is actually bad looking in any way.

ED: Incels can be attractive, you know?

KEN: Yeah.

ED: It’s, uh, it’s the ugliness on the inside that –

KATH: Yeah.

ED: That stops – that stops it from happening.

KEN: Because as we know, people – there’s no shallow people in this world. And everyone is only – has sex based on personality.

ED: Yes, yes. Exactly.

[All laugh]

ED: Um, yeah. So – so Brandon for me – but I think – I don’t know. I’ve always got a little thing from Brandon and Laurie. I think they – I think they do genuinely get on, which is nice.

KATH: Yeah, I think – I’m getting that vibe.

KEN: Do you think his actions were appropriate? Because that is up for debate.

KATH: Yeah.

ED: I don’t think his actions were appropriate. I think –

KATH: I – I think he misread the vibe and didn’t read the room. Um, and doing what he did.

ED: Yeah.

KEN: Yeah, he jumped – he made several illogical leaps based on one small conversation.

ED: Yeah.

KATH: Yeah. Yeah.

KEN: And he even tried to use the guilt of his dead son to – to kind of – which worked in the end. Which worked, luckily.

KATH: Yeah.

ED: That was wild. That was fucking wild.

KATH: Manipulative, but yeah.

KEN: Yeah.

KATH: But yeah.

ED: So I guess the – I mean I don’t want to put words in your mouth, but I suppose the – the spooky thing that you’re telling us about, the reason that we’re here today, is that there’s a small Victorian child ghost in the Blockbuster?

KEN: Oh no, that’s – that’s actually just the – that, uh, to explain that, that is the son of the very old man who’s rented ‘The Fugitive.’ Just – just got neglected and is just running around.

ED: Right. Okay, great.

KEN: Yeah. Sorry to break –

ED: No no no.

KEN: And actually things ended up fine, really.

ED: Okay.

KEN: The – the spookiness was probably a slight inappropriate, uh, handling of – of like how you treat your employees.

KATH: Yeah, yeah.

ED: Okay so the – yeah, the horror comes from, um, the – the boundaries that –

KATH: That – that were crossed.

ED: That Brandon crossed.

KEN: Yeah, yeah.

KATH: Yeah. Well I believe that, yeah.

ED: So the –

KEN: And maybe potentially he did – he did actually kill the CEO of Blockbuster, which –

ED: Oh shit, yeah, I forgot about that. That was huge.

KEN: There’s a lot of lore behind that, which didn’t get – we didn’t get to establish.

KATH: But yeah, with all – with all the – the CEO like Blockbuster stuff, like it is weird to keep clippings of that. I was like, ‘is he keeping clippings just because it’s says Blockbuster and he’s really passionate about Blockbuster?’

ED: Yeah.

KATH: Or it is about the murders. Missing people.

KEN: So here’s – I’ll give you the back story.

KATH: Okay.

KEN: That wasn’t in the – in the official – the theatrical cut, or whatever this –

[All laugh]

KEN: Brandon Curry’s father is one of the original co-founders of Blockbusters, but lost – it was a very much like a ‘Social Network’ situation, where he got Eduardo’d out of the situation.

ED: Right.

KATH: No.

KEN: Uh, so that’s why he’s running this Blockbuster, which is not an official Blockbusters. But he is adamant that it is a real one because his father got screwed out of the business.

KATH: Right.

ED: Right.

KATH: Got you.

ED: Is it like, um –

KATH: That’s why he’s so pissed off about the ‘well it’s not – that’s not the last one in America. This is the last one.’ Yeah, I got – yeah.

KEN: Yeah yeah yeah. That’s why –

KATH: Yeah.

ED: Is it like a – an Allen’s Fried Chicken sort of thing?

KEN: Yeah, with the – with the –

ED: Is it that vibe?

KEN: Yeah. The original – this is the original Blockbusters right here.

ED: Right. Okay.

KATH: Yeah.

ED: Okay. And so Brandon struck out at the CEO of Blockbusters because he pushed his father out of Blockbusters.

KEN: Yeah.

ED: Fuck. This is huge news. I love that that bit got cut but the lost child stayed in.

KATH: Just some kid knocking about in fancy dress.

KEN: Yeah, just some kid. Yeah, all – this is probably a whole expanded universe really, but everyone’s –

ED: This is amazing.

KEN: Yeah.

ED: This is amazing.

KEN: I don’t know how far back this conspiracy goes, to be honest.

ED: Calippo shots. Fucking forgot about them.

KEN: Oh yeah, there’s –

KATH: Same.

KEN: I’m trying to build up the vibe that this guy is stuck in the 90s. Noughties.

ED: Loved it. They were great.

KATH: Yeah, no, you absolutely smashed that.

ED: They were great. All clumped together.

KEN: Also before she went downstairs, he was in the break room watching, uh, aforementioned ‘Guns for Hire’ starring Steven Seagal and Lee Evans.

ED: And Lee Evans, yeah.

KEN: On that small like old school 4:3 kind of, uh, 14 inch TV.

KATH: I feel like I was one of the 700 people that watched that. But on like a little portable television. Do you remember then? Those mad little portable TVs.

ED: I do.

[Spooky music]

[Music playing, singing ‘here to judge. Here to judge.’]

PRIYA HALL: Hello.

ROBIN MORGAN: Hi!

LEILA NAVABI: Hey, Priya!

PRIYA: [laughs] Okay, I see how it is.

[All laugh]

PRIYA: Here to Judge is the new weekly podcast from Little Wander, where we dismantle predicaments posted online.

LEILA: Featuring fruity dilemmas from Am I The Asshole on Reddit.

ROBIN: To Am I Being Unreasonable quandaries on Mumsnet.

PRIYA: Join me, Priya Hall.

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ROBIN: Spotify.

LEILA: Or wherever you get your podcasts.

ROBIN: Wherever.

LEILA: Go on. Give me –

ROBIN: I was just being like your hype man.

LEILA: Beatbox a bit.

ROBIN: [beatboxes]

LEILA: New episode every Friday. There must be something we can use. [laughs]

[Spooky music]

ED: Um, can we go in?

KATH: Oh, that’s a really good shout, actually.

KEN: Um, well we can break in, I guess.

KATH: Yeah.

ED: Nice, Kath. Get your crowbar out.

KATH: Yeah, I’m on it.

[Crashing]

KEN: Okay. It’s a lot of old films. Yeah.

KATH: Okay, uh…

KEN: If you want to revisit any of the the – the films from the 1990 to 2000 era, you can probably be there.

KATH: We’re in the right place. Alright, we’re in. We’re in.

[Bell chimes]

KEN: Ah, nice one. You’ve done this before.

KATH: Oh god, so many times, Ken. So many times.

ED: Ah, it’s so exciting. Look at the carpet.

KEN: It’s like this green-grey carpet that you can only find in like shops like Blockbuster or HMV or Games Workshop.

ED: Yeah.

KATH: Yeah.

ED: Oh god, yeah, here, look. Here’s the – ‘The Matrix’, ‘The Sixth Sense’, and ‘The Spy Who Shagged Me.’

KEN: Yeah. Great year, great year.

KATH: Yeah.

ED: What a fucking – I’d buy that triple pack DVD. Bam, bam, bam.

KATH: Yeah, they really complement each other. Yeah.

KEN: Which order? Which order would you watch them in for maximum enjoyment?

ED: Ooh. Fuck. Um, I’d watch the first half of ‘The Sixth Sense’.

KATH: Yeah.

ED: Then I’d watch the – all of ‘The Spy Who Shagged Me’. Then I’d watch up to the bit where he becomes the One in ‘The Matrix’. Before he becomes the One I’d watch the end of ‘The Sixth Sense’, where it turns out he’s a ghost.

KATH: Yeah.

ED: And then I’d watch the bit where he becomes the one, so it’s just like bam. Like a real fucking one two punch right at the end.

KEN: Yeah.

KATH: And you’d watch it all like just in a row. No breaks?

ED: Yeah yeah yeah. I’d watch them all in a row, no breaks, piss in a bottle like an Amazon driver. Don’t eat.

KEN: I like it. I like how you’ve messed with the chronology as well.

ED: Oh, fuck it.

KATH: Yeah.

ED: Yeah. Got to get those two endings tied together.

KATH: Are they sort of all part of the same universe then? Like is it all one – like the MCU? Like the sort of –

KEN: There’s nothing to suggest they’re not.

ED: Yeah.

KATH: Yeah, exactly. So I think you’re just sort of – you know how you watch like the – the MCU stuff and like you will watch it in chronological order?

ED: Yeah.

KEN: Yeah.

KATH: I think you’ve just done ‘The Matrix’, uh ‘Sixth Sense’ –

ED: ‘Spy Who Shagged Me.’ Yeah.

KATH: Yeah, Austin Powers. Yeah.

KEN: Chronological.

KATH: Chronological, yeah.

ED: It’s the original – it’s the original Marvel – expanded Marvel cinematic universe, isn’t it?

KATH: Yeah.

KEN: Yeah.

ED: It’s what they based that on, actually. It was those three.

KATH: Yeah, well wasn’t that – that was like the first time they were like sort of –

KEN: Yeah.

KATH: Hinting at other films in other films? Yeah.

KEN: Yeah.

ED: Which – which is really strange because I think all three of those films are parts of their own – their own franchises. It’s weird that they don’t – it’s weird that they didn’t go down that route. But, you know.

KEN: That’s probably where they messed up.

ED: Right.

KEN: They didn’t realise they have to – they have to say they’re in the same universe. They thought they could just imply it. But actually Marvel got it right, where they were like, ‘actually we – no, the same characters are going to come back.’

ED: Yeah.

KEN: ‘And we are going to say, “we’re definitely in the same universe.”’ It was a big moment for like universe – fictional universe, you know.

[Spooky music]

ED: So what – because if – I love the story, Ken. Huge fan.

KEN: Yeah, thanks. Thanks.

ED: But there’s – nothing scary actually happened. Do you get me?

KEN: There were points where someone was scared.

ED: Yes. Yeah yeah.

KATH: Yeah. I don’t know. I think what Ed’s getting at is that it wasn’t necessarily a horror story.

KEN: Yeah. Well sometimes it’s psychological horror, isn’t it? And I think psychologically, that was horrifying to go through that.

KATH: I – yeah. We have established though that you were frightened by a bench and a – and a map.

KEN: Yeah. Yeah.

KATH: So –

KEN: Be surprised there’s no like random bench in there.

[All laugh]

KEN: Ah, the bench universe. The expanded bench universe.

KATH: Yeah.

KEN: It would be everywhere.

ED: Another failed – another failed experiment.

KEN: Forrest Gump – Forrest Gump is part – part of that bench universe, famously.

[All laugh]

ED: The OG bench story. Um –

KEN: Yeah.

ED: Yeah, I think my problem is, is that nothing – there’s nothing in this story that we wouldn’t believe.

KEN: Yeah, so you kind of have to believe it.

ED: So I suppose in that – yeah, in that –

KEN: You kind of have to believe it.

KATH: In that sense, yeah.

ED: Yeah, in that sense I believe you.

KATH: But –

ED: But in the other sense, nothing happened.

KATH: And also it doesn’t – I don’t think it warrants a plaque. Do you know what I mean? I don’t think it’s –

ED: Yeah.

KATH: It’s one of them.

ED: I believe – I believe that somebody would, uh, return and then re-rent ‘The Fugitive’. Um, maybe there’s some trauma there.

KEN: That’s kind.

ED: Um, I believe that a child could knock about in the back end of a Blockbusters without much problem.

KATH: Absolutely, yeah. Yeah, no problem.

ED: Yeah, so I suppose my question is, what – which bit do you think we wouldn’t have believed?

KEN: I think I originally planned for the child to be a ghost.

ED: Oh.

KEN: And, um, but I decided it would be funny if I said that it was the son of the man who comes in and rents ‘The Fugitive.’ Um –

KATH: Well no wonder he’s got to knock about in the Blockbuster if his dad’s constantly watching ‘The Fugitive.’

KEN: Yeah, exactly.

KATH: There’s definitely problems at home there.

KEN: I will rewind my answer of, ‘is the kid a ghost?’ I’ll be like, ‘yeah, the kid is 100% a ghost.’

ED: Oh. Holy shit.

KEN: ‘And will kill them all. Will kill them all.’

ED: Okay, so the kid’s a ghost. This is –

KATH: We should get out of here then.

KEN: Yeah, he –

ED: What a reveal.

KATH: If you truly believe that, we absolutely need to get out of here.

KEN: Yeah yeah yeah yeah. The kid – so the great irony, he planned this like shitty horror – it wasn’t even that good a like horror reference, really. Just ran at her with a shard of glass.

ED: Yeah.

KEN: There was nothing like – there was no thought put into this.

KATH: A misjudged prank.

KEN: There’s no thought put into it and he expects to be, you know, um, praised for his devotion to horror genre. When really there was nothing actually that smart about this – this whole ruse.

ED: No.

KEN: And then the – because he didn’t plan for this Victorian kid. And there’s just a Victorian kid there who, uh, might be, uh, I think originally I think it had something to do with this – this, uh, film ‘The Victorian Secret’, which I didn’t have time to actually describe the full plot of. But it was the idea that this kid comes – that kids – things can come alive from the VHS’s in the Blockbusters.

KATH: Nice.

KEN: Because of some kind of weird voodoo stuff. But –

ED: Wow. That sounds great. I love that.

KEN: Rushed the end. Rushed the ending. So you’re going to have to get that in the second instalment of whatever this is.

KATH: The sequel.

KEN: The Spooky Blockbusters.

KATH: Yeah, I feel like what – you sort of accidentally took out all of the spooky bits.

KEN: Yeah yeah yeah. I just –

KATH: And then kept the really like, ‘yeah, so someone – he owns Blockbuster and he gave this girl a job, pulled a prank, it went wrong.’

ED: Love the prank.

KATH: ‘Also there’s this kid.’

KEN: Here’s the issue: I got so caught up in the lore behind the guy – the guy who comes in renting ‘The Fugitive.’

ED: Yeah.

KEN: But –

KATH: Yeah.

ED: Okay. Yeah, I think – I think I thoroughly enjoyed the story.

KATH: Yeah, same.

ED: We’re going to go and have a conflab. So just to talk through whether we believe your story or not, Ken, if that’s okay.

KEN: Okay, that’s cool.

KATH: Yeah, back in a sec.

ED: Yeah, like – I feel like he’s so full of amazing lore that I’d love to like dig around over and over again.

KATH: Oh, there’s so much to unpack. Yeah, there’s like – I want to – I want to watch all the special features.

ED: Yes!

KATH: And then watch like the – the director’s cut.

ED: Uh, but obviously I don’t believe the story.

KATH: Oh, I believe the story. But you can’t put that in a museum. You can’t go, ‘welcome to Spooktown, we know someone who works in Blockbuster.’ We can’t do that.

ED: Yeah.

KATH: But it’s excellent gossip. Really good gossip.

ED: Yeah, the fact that Brandon’s a fucking weird incel. Yeah, that’s pretty good gossip.

KATH: Yeah.

ED: Um, yeah. I think – I think it’s not going in.

KATH: But I do want to chat to Ken about the lore.

ED: Yeah, should we go and tell Ken the bad news in a nice way?

KATH: Yeah.

ED: Okay.

KATH: Yeah.

ED: After you.

KATH: Okay. Thanks so much.

ED: Absolute coward’s way out. After you, Kath.

KATH: Hey. Hey, Ken.

ED: Hi, Ken.

KEN: Hey.

KATH: Hey. So we’ve had a chat.

KEN: Yeah.

ED: I’m stood directly behind Kath.

KATH: Um – and you’re taller than me, so I don’t know why – why you’re hiding. Um, we believe you.

KEN: Thank you. Thank you very much. I’m a very honest person.

ED: Ken. Ken, come back. You can’t just leave.

KEN: No, yeah, that’s –

KATH: Yeah, no no no. Let me finish. Let me finish. Let me finish. Just let me finish. Um, however it’s not going into Spooktown lore. Sorry.

KEN: Oh. Oh, yeah.

KATH: I said it. Okay.

ED: That was horrible to watch. I’m so sorry, Ken. We love the story. It was amazing.

KEN: It’s okay. It’s okay. I’m going to shop it around. I’ll shop it around to other places. To other rival towns I think might –

[All laugh]

KATH: Just constantly change the ending.

KEN: Might want this. There are a lot of rival towns who are after this kind of stuff. And ultimately, you know, Spooktown is just one of many. Many spooky – spooky towns.

ED: Brutal. Brutal. I see, you’re lashing out, I get it.

KEN: Being, uh, neglected. I am lashing out. That’s right.

KATH: Yeah, he’s – he’s defensive. He’s hurt.

KEN: I don’t take rejection well. Just like Brandon Curry.

ED: Yes.

KEN: I do not take rejection well.

ED: I – it was a genuine pleasure, uh, spending time with you, Ken. Especially in this Blockbuster. Um –

KATH: Yeah.

KEN: Likewise, likewise.

ED: I hope to see you here again. Um, so sorry that you didn’t make it in. I feel awful. I’m going to – it’s going to keep me awake tonight.

KEN: That’s okay. I’ve – I’ve made my peace with it already in those last 25 seconds.

KATH: Gosh, you – that’s marvellous and really quick.

KEN: Yeah. Sometimes you’ve just got to take the L. That’s what I’ve taught myself. You’ve got to take the L. Take it on the chin.

KATH: Yeah. Yeah.

ED: You’ve gone through that – what is it? The five stages of grief? However many stages there are. You’ve gone through those so quickly.

KEN: Yeah. Yeah. It was the worst feeling of my life but it was very quick. So is it – is it that bad? It was the worst feeling of my life for about 2.5 seconds, but then it was fine.

ED: Wow. Wow.

KATH: What a rollercoaster.

ED: That’s crazy. Um, great. Well have a safe journey back on the train.

KEN: Thank you, thank you.

KATH: Yeah, enjoy the train journey. Yeah.

ED: Yeah. Goodbye, we’re going to fuck off now.

KEN: You’re going to, um, reimburse my train ticket there? Just wondering.

ED: Oh.

KATH: Oh. Um –

ED: Um, how much was it? Did you get a first class or did you get standard class?

KEN: Uh, first class. I – I always get first class.

KATH: I don’t –

ED: Bottle of Wenlock Springs for Ken.

KATH: I – Ken’s doing alright.

KEN: No, because I just –

KATH: Actually no, he’s trying to get us to pay.

KEN: Yeah. Exactly.

ED: Uh, yeah. If you just email –

KATH: Um, well why don’t –

ED: If you just email –

KEN: Yeah.

ED: Spooktown.

KEN: Okay.

ED: @spooktown.spooktown.

KEN: Oh, you have your own domain name? That’s pretty cool.

KATH: Yeah.

ED: It is.

KEN: I mean domain name and domain region.

ED: Yeah.

KATH: Yeah. Kind of a big deal.

ED: And, uh, we’ll – we’ll get that sorted for you.

KEN: Cool cool cool.

ED: Domain name and domain region. Yeah. Thanks, Ken. We’ll, um, we’ll pay for your train ticket.

KEN: Thank you.

KATH: Thanks, Ken.

KEN: Thanks.

ED: Bye.

KEN: Bye.

KATH: Bye.

KEN: Bye.

[Spooky music]

ED: That was nice.

KATH: That was nice.

ED: Kath, that was nice.

KATH: Ed, that was nice. What are you up to now?

ED: What am I up to now? I thought I told you.

KATH: No.

ED: Oh, Lizo. Lizo Mzimba.

KATH: What’s happened?

ED: Did I not tell you about this? This is crazy. Lizo Mzimba’s discovered ‘Newsround.’ And he says it’s – that’s not him.

KATH: What?

ED: Yeah yeah yeah.

KATH: Oh my god.

ED: Yeah. He was like texting me like, ‘you’ve got to call me now. You’ve got to call me now.’ And I was like, ‘fuck’s sake, what is it now?’ ‘Hi Lizo, what’s up?’ ‘I’ve just seen “Newsround.”’ ‘Yes.’ ‘That’s not me.’

KATH: Oh my god.

ED: What? So I’m going to go around to his and watch it back to back and just see if he recalls any of it, you know? Maybe it’s a memory thing that he’s – he’s 100% like, ‘that – that ain’t me.’

KATH: Bloody hell. Could I come?

ED: Please. I don’t want to have to deal with this on my own.

KATH: Great, okay. yeah, I’ll come with.

ED: Do you want a backie?

KATH: Yeah. We called them seaties.

ED: Did you? We’re going to have to get a taxi back to mine to get my bike anyway.

KATH: Great. You’re paying.

[Spooky music]

This has been a Little Wander production. Music from Rhodri Viney. Local artwork from Suze Hughes. Voice by Melanie Walters. With special thanks to Beth Forrest, Steve Pickup, Sam Roberts, Henry Widdicombe, and Jo Williams. Other podcasts from Little Wander include Here To Judge and I Wish I Was An Only Child. Subscribe now on iTunes, Spotify, or wherever you get your podcasts.