Welcome To Spooktown – Ria Lina

[Spooky music]

ED EASTON: Ah! Ah!

[Bird sounds]

ED: Ah, it's been a long walk down, hasn't it?

KATH HUGHES: Yeah.

ED: Been a long one, this one.

KATH: Nice bit of fresh air though, so that's nice.

ED: Yeah. Yeah, it's a nice day.

KATH: Yeah, it is.

ED: Nice day. It's so embarrassing. I – the other day genuinely I mean – we went for a walk in the sun and I've never had such a flip from like moping about the house to like, 'god, everything's going to be alright' just because the sun touched my flesh. I was like, 'oh yeah, do you know what? You're alright by me, kid.' It was very embarrassing.

KATH: It really does make a difference, doesn't it?

ED: Absolutely, yeah.

KATH: Especially when you're like in the middle of it and you're like, 'oh, that's the only thing that's changed, is the sun's out.'

ED: Yeah yeah yeah.

KATH: 'And I feel okay now.'

ED: I'm so embarrassed by how much the sun influences my entire behaviour and life.

KATH: Get one of those lights. Get one of those sun replica lights that – that doesn't –

ED: I've got lights, Kath.

KATH: Uh, bragging.

ED: I've got some light, Kath. Don't worry about me. Uh, have you had any nightmares this week?

KATH: That's very, uh, musical. Uh, yes, yeah.

ED: Have you had any -y - y [sings]

KATH: Uh, yeah. I have, yeah. Our, uh, our –

ED: Sing them to me, Kath.

KATH: I can't sing for shit. Um, I think that one thing I did was out of tune there. Uh, our mutual pal Kiri, um, who is a vegan, uh, took me to a cheese factory.

[Ed gasps]

KATH: Um, and we had to use this machine to slice all the cheese. And I just couldn't use the thing at all. Like at all. And there was like a crowd of people being like, 'I'm – I'm six and I did this in five minutes. Why can't you do it?' And then other people being like, 'gosh, it took me only ten minutes to learn. This is bad that you can't do it.' And I was like, 'what do you want me to say? That I'm stupid?' So that wasn't very nice.

ED: They sound like wankers, man.

KATH: And also we had to, um, we had to – we had to chuck a lot of the cheese. We cut too much. Which is wrong.

ED: That's a real nightmare.

KATH: If you're going to – yeah. If you're going to make the – if you're going to sacrifice cheese, use the lot.

ED: Yeah.

KATH: That's it, isn't it?

ED: That's the real nightmare here, Kath. Capitalism. The waste from capitalism.

KATH: Yeah, that is the real nightmare. How about you? Any nightmares?

ED: Uh, uh... yeah. I had a medical.

KATH: Yeah?

ED: Examination, yeah. Just a general one. It sounds like I'm being coy. Had a —

KATH: Yeah.

ED: Certain – a certain medical exam I shan't be talking about. It was just a general where they do your blood pressure and that. Weigh you like a pig.

[Both laugh]

ED: And -

KATH: Yeah, it doesn't sound nice. But it – but as long as the results are all good, I suppose that makes it less of a nightmare.

ED: Do you know what was really horrible? Yeah, I'm all fine. Um, my blood pressure's fine. Weight's fine. My piss is exquisite.

KATH: Outstanding.

ED: Um, I've got some outstanding piss inside me. Um, I absolutely crushed that bit. I absolutely annihilated pissing in that pot, genuinely.

KATH: Well done.

ED: Um, yeah. Uh, the real nightmare was the doctor had a salad in a box behind him. And I was like, 'oh, that looks nice.' And for the whole thing all I was doing was staring at his salad trying to work out what was on it. So it's like classic like salad base. But then I was like, I said, 'excuse me, can I ask you a question?' And he said yes. And I said, 'is that grilled tuna? Like seared grilled tuna with a, uh, sesame and tahini yogurt?' And he burst out laughing and said, 'no, it's gammon and mayonnaise.'

[Both laugh]

ED: Which I think is the opposite of what I said.

KATH: That's the most middle class thing I think I've ever heard. 'Is that seared tuna with a sesame – sesame glaze?' Wow.

ED: No, it's gammon and mayonnaise. It's like the opposite of what I would assume a doctor would eat. No, it's thick bacon and whisked egg. I was trying to endear myself to him but I think I did the opposite. But he liked my piss, so you know. Every cloud —

KATH: Yeah, swings and roundabouts, isn't it?

ED: Every cloud stinks of piss.

KATH: Mhm.

ED: Um -

KATH: Where are we – uh, where are we meeting Ria?

ED: Oh we're meeting her – do you know Sehaton Lane?

KATH: Um, no. Is that – is that – Sehaton? Sehaton Lane?

ED: S-E-H-A-T-O-N.

KATH: I think – oh. No, I do. I have heard of that actually, yeah. It's like at the northernest point or something like that. Of Spooktown.

ED: That's why were at the northernest point.

KATH: That makes sense.

ED: Yeah.

KATH: I don't know why I didn't read between the lines.

ED: It's alright. We've got along, Kath. Um -

KATH: Yeah.

ED: God, these houses are nice, aren't they? Very nice. Lot of turrets.

Oh there's – there's Ria Lina. Hello Ria!

KATH: Oh, hey!

RIA LINA: Hi, hello.

KATH: Hey.

ED: Hello. Thank you so much for inviting us, uh, to the empty house at the end of Sehaton Lane. Am I pronouncing that right? Sehaton?

RIA: Pleasure. You are. Sehaton. It means, um, shade.

ED: Ooh.

KATH: Ooh.

RIA: Shadow. It means shadow.

KATH: Spooky.

ED: Um, Ria, we're just going to get a little bit closer to you if that's alright.

RIA: Okay. Sure.

ED: So the sound of your voice might change.

RIA: So we're – so we're huddling closer for warmth, are we?

KATH: Yeah yeah yeah.

[Spooky music]

[Wind blowing]

ED: How many ghosts have you seen this week?

RIA: That's a really good question. It – I think it depends on what – what stage of ghost are we talking about? Because you know they go through stages.

KATH: Okay, right. Yeah.

RIA: So -

ED: I'll be honest, balls out the bath here, first I've heard of this. I'd love to know more.

KATH: Yeah, talk us through the stages.

ED: Yeah.

RIA: Well. Well there's obviously the – the haunty stage, you know?

ED: Yes. Yeah.

RIA: That's the one where they're quite see-through and a little wispy and, you know, quite cold usually.

ED: Yeah, the classic.

RIA: Um, sometimes – sometimes a bit smelly. Um, I'm going – I'll be straightforward, I haven't seen any of those this week. Uh, but I haven't gone out much if I'm honest.

KATH: Yeah, yeah.

ED: Sure.

RIA: Um, but then there's the – there's the stage before that where, um, you know, where they may or may not have gotten to that decision of, 'I'm going to be a haunty ghost.' Uh, it really very much depends what happens, um, and some would say that that – that stage you could call it the life stage because they haven't died yet. Um, so from that point of view, I think I've seen quite a few.

KATH: Yeah.

ED: Yeah.

KATH: Okay, yeah.

RIA: Um, but I don't know which ones are definitely going to go to the next stage of the haunty stage. Some of them – some of them might just go straight to the light. Um, it's hard to tell.

KATH: Yeah. I mean you can't make that – yeah, you can't make that decision for them, can you? Yeah.

RIA: There's definitely at least two people that I think that if I saw them in the next stage, like in the post – post-death stage, that I'd be like, 'yeah, I totally get why you're still here.' Yeah.

KATH: Yeah.

RIA: Your life sucked. But um -

KATH: So in theory you've seen perhaps two then, I guess. But in pre – pre-ghost stages.

ED: Pre-ghost, yeah.

RIA: Maybe, yeah. Yes, but in their sort of pre-germinated stage. They're still sort of forming. They're still formulating, uh —

KATH: Yeah.

RIA: They're, you know, they're still quite corporeal, um, is probably a good word for it.

KATH: Yeah, yeah. Yeah.

ED: That's one of the – that's one of my skills on my CV. Corporeal.

RIA: Oh, is – is being corporeal?

ED: Yeah, can stand up, you know, that kind of stuff.

RIA: Oh that's – that's great.

ED: Yeah.

[Spooky music]

ED: Uh, thank you for being honest. Um, because I don't want you to be like, 'oh, I've seen loads of ghosts.' And it would be a lie, you know? Um –

RIA: No, you know. I hate that. Don't you hate that?

KATH: Yeah.

RIA: When someone sets you up and you're like, 'that wasn't true, was it?' They're like, 'no, I just slept really well this week.'

KATH: Yeah.

RIA: You're going, 'come on. That's – that's not being a team player, is it?'

KATH: Yeah.

ED: Yeah, exactly. Exactly.

KATH: Don't tell Paul please, yeah.

ED: Um, final question from me is what is the spookiest thing that's ever happened to you?

RIA: Okay, this is tricky. Because I'll be honest, I – you know there are people – you know how there are people who are very open, uh, to that kind of thing? And maybe ghosts are talking to them all the time or they – they go on a haunted tour and – and they see lights that no one else sees? Yeah. So – so all of life is a spectrum. And if there are people like that in the world, then there are also people at the other end of the spectrum, like myself, where when I go on the ghost tour it's almost like the ghosts are like, 'ugh, it's her.' And they hide. So I don't see lights, I don't get to see haunty things. I – I went on a tour with one of those guys and for everything he saw I got nothing. I got nothing!

ED: That's so embarrassing.

RIA: I was like, 'can you give me a little breeze on the back of the neck?' Like nothing. Um, and – and I'm easily scared. Like I'm prime fodder for hauntiness. Like I'm open to it. I'm like, 'prove to me that something else is going on.' I'm – I want to experience this. I want to know if these pictures of ghosts are real. I want to know it all. And they're like, 'yeah, no. Not for you. Not for you.'

KATH: 'You're not invited.'

RIA: No no, stick to your science. Stick to your science, stick to your experiential, you know. I'm just — so annoyingly, nothing spooky every happens to me. And I'm so frustrated by it because I'm like, 'I bought the ticket, let me in.' But no.

KATH: Yeah.

ED: Yeah, give me some of that juice.

RIA: Really frustrating. I've done those, um, you know, those tours in Edinburgh where, you know, you go underground where all the people died and stuff.

KATH: Oh yeah. Yeah.

RIA: All of those. The plague and –

ED: Yeah.

RIA: Nothing.

KATH: Nothing.

RIA: I can freak myself — and this is the thing. I can freak myself out in a Travelodge. I've actually slept with the light on all night in a Travelodge because I'm like, 'maybe — it's a hotel, maybe somebody died.' No one's ever, you know? No one. No one died in that Travelodge. It was like off the M62. It was — it was — like I just worked myself up. And then in the end woke up in the morning going, 'I did not sleep well.' Because the light was on. But no ghosts. No ghosts. No.

ED: Not a ghost.

RIA: So frustrating.

ED: Maybe – is there something quite spooky in that? That you can never experience anything spooky?

KATH: Yeah, that feels like – like they're avoiding you for a reason. Like –

RIA: Well – I wonder.

KATH: Like are you the spooky thing to ghosts?

RIA: I'm quite excited for the, you know, I'm quite excited to go to the next stage. Because if I get there are they all going to be like, 'oh my god, she's arrived,' you know? Like am I something – am I – am I their messiah? Do you know what I mean?

KATH: Perhaps.

RIA: Is there something about me? Am I their –

ED: Nice, yeah.

RIA: Or – or even worse, you know? I don't know. Am I yet to be something.

ED: [whispers] 'Oh fuck, it's Ria. Ria's here. Fuck. Oh my god, Ria's here. Look everyone.'

KATH: Yeah.

RIA: Yeah.

KATH: Maybe they're all a bit sort of star struck, you know? They're like, 'oh my god oh my god oh my god, just don't – don't look at her don't look at her.'

RIA: Yeah, no. What powers will I have, you know? Do I have the power to like reincarnate – do I get to like reincarnate people? 'You

might have another chance.' I have no idea. But I'm excited to find out.

ED: Really exciting.

KATH: Yeah. Well you're still in your working out stage as well, so you you know, there's time. There's time to, uh, work it all out before you, uh –

RIA: I am. I'm early – I'm in that early life stage, so anything can happen.

KATH: Yeah yeah yeah.

RIA: But we'll -

ED: In the nicest possible way, I cannot wait for you to pass on.

KATH: Just to see what happens.

RIA: Thank you. Thank you.

ED: You're welcome.

RIA: You know in the nicest possible way, I wish we could do it together so we could find out together.

ED: That would be lovely.

KATH: That's lovely.

RIA: Yeah, that's –

ED: What a dream.

RIA: Aw, I know. Let's – let's hope someone doesn't just click in at this point.

[Spooky music]

[Wind sounds]

ED: Um, that's all my questioning. Kath has one question for you and then I cannot fucking wait to hear your story.

RIA: Have you two had a little peak through the hedge at the house?

KATH: Ooh, no not yet.

RIA: You haven't? Oh, okay.

ED: I haven't and I'm sort of stealing myself for the reveal.

RIA: Okay. No, that's fine. That's fine. Probably for the best. It'll be interesting. Okay.

KATH: Okay.

RIA: Alright, Kath. What's your question?

KATH: Okay so 'Goosebumps', the book series –

RIA: Love them. Loved them.

KATH: Yeah, great, right? Goose from 'Top Gun' and a real goose. Shag, marry, kill.

RIA: Interesting. Well 'Goosebumps' – do you mean – am I – are we talking about books?

KATH: The book series, yeah.

RIA: Oh, definitely marry. Definitely marry the books.

ED: Yeah.

KATH: Great shout.

RIA: Um, you know, they're with you – with you for life. With you for life.

KATH: Yeah, there's a lot of them as well.

RIA: And let's be honest – there is. And – and all good marriages end up being about words more than physical anything. So I think that that's –

ED: Wow.

KATH: That is beautiful.

RIA: Well, and I mean and bad marriages end up with no words. But this is, um, yeah. Definitely marry 'Goosebumps.' Um — which — this is really quite straightforward. Uh, as cruel as it is, I do love a bit of, uh, foie gras. So it would be kill the goose, wouldn't it? It would be kill the goose. Come on. Who doesn't — foie gras — you know. But I'd use the whole goose. Like, you know, those feathers would become, you know, pillow stuffing for that — my marriage.

KATH: There would be nothing to waste, yeah.

RIA: I would waste nothing. That life would be – I would be very grateful to that goose for giving its life over to – to me and the 'Goosebumps.' And then shag Goose. I mean come on, shag Goose.

KATH: Really strong answer, that. Like –

ED: Yeah. Yeah, real nose to tail answer there. That was great.

RIA: It's just – I think everyone feels that is the only true answer to that question.

KATH: Yeah. Yeah.

RIA: It's funny, I barely eat meat anymore. But if that goose sacrifices itself, I would eat it for, you know, to make sure that it didn't go, you know, to waste.

ED: Yeah, if you've got to kill it -

KATH: That's the thing, yeah. If you've got to kill it, it's – it's worse to not use all aspects of the goose that gave its life, you know?

RIA: Yes. Exactly.

ED: Candlestick feet.

RIA: Oh, I like that. Although I'm Asian. I would've just eaten the feet.

ED: Fair enough. I guess I'm vegan so I don't go – my head doesn't go to eat.

RIA: I would've used the beak like you use a mussel to like eat other mussels. That's what I'd use the – you know what I mean?

ED: Nice.

KATH: Oh wow, yeah.

RIA: You just take the beak and just – you know.

KATH: Would you eat the goose with its own beak?

RIA: Yeah, that would be nice.

KATH: That's dark.

RIA: Is it? I guess. But I'm just –

ED: Weirdly back on board. Back on board with eating it all. There's something very very nice about that.

RIA: And then, you know, and then you put it upright and it's a nice little vase for maybe a couple of dried flowers.

KATH: Yeah.

RIA: I'm just trying to make sure – because you asked me to kill something.

KATH: Yeah.

RIA: Which I'm not overly okay with.

KATH: Yeah.

RIA: But if we're going to do it, let's use it, you know, make sure that that goose is well remembered.

ED: Yeah.

KATH: You know what? You're absolutely right.

ED: Weirdly this is usually sort of a hypothetical question, but we have brought a goose with us today.

[Goose sounds]

RIA: Oh wow, interesting. We should –

ED: After this has happened.

RIA: Into the – into the house. See what happens.

ED: Okay, yeah. Give it one last final day.

RIA: Yet another sacrifice. Um -

ED: Right, well we hear word on the grapevine is you've got a story about this house at the end of Sehaton Lane.

RIA: I do. It comes with a little bit of a – what's the bit at the beginning of a story called?

ED: Prelude?

RIA: Yeah, alright. Let's go with that. Prelude. That sounds like -

KATH: It's not an epilogue. That's the end, isn't it?

RIA: That's the end.

KATH: Yeah.

RIA: Prelude, that's not what you up your wazoo, is it? That's not the medicine. No, that's a quaalude. Is that a quaalude?

[All laugh]

KATH: There were so many words that I enjoyed then. Up your wazoo. Yeah. Yeah.

ED: Wazoo was a highlight. Um, yeah, that's a quaalude I think. Prelude is the – is the beginning.

RIA: Yeah, right.

KATH: All I know out of that is wazoo. That's all I took from that, so –

RIA: Well I've got all of those things here.

KATH: Amazing.

RIA: There's a bit of a - bit of a - bit at the beginning. And then the story. Just to sort of set stuff up for you.

ED: Right.

KATH: Perfect.

RIA: Um, and while I tell the bit at the beginning, you could both, if you wanted to, look through the hedge.

KATH: Okay.

RIA: But that's up to you. It's up to you.

ED: I'd love to. I'd love to.

KATH: Okay. Okay. Alright, yeah. I'll have a peak.

RIA: Here we go. Shall I just start?

ED: Absolutely, yes please.

KATH: Go for it.

ED: I'm so excited.

RIA: Okay. Alright This is called Forever Home: The Empty House on Sehaton Lane.

[Spooky music]

[Ominous low humming]

RIA: In a quiet, leafy neighbourhood at the edge of Spooktown is a winding street lined with gentle wooden giants so fat with foliage that the sun rarely kisses the pavement. As such it was named Sehaton Lane. Now the houses on Sehaton Lane were built at a time when land was abundant and time was plentiful. And as you travel along the lane from west to north, you would be forgiven for thinking that each house is more structurally complex than its neighbour.

For it is true. It is said that no sooner had the architect completed one specimen that his ambition to best his own best work led him to create with increasing intricacy, each neighbouring construction culminating with the impressive edifice at the end of the lane. Now due to its location at one of the northernmost points of not just the lane but the town itself, and its relationship not just to the trees but to the shade they cast, one could also be forgiven for thinking that the house, not content with already being the most architecturally ornate in the neighbourhood, was growing, despite construction having been completed at least a couple of centuries since. And

certainly if you stand upon the tips of your toes as you peer over the thick hedge that has grown recklessly in the front garden, and only in certain light, when light is permitted entry by the lane's oaken centennials, you might even see a turret that just wasn't there the day before. Or if you stare really hard, a window that is a pane wider than when you first looked a moment ago.

Whether it be the light, your memory, or indeed the house itself, the residents of Spooktown all agreed upon one thing: no two people have ever described the same house. Quite the arguments have erupted over the years as to whether the house has two stories or three, four turrets or five, wooden or wrought iron balustrades. Friendships have lived and died, lovers have married and divorced, and careers have ended over as little as whether the chair on the porch rocks [creaking] or swings.

So as such it stands empty. Quite when it was last occupied nobody knows. Or even who the last tenants were escapes town folklore. Nonetheless the one feature which, if anyone ever thought to discuss it, everyone would be pleasantly surprised to find they agree upon, is the sudden appearance of a freshly-painted 'for rent' sign hung like a guilty man [creaking] from a stake in the unforgiving hedge. Do you want to look through the hedge?

ED: Yes, please.

KATH: Oh my god.

ED: You're kidding me.

RIA: It'll be interesting to see what you see.

KATH: Yeah, so I – it looks like a sort of nice sort of three storey like –

ED: Two storey, Kath.

KATH: No, it's three storey. Uh, swinging, um, like a swinging chair on the –

ED: Are you counting the – are you counting the ground – ground floor, second floor?

KATH: No, like ground floor, second floor, third floor. And then it's got like a turret and –

ED: Then another turret.

KATH: No, just – just the one.

ED: What are you talking about?

KATH: Go and have another look.

ED: What's going on here, Ria?

RIA: Well, interesting. Alright, I'll continue, shall I?

KATH: Yeah, okay.

[Ominous low humming]

RIA: Tom and Lucy were not spontaneous people. But for some reason, and they saw it as a sign that they should, they both decided on the same day without consulting each other that it was time to make a change. Tom by quitting his job as a lawyer in the city and Lucy by not renewing the lease on their flat had set into motion a plan that unbeknownst to them had been decided for them long before they thought they had decided to do it themselves.

Packing the last of their portable goods into the back of their Toyota Corolla, they hit the open road [car revving] and drove until their stomachs growled. Having refreshed themselves with service station

sandwiches, they got back into their cars and drove again. This time on less open back roads, taking lefts when the lights were green and rights when they were red. [car skidding] And while occasionally they joked they would end up back where they started, it soon became clear that that might never be the case, as the traffic lights became more irregular, the roads grew progressively narrower, their surroundings more unfamiliar, and the trees more... attentive? [ominous low noises]

'That's a strange word to use,' laughed Lucy.

'Nevertheless,' said Tom, 'that's exactly what they seem like. Like they're paying us particular attention.'

And so they came upon Spooktown. They entered from the east, slowing right down, not just because of the sign politely asking them to watch their speed, but because the town seemed to warrant a paying of respects. It was dusk. Many of the shops were already closed. [car skidding] And as they drove this way and that, they suddenly found themselves on the edge of town, outside the most beautiful house Lucy had ever seen.

'Tom,' she breathed, staring at what little house she could see between the ever-closing gap in the hedge, barely held agape by the rickety front gate. 'This is why I gave up the lease on our flat. We were meant to live in this house.'

Tom stared intently at the house. He must be tired from driving, he thought. The house keeps... undulating.

'It's available for rent, let's see if we can have a look around. I think I see the estate agent in the window.' Lucy chattered excitedly as she undid her seatbelt, [clicking] opened her car door, [door opens] and bounded out. [shuffling]

Tom cleared his eyes and looked again. And indeed it was just possible to see a figure standing near the front window, silhouetted by the glare from the bare bulb in the ceiling above her, a clipboard in hand. She looked like she was expecting them. As they climbed the porch steps, the door opened as the woman glided over from the window to greet them.

'Come on in,' she said, smiling. 'You must have had a long drive.'

Lucy was already deep in the house exclaiming at the beautiful detail of the woodwork, the quality of the workmanship, and how hard it is to find solid oak floors.

Tom followed wearily behind. Something wasn't quite right, but he couldn't put his finger on it. Perhaps he was just tired. But how did he enter and leave the dining room back into the living room without turning around? It was as if the house had wrapped around on itself to deliver him back to where it wanted him to be. But that would be crazy. Houses don't bend. Houses don't think. He walked to the back of the house and stared out the window. It was almost completely dark by now and he could just about make out at the end of the pleasantly large garden a set of swings, one of which was swinging. [creaking] Not with the wind, though. The trees in fact were making a point of standing particularly still. No, it was swinging as if someone was swinging on it.

'The swing,' he said to the room.

'Oh, those,' said the realtor, who was very suddenly at his shoulder. Tom jumped. 'Yes, they're very popular with the children.'

'The children?' He thought. 'What? Do you smell barbecue?' He suddenly said out loud, turning to face her. But she was no longer

there. Instead she was already in the middle of the house, walking up the large wooden staircase leading to the first floor.

'Oh yes, the house has built-in barbecue on the patio. It's very popular with the residents,' she chirped. 'Come and look at the bedrooms. See which one takes you.' Tom followed her up the stairs which were, he had to admit, beautifully crafted.

'Hey Lucy, where are you?'

'In here,' she called from down the hallway and around the corner. 'Come look at this room.'

Tom followed the strange woman down the corridor, passing empty room after empty room. [heavy breathing] The design of the house on the inside was fascinating and impressive. Despite looking fairly square on the outside, which you would expect most houses to be, from the inside it was clear that no two bedrooms had the same view. Each window had a completely unique vista, as if the aim was to provide a completely different experience for each room's occupant.

She turned the corner and so did he. There were only two rooms in this wing. Lucy was in the far room on the right. But as he passed the first room, he yelped and almost jumped [gasping] out of his skin.

Just like all the other bedrooms they had passed, the door to the room was open. And inside was a lone, standalone wardrobe against the wall between the two sashed windows. On the door of that wardrobe was a full-length mirror, and he could have sworn he saw a family of faces staring at him from the mirror on the closet door. And not just staring, beseeching him with their eyes. The father was shaking his head vigorously while the mother was silently crying. The children were stony-faced, as if they had given up hope. His heart

raced in his chest as he stood just past the door, trying to catch his breath. He wasn't sure what he wanted to do next. [heavy breathing] Should he continue on to Lucy and that woman? Or should he go back and double check what he thought he saw? Perhaps there was a piece of art on the opposite wall facing the mirror. Yes, that makes sense. A rather graphic piece of art, but most likely a removable, stick it in the attic, replace it with a picture of sunflowers piece of art.

Having satisfied himself with that explanation, he decided that he didn't need to double check the room just now. He could do it on the way back out when Lucy was with him. Perhaps they could view the room together. Or better yet, perhaps they could view it another day. Or not at all. There was definitely something not right about this house. He continued towards Lucy, but wait a second. She was no longer in the last room on the right. Somehow she was in the room across the hall. But when they turned into the corridor there wasn't a room across the hall. It was a dead end. What the hell was going on here? It was time to leave.

'Lucy, it's getting late. We really should let this nice lady get back to her family,' he said rather urgently, entering the room.

'Tom, what took you so long? I've been dying to show you this room. Isn't it gorgeous?' Gorgeous wasn't quite the word he would use. Unsettling is what he would use. Because he would swear that the room they were standing in on the first floor was directly above what was the garden patio he was looking at earlier. But earlier there definitely wasn't anything above the patio. He rushed to the window. There were the swings he saw from downstairs. No longer swinging, but they were definitely closer to the house than he remembered from downstairs. As if the garden had shrunk or the house had grown.

'Lucy, I think we've seen enough,' he said, turning back to her.

'Oh, I knew you would feel the same way,' said Lucy, excitedly clutching at a stack of papers. 'That's why I signed the lease right here and now. We can move in right away.'

'Consider yourselves at home,' said the strange estate lady, who had been standing quietly by the door all this time.

Tom paled. 'What do you mean you signed the lease? Without even letting me read it? I'm the lawyer for god sake, Lucy.'

'I know but this house was just calling to me and it's so perfect for us. This could be our forever home.'

'Could be?' Said the estate agent as she started to leave the room.
'I'll leave you two to it,' she murmured as she shut the door behind her.

Tom grabbed the contract from Lucy and frantically started flicking through the pages. [flipping paper] 'Oh god, oh god, oh god,' he cried, 'Lucy, what have you done?' But Lucy didn't answer. She was too busy staring at the wall. A wall where the door used to be.

The residents of Spooktown rarely had anything to gossip about. And today was no different. Having exhausted their thoughts on the weather and politics and great-aunt Bertha's rheumatoid arthritis, they toyed with the idea of mentioning that they didn't realise the empty house at the end of Sehaton Lane had a mezzanine over the back patio. But thought better of it, in case they had to avoid shopping at the butcher's for the foreseeable future because the butcher was adamant the living room was in the front of the house, not the back, and certainly not the back and the front. Once over lawn-ball someone almost brought up that they saw lights in the house a couple of months back, but thought better of it in case it

started an argument again over how that missing family from two towns over was probably, definitely squatting there. Despite there being no sign of them or the children, or indeed anyone ever coming or going. Nonetheless the one change, which if anyone ever thought to discuss it everyone would be pleasantly surprised to find they did agree upon, [creaking] is that the ever-swinging 'for rent' sign, which hung from a stake in the unforgiving hedge, was no longer there.

[Spooky music]

ED: Wow. [shivers]

KATH: Fuck.

ED: Right.

KATH: Right, so, um – well it's interesting. So there is – there is actually the abandoned, uh, Toyota Corolla. So that stacks up straight away.

RIA: I was wondering if that was what I'd parked next to in that car park.

ED: Interesting, yeah.

RIA: Which I thought, 'no, surely if it was theirs it would be outside the house.' But – yeah.

KATH: But no, there is – I know there is – there's an abandoned one in the car park. It's been there for ages, hasn't it?

RIA: I thought if anything my car would be safer next to that car because it was full of stuff, you know? It had all of those like cheap bags that you get from those 99p shops, you know? Those big ones.

KATH: Yes.

ED: Yes yes yes yes.

RIA: Yeah.

KATH: Oh yeah, everyone knows about that car. Like it's sort of like a, 'huh, the Toyota's there.' Like no one's –

RIA: Isn't that strange, yeah.

KATH: Weirdly no one's robbed it. I don't know why.

RIA: But do you know what? And no one can tell me how long it's been there. It's just sort of like a fixture.

ED: No.

KATH: Yeah.

ED: It's – It's – I think it's number five or six on the, uh, 'best things to view', uh, TripAdvisor.

KATH: From TripAdvisor. Yeah, it is. Yeah.

ED: Spooktown. Yeah. The abandoned car. Yeah.

RIA: Oh wow.

ED: Yeah.

RIA: Okay.

ED: Yeah. So sort of, you know, on bank holidays and stuff like that people will gather around it.

RIA: They do.

KATH: Yeah, it's a good little, uh, good little, you know, gets people into the area.

ED: Yeah.

KATH: It's a good thing to have, really.

[Spooky music]

ED: Should – Kath, should we have another look though the hedge?

KATH: Uh yeah. I mean -

ED: So we know exactly what we're talking about.

KATH: Yeah, okay, okay. Yeah, I mean –

ED: A little peek through.

KATH: It's – it's a nice house. It does look nice.

RIA: It's beautiful, isn't it? I mean it's just –

KATH: Yeah, really nice house.

RIA: It's like we don't have those skills anymore. And you know, there are very few people that can do that kind of work these days.

KATH: Yeah, no you're right actually. You're right.

ED: Yeah, it's a lost art, isn't it? Making a nice house.

KATH: I mean is it trespassing? I know the 'for rent' sign's down. Is it trespassing if we go in? Are we allowed to go in?

RIA: I – do you want to risk it?

KATH: Well how are we supposed to know if this happened if we can't go in and sort of –

RIA: What if we go around the other side and see if we can see if there's a mezzanine over the patio?

KATH: Great shout.

RIA: That's unusual, isn't it?

ED: That's a great shout.

RIA: To have like – to have your house overhang your patio.

KATH: Yeah. Yeah, okay.

ED: Yeah, it's very, um, sort of Eastern Bloc brutalist architecture to have a – a jutting out mezzanine, I think. Um, it sounds lovely. Let's go and have a little check.

KATH: Okay.

ED: Just walk around the, um, walk on the outside. [clicks tongue] Come on! Just getting the goose coming with us. Come on!

[Goose sounds]

ED: Okay. Oh, so there's not – there's not the mezzanine.

KATH: There is a mezzanine. I see a mezzanine. Yeah.

RIA: There is. Yeah.

KATH: Could you not see the mezzanine?

ED: Maybe I don't know what a mezzanine is, then.

KATH: Perhaps, yeah. No, there is one.

RIA: It's sort of like – it's sort of like a bee's eye, isn't it? Like none of the windows quite – like the wall is straight but none of the windows quite point in the same direction. But they – it's very odd. It kind of reflects the light. You can't see in. I mean it's clearly empty.

KATH: Well that's what I think we can -

ED: It reminds me of Gaudi.

RIA: Oh.

KATH: Oh, is that where the like -

ED: Do you know what I mean?

RIA: Interesting.

KATH: That – that lad that paints all the wonky stairs, uh, like stairs all over the place? Is that Gaudi?

ED: No, that's – that's Escher.

KATH: Oh, that's who I'm thinking of.

ED: It reminds me of Escher as well.

KATH: It looks like Escher to me.

ED: It looks like a Gaudi-Escher.

RIA: I love the turrets.

ED: The turrets. Um, yeah, I think it's weird to have an odd number. I think it's weird to have five.

KATH: What do you mean? There isn't five.

ED: There are five turrets.

KATH: I saw one before and there's still one.

ED: Yeah, one five times.

KATH: There's a mezzanine, one turret, and three stories.

ED: There's no mezzanine.

RIA: There is a mezzanine. There is.

ED: There's five turrets.

KATH: Right, I'm going in. I'm – I'm pushing through the hedge here. I'm going in. Where's my crowbar?

RIA: You're going to crowbar the hedge?

KATH: I'm going to crowbar the hedge. It's –

RIA: Why don't you climb over the front gate? It's quite rickety.

ED: Let Kath use her crowbar, it's a thing.

KATH: Crowbar's kind of my thing, and I just – I – it helps me.

RIA: Okay.

KATH: I feel good about it.

RIA: I don't want you to piss off the hedge, that's all.

ED: It's a fair point.

KATH: That's true, but will I not piss off the fence if I climb on it?

RIA: But it's a front gate. I think it's –

ED: Crowbar the fence. Split the difference.

KATH: It – should I not be crowbarring stuff? Is that – is that the issue? Are we worried –

RIA: Well I think it depends. I think it depends. I just think — I think that the trees and the hedge probably are quite chummy, and I wouldn't want to mess with the hedge in case the trees get you. These trees are very attentive. They're very attentive trees. And I just

ED: They are very attentive.

RIA: I feel like -

KATH: Yeah.

RIA: Like even at night they see what you're doing. So I – you know what I mean? It's just like, ugh, you know?

ED: Yeah.

RIA: You know that whole thing of, 'someone's watching me.'

ED: I thought it was the goose watching us.

KATH: Yeah, it can be kind of nice though sometimes. Like – but no, I think it's the trees. They are – they are attentive, as you say. One of them's sort of like – a branch came down. There was a hair in my eye before and it just sort of swept – it swept my hair out of my eye.

RIA: Oh, that's really sweet.

KATH: Which I thought was quite nice.

RIA: Um, that's really nice.

KATH: Yeah.

ED: That's really nice. Well don't go crowbarring it then.

RIA: I hope they weren't just checking if they wanted you. 'Can we do without this one?'

KATH: Oh god.

RIA: You know what I mean? Like -

KATH: Extra sorry, extra sorry.

ED: Oh, checking if they want -

RIA: You know, 'check her teeth. Check her teeth,' you know, and that's as close as they got.

KATH: But they got the eye instead.

RIA: Yeah. Just sort of – you know –

KATH: Well it worked out well for me. I got hair out of my eye, so thank you either way.

ED: 'Check her teeth.'

KATH: Uh, alright. Let's climb over this, uh, let's climb over this gate then.

ED: Okay.

KATH: Right. [creaking]

RIA: I mean there's a reason you've never heard of a house collecting beavers. Because they've got teeth. They'll just chew their way out, do you know what I mean?

ED: Very true.

RIA: So just – I mean if that car isn't that old, maybe – maybe we could see if Tom and Lucy are still in that room.

KATH: Well I'm over the fence, so -

RIA: Do you want to –

ED: Okay Kath. I'm coming – I'm coming over. [creaking]

KATH: I'm happy to – I'm happy to do that. Okay.

ED: Alright. Let's go in. Let's go in.

RIA: I don't want to. I don't want to. Can I stay? Can I just keep watch?

KATH: Well -

ED: You can – you can keep watch and we'll –

KATH: You can – you can if you want. Don't want to force you.

ED: Yeah.

RIA: Like what I'm worried about – what I'm worried about is that we all go over and then none of us can see whether like a 'for rent' sign shows up or even heaven forbid a 'sold' sign or something. Like I don't want –

ED: Yikes. Um -

RIA: Do you know what I mean? Like there's no sign right now.

KATH: Oh. Should we leave a trail of something? So we can like definitely get out as well?

RIA: Well the goose will do that.

KATH: The goose, yeah.

ED: We'll go in and have a little nosey.

RIA: Okay. Alright. If I see a sign appear, I'm calling you. Like don't – don't sign anything.

KATH: Okay.

RIA: Just don't – just don't commit.

KATH: Okay.

RIA: Like this house – you can fall in love with this house but don't do that.

KATH: Okay. Okay.

ED: Listen, I'm going to take my pen with me.

RIA: Don't take your pen with you.

ED: But it's not to sign anything, it's just to –

RIA: No.

ED: I'm just going to take my pen with me. I'm just going to take my pen with me. I'm just going to take my pen with me but I'm not going to sign anything.

KATH: Okay well you take your pen, I'm going to take my crowbar. [clanging] So –

ED: Yeah.

RIA: So if he signs anything you will crowbar –

KATH: I crowbar his head and then the pen.

RIA: No, I was going to say the contract. Crowbar the contract. Make sure that –

KATH: No. I think it would work better if it was Ed's head, then the pen, then the contract. I think that's the order.

RIA: Okay. Alright.

ED: I just — I just wanted to say I think crowbarring a contract is legally binding. So I wouldn't crowbar the contract.

RIA: Oh. Okay then don't do that.

KATH: Yeah, so in Spooktown that's – that's kind of how it works because the law's a little bit different. So that's why it's like go for the head first.

RIA: Okay. Okay.

KATH: Then the instrument that's signing, which would be the pen, and then the contract. So there is like an order to it, um, to abide by the law, really. We aren't rule breakers.

ED: Kath, would you like to do the door?

KATH: Yeah, okay. [creaking] Yeah. Okay. [door opens] Okay. That's quite easy, actually.

ED: Is that someone in the – can you see the – the third window to the left? Second floor, third window to the left of the door. Is somebody there? Hello?

KATH: Oh wait, do you mean the – I can see someone in the ground floor window. There's someone in the ground floor window.

ED: Got like a clipboard. Let's go in. Let's go in. Are you – are you okay out there, Ria?

RIA: Yes.

ED: Okay, good.

KATH: Okay, we'll be out in a minute.

ED: This is nice.

KATH: Nice. Nice oak floor.

ED: Nice maple floor.

KATH: Well I'd call it oak, but yeah.

ED: Very nice.

KATH: Yeah, it's – it's good. Should we go in the, uh, in the lounge?

ED: Yeah yeah yeah, okay.

KATH: This looks like to be the lounge. Oh yeah, look.

ED: Flying by the seat of our pants in this house. No – no idea where this is going to go. Because it's real.

KATH: Well – well Ria said that they had like, um, bespoke views, uh, from each window. So do you want to go to another window? Well what can you see? Basically I can see a skip out of this window, so –

ED: Ooh, lovely.

KATH: Yeah, so that's – very much suits me. Quite a nice thing to see.

ED: I'm just going to go and have a look out of this window.

KATH: What can you see?

ED: Huh. Do you know Rita, Queen of Speed?

KATH: Yes. That's just there, is it?

ED: That's what I can see. Yeah. Yeah.

KATH: Okay, so the bespoke view thing is, uh, accurate. Should we –

ED: Is it a picture? I think it's real. I think it's a real view. It's very – very strange. I love it. It's, uh, it's endearing me to the house. Something rotten.

KATH: Yeah, I like the house. I kind of want to stay in here, actually. Oh, we should probably go say – say bye to Ria, though. We don't – that would be really rude.

RIA: Are you two okay? Are you two okay in there?

ED: Hi Ria. Yes, um, yeah we're fine. We're fine.

KATH: Hey.

RIA: Are you sure?

ED: We're just – just mooching about.

KATH: The house is lovely, you're missing out.

ED: Yeah, it's – nothing to worry about at our end.

RIA: I'm enjoying the view from here. Do you want to go get coffee maybe? Walk down into town now? Get coffee?

ED: Maybe you could get us a coffee and bring it back.

KATH: Yeah.

RIA: You sure?

ED: Uh, maybe – just keep an eye out. Just keep an eye out for a little bit longer.

RIA: Yeah. Okay.

ED: I'm just – I've just spotted someone. I'm going to go chat to this woman over here.

RIA: There's no one else in there but you. No one's gone in or out. What woman?

ED: Two seconds, Ria. [whispers] Hiya, I'm just going to sign this piece of paper. 'Ed and Kath.'

KATH: Ed? Ed? Ed? I'll crowbar. I've got the crowbar. I've got the crowbar.

ED: It's signed, mate.

[Ria gasps]

KATH: Gosh, she's got good hearing. So was that – was that Ria from outside? Did she hear that? Bloody hell.

RIA: There's a sign out here. It's suddenly grown a sign. It says 'under offer.'

KATH: Oh shit, Ed. Give us the pen. Give us the pen. Give me the pen. I'm breaking the law here by not crowbarring your head. Give me the pen.

ED: Kath – Kath, listen to me. I've lowballed it.

KATH: Oh.

ED: Silly offer. I've put in a silly offer, mate.

KATH: Nice.

ED: Only a grand.

KATH: Really?

ED: 1000 pounds for this beautiful, stunning house. Yeah.

KATH: For the whole thing? Wow. God.

ED: Yeah. I'm playing – I'm playing her like a fiddle. We're fine. Let's, uh, let's pop – let's pop out to Ria and see if she's alright.

KATH: Let her know how it's going.

[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.

ROBIN: Me, Robin Morgan.

LEILA: And me, Leila Navabi. Subscribe on Apple –

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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: Hello, Ria.

RIA: I am so pleased to see the two of you.

ED: Thank you.

KATH: How long were we? We weren't that long, were we?

RIA: Oh my goodness. Um, what do you mean how long were you? I've been coming back here every day for a week hoping that you would come out again.

ED: What?

KATH: Oh shit. It was literally like five minutes for us.

RIA: No.

ED: We were just fucking about in there.

KATH: Oh shit.

RIA: Oh my goodness. I was about to have to go back – like I was like, 'I can't do this for more than about ten days.' But, um –

ED: Yeah.

KATH: Ugh, that's so nice of you to do it for a week.

ED: I'm so sorry.

KATH: Bloody hell.

RIA: I felt so guilty, you know? I was like, 'this is going to be totally my fault.'

ED: Yeah.

RIA: You know? No one kind of knew you were there because no one, you know, I didn't tell anyone I was meeting you. I was like, 'what am I going to do?'

ED: Yeah, we didn't say anything either.

RIA: I'm sorry. I mean, I'm sorry about the goose. I don't know where it is. But it's gone.

ED: [laughs] Oh no.

KATH: Oh no.

ED: I think it might've come in with us.

KATH: Oh no.

ED: Wait. Wait. That sign. It's saying 'sold to a goose.'

KATH: Because signs do usually list, uh, who they sold to.

ED: Yeah. I think if they sold it to a goose you'd – you'd pop a sign up for that. Because you're –

KATH: Yeah, you would. You would.

[All laugh]

ED: Sold to a goose?

KATH: To a goose.

ED: No.

KATH: Oh, Ed. The offer was too low.

ED: Fucking hell. Um, uh, thank you so much for coming back all these – all these days.

KATH: Yeah.

ED: We must've zoned out hard in there.

KATH: Yeah, oh god.

RIA: I just – I mean but what did you see? Like what was it like in there?

KATH: We just popped into the lounge, uh -

ED: Um, stunning. Yeah, we didn't even really go anywhere.

RIA: That's probably for the best. Oh, I – I think it's the bedrooms that get you. They give – they allocate you a room and that's it. Yeah, so I think you got lucky.

ED: Oh, nice.

RIA: That's lucky.

ED: Yeah.

RIA: So you didn't go upstairs?

KATH: We didn't go upstairs, no.

ED: No.

KATH: We literally wandered in, went into the lounge, had a look out the window, Ed tried to sign something. Well, kind of did.

ED: I tried to lowball them. Yeah, yeah.

KATH: Lowball them.

ED: Yeah.

RIA: Right.

KATH: Um, and then we've come out. That's it.

RIA: Aw, well that's lucky.

ED: It took a week.

RIA: That's lucky.

KATH: I've got to say, now that I'm on the outside of the fence I don't feel the – the love that I had for the house now – that what I did when I was in there.

ED: I know – I know exactly what you mean. In fact just looking through the hedge now, it sort of looks like a run-down caravan.

KATH: Even I can see exactly that.

ED: Really?

KATH: Exactly. Run-down caravan. I – that's exactly what I can see as well.

ED: Um, I think we can – I think we can hands-down say that this – we believe your story.

KATH: Oh yeah.

ED: We believe in the house and that it's going into Spooktown lore.

KATH: Yeah. Yeah.

ED: Um -

KATH: Confidently.

ED: I don't particularly want to look at the house anymore because it's freaking me out.

RIA: No, don't. I don't even know if it deserves that TripAdvisor – reviews, you know, that page it has. It maybe shouldn't be. The car, sure. But maybe not the house.

KATH: Yeah. We should -

ED: Maybe not. Maybe not the house.

KATH: Yeah, not the house.

ED: But we also, you know, we do want people to visit, so.

RIA: Well maybe if they do it from inside a bus or something, I don't know. Like a tour bus.

ED: Nice. We should do a bus tour.

KATH: That's a really nice idea. We should do a bus tour. Write that down, Ed. Use your pen.

ED: Um, bus tour. [pen clicks] Thank you so much for your story.

RIA: Well I – I do admit that if you two had been taken by the house that would've been the perfect ending. But I – I must admit I am relieved that you weren't. Because you and I, Ed, were going to die together in order to see what happens next, weren't we?

ED: Oh yes.

RIA: Yeah, so –

ED: I forgot about that. I need to write that down.

RIA: I would've – I would've felt really betrayed if – if you had abandoned me for a house.

ED: Yeah. Yeah.

RIA: Like how materialistic is that?

KATH: Yeah, very. Very.

RIA: Yeah, so I'm pleased it worked out. I'm glad I stayed the extra week, um –

ED: Yeah. Thank you so much.

KATH: Thanks for that.

RIA: No, it's okay.

ED: That's dedication to dying with me, that. I really appreciate that.

RIA: Yeah, I could really do with a shower, though, because I've been sleeping in my car for a week and it's —

KATH: Oh man.

RIA: Yeah.

ED: Good to know your car's alright.

RIA: Yes, well. And the one next to me. Still there.

KATH: Well you look great for it. You look great for it.

RIA: Aw, thank you.

ED: Yeah. Uh, great. Well let's go for that coffee you offered about seven days ago.

RIA: Oh, that would be fabulous. Let's do it.

ED: Yeah.

RIA: How do you take yours?

ED: Uh, just black actually.

RIA: Oh, that's nice and simple.

ED: Yeah.

RIA: Okay.

ED: Yeah, it's quite easy. Kath, will you have a green tea?

KATH: I'll have a green tea, yeah.

ED: Yeah.

RIA: Oh great. I'm going to have a chai tea latte actually, if that's alright.

ED: Oh, nice.

KATH: Oh, that sounds nice.

ED: Yeah, nice. Yeah.

RIA: Yeah, little bit of froth on it.

ED: Hello, might change my order. Let's walk away from this crazy house.

KATH: Yeah. Let's get – get you away from this house. Come on then.

RIA: Yes please. Thank you.

[Spooky music]

ED: That was nice.

KATH: That was nice.

ED: That was nice, wasn't it?

KATH: Yeah, really nice.

ED: Really, really nice.

KATH: What are you up to now?

ED: Oh, um, Laura Dern's accountant is a ghost, or so she says. So, um, I haven't got a lot of time for her so I'd better go, um, go over her tax return at the Frankie & Benny's.

KATH: Oh, great.

ED: On the – you know on the – what's it called? Retail park.

KATH: On the – the industrial estate?

ED: No, that's where industry – that's where like all of the industrial places are. It's a retail park.

KATH: Okay.

ED: An industrial estate is like your garages, your forklift truck hires, um, your –

KATH: Where people learn to drive.

ED: Where people learn to drive, exactly. Whereas a retail park is like, a Frankie & Benny's, a Topshop/ Topman, um, maybe an Aldi and a Lidl. Uh, it's where people obviously also learn to drive. In car parks, isn't it? So I'm going to go meet Laura Dern.

KATH: Great. She seems nice.

ED: She's a handful.

KATH: That's a shame. Never meet your heroes, as they say.

[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.