

Welcome To Spooktown – Darren Harriott

[Spooky music]

ED EASTON: [yells] Oh! A ghost!

[Wind sounds]

KATH HUGHES: Shoe Zone's still smouldering.

ED: Oh god, yeah.

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

ED: Do you call them pumps?

KATH: Pumps, yeah.

ED: Yeah, same. Some people call them daps.

KATH: Who does that? Who's going around saying that?

ED: I don't know. I think it's posh people but it also could be not posh people. I think it's like a... pumps is... we all know it also means fart.

KATH: Sure.

ED: But that's why I like it. 'Have you put your pumps on?' You're going to have to narrow it down.

KATH: How would you put a fart on?

ED: Let's chat to Darren and then I'll show you.

KATH: Okay, thank you.

ED: Anyway, have you had any nightmares this week?

KATH: Um, yeah. I had one where I was trying to have a shower, but in a room where I couldn't lock the door. And the shower curtain didn't like fully go across. So I was just for ages trying to have a shower but like... really like, 'oh, pull the curtain that way. Someone can see you there. Pull the curtain that way, someone can see you there.' Fingers crossed no one comes in.

ED: Oh no!

KATH: I felt – I mean, I checked – I've got a thing where it tells you how long you've been in REM after. Two and a half hours I was trying to have that shower!

ED: [laughs] That's horrible!

KATH: I know!

ED: That's horrible.

KATH: That's why it's in the nightmare category. And there was people waiting at the door as well.

ED: Yeah.

KATH: Trying to rush you. And I'm like, 'I can't – oh, I just can't – if I could just – if the shower curtain was just long enough, then I could just lock the door.'

ED: That actually happened to me on a stag do.

KATH: [laughs] Oh no, really?

ED: Yeah, we had um – we paid loads of money to stay in a National Trust property. And then the best man just forgot to put the deposit down so we ended up staying in serviced apartments. And it had two toilets. One of the toilets just had boiling water, so if you had a shit in there, you flushed it with boiling water and you got sort of a turd facial. Uh, like a stinky turd facial.

KATH: That's horrific.

ED: And like you'd have to use that toilet, but you couldn't have a shower in there because it would boil your skin off. So we went in the other shower that didn't have a door. So I showered in that one. You just stood in a room, naked, showering. And then the best man unlocked the door with a coin and walked in to have a piss. And luckily like I'm fine with my body, so I just said, 'absolutely not. Get out now.' And he's like, 'I just need to piss.' It's like, 'I couldn't – I couldn't care less. Get out while I wash myself.'

KATH: So he didn't just open the door. He broke in. Let's – let's say it for what it is.

ED: He broke in.

KATH: He broke in with a coin.

ED: He broke in to have a piss, yeah.

KATH: That's rude, innit?

ED: It's not even the rudest thing he did on the stag do.

KATH: [laughs] How about you? Have you had any nightmares?

ED: Yeah, getting the electrics done.

KATH: Oh, really?

ED: Yeah. We're replacing an old sort of botched system of wiring with a new, good system of wiring.

KATH: Oh.

ED: And it's the – the power's all janky.

KATH: Sure.

ED: Janky?

KATH: Sure.

ED: Wonky. Like bad.

KATH: Bad, yeah.

ED: Probably going to have to get a new – get a new one of them. New power source.

KATH: Hm.

ED: Doesn't bare thinking about though.

KATH: Hm.

ED: Oh, there we are. Pound shop? Pound World? Poundland?

KATH: Pound.

[Spooky music]

ED: Oh, hey Darren.

DARREN HARRIOTT: Hey! How are you doing, guys?

ED: Good, thank you.

KATH: Good, thank you.

ED: You're very chipper.

DARREN: Nice to see you! Oh, of course! Of course! We're outside a store that I know very well. Yeah, yeah. Poundland.

ED: Oh, great. A lovely Poundland. Yes.

DARREN: Who doesn't love a Poundland? Let's be honest. Come on now. Come on.

KATH: Yeah. No, you're right.

ED: It's great.

DARREN: Yeah, exactly.

ED: It's great. Thanks so much for inviting us here.

DARREN: Yeah, no. No, it's very nice. I quite like, uh, Spooktown. It's definitely got a unique look about it. A unique feel as well. Yeah.

KATH: Yeah, that's fair.

DARREN: Yeah, no. It's better than Dudley.

[All laugh]

ED: That's on the sign as you drive in.

KATH: 'Better than Dudley.'

DARREN: 'Better than Dudley.' Yeah.

ED: How is your – how was your journey here? Was it alright?

DARREN: It was alright. It was alright. Um, yeah. I came here by train, as you do. As you do.

ED: Lovely.

KATH: Oh, yeah.

DARREN: I quite like the trains that go into Spooktown because they're – they're almost kind of like ghost trains. Almost. It was like – it was very – I felt like there were definitely quite a few spirits on the train as well. Yeah.

KATH: Oh, really?

ED: Okay.

DARREN: And it was an old black train as well. You don't see many old black trains anymore.

KATH: No, that is unique to Spooktown I think.

DARREN: Very unique. Yeah, it definitely felt slightly spooky as I was on there as well. But yeah, no. I can't wait to go back. I've got first class, whatever that means.

KATH: Oh, lovely.

ED: Fucking hell.

KATH: Very posh. Very posh.

ED: That's nice.

KATH: Indeed.

DARREN: Spooktown dollars are something that I've been saving.

[All laugh]

KATH: Like Bitcoin.

DARREN: Yeah.

[Spooky music]

ED: How many ghosts have you seen this week?

DARREN: This week? I felt like – well, I felt like I can feel ghosts but I don't really see them that much.

ED: Interesting.

KATH: Okay.

DARREN: Because in my family, my nan for example, my nan, you'd almost think she was like – like a ghost's best friend. Because there's always some sort of a ghost story with her. Any dreams she has, it involves some sort of a ghost. I think – I do think though, because she's like 80 and she's just had like a lot of people die –

KATH: Yeah, that happens.

DARREN: There's just people who she just – I mean, I don't know whether I like the idea of them being there, or my nan being mental.

KATH: Yeah.

DARREN: Because if there's loads of – if there's loads of spirits and stuff, I feel like they always want something. And I don't know whether I'm in the mood to help them at the time. Because, you know, they always feel like – there's always like an – there's always something they need to complete, isn't there, so they can go – so they can go back?

KATH: Right. Yeah, they're always – they always come with a task as opposed to being like, 'hey, let's just hang out.' It's always like, 'oh, can you do this for me?'

ED: Yeah, that's interesting.

DARREN: It's never, 'hey, let's hang out.' I've noticed that with ghosts.

KATH: Yeah.

DARREN: It's never like, 'hey, let's play a bit of Connect 4.' They're always – they always want you to get involved in something, yeah.

KATH: Gosh, your nan must be exhausted then. If she's constantly got them around.

DARREN: Yeah. I think – I think my nan, she really does. In my mind, anyway, most ghosts tend to be evil. I don't really know –

ED: That's what I think, yeah.

DARREN: Yeah, I don't – I don't believe they're like goody like – I know obviously you see ghosts with like a halo and stuff, but that's – that's very rare in society, that is.

KATH: You've not seen any of them this week, basically?

DARREN: No.

KATH: You've only seen bad ones.

DARREN: I mean, yeah. Well, they're like neck tattoos, aren't they? There's always – pretty much all of them are bad ones.

[All laugh]

ED: What's the scariest thing that's ever happened to – to you?

DARREN: The scariest thing that's ever happened to me? Uh, I remember when I was a little kid, my little cousin who was maybe about one was 100% certain that there was somebody in the room with her that wasn't me.

ED: Oh no.

DARREN: So she was like – she – and like, here's the thing, I'm not like up to date with many horror movies. I've watched a few. But I know that a baby or a dog that is losing its mind to somebody in the room is not a good sign. Right?

KATH: Yeah.

DARREN: Anytime I watch a horror movie and I see a dog in a horror movie, I go, 'that dog is going to tell us everything we need to know. That dog –

KATH: Yeah yeah yeah.

DARREN: And then just seeing my cousin just – it was about ten minutes. It was so intense my auntie came in, my nan was there. It was at my nan's house. And we were all just watching her like horrified. Because she was acting as if somebody was definitely there.

ED: Oh my god.

KATH: That is so creepy.

DARREN: Yeah. And I was – I was crapping my pants. I was like, ‘what’s going on?’ It was just – it was so strange to me.

KATH: Yeah that is poo pants worthy.

DARREN: Yeah yeah yeah.

KATH: Bloody hell.

DARREN: Yeah, so that –

ED: Did you try and have that sort of like bravado of like, ‘I’m not scared.’ Like, you know, like when teenagers are like, ‘I don’t believe in ghosts.’ And then as soon as you see a child –

DARREN: Oh yeah.

ED: Talking to somebody, you’re like, ‘fucking hell!’

DARREN: Oh yeah, I tried to blame it on anything else. I said, ‘I don’t know, maybe she’s hungry and that’s her way of showing she just wants food. I don’t know. Maybe she needs changing or something.’

ED: Because the child has nothing to gain from scaring you.

DARREN: Exactly.

ED: Whereas with an adult, you’d be like, ‘ah, you’re pulling my leg.’ But a child doesn’t have the – or a dog –

KATH: Or a dog, yeah.

ED: Doesn't have the capacity to be like, [laughs] 'I'm going to absolutely prank Darren.'

DARREN: There's nothing in it for them, yeah. Exactly.

ED: Yeah yeah yeah. That's it. There's no end goal. There's no end goal for a dog or a child to pretend it's a ghost.

DARREN: Here's a question I have for you two. Right. Do you guys believe in pet ghosts? Like dogs and cats and stuff like that as – as ghosts?

KATH: I reckon if people ghosts exist, then I reckon there's like dog ghosts, whale ghosts, whatever animal ghosts. Yeah, I reckon. If there are people ones.

DARREN: I never thought of – I never thought of whale ghosts. For some reason I immediately went to dogs and cats. But now I'm like, 'yeah, there's going to be whale ghosts.'

KATH: Yeah, the sea is going to be riddled.

DARREN: There's going to be tons of shark ghosts. Oh no. I don't know why I completely sort of skipped over fishes.

KATH: Never forget about whales, Darren.

DARREN: Yeah.

ED: If there were animal ghosts, there'd be just so many dinosaurs all of the time.

DARREN: Yeah.

KATH: That's a good point.

DARREN: That is a very good point as well. I'd be into seeing a dinosaur ghost.

ED: Aw, it'd be insane.

KATH: Yeah, it'd be pretty cool.

ED: Two of my favourite things.

DARREN: Right? Tyrannosaurus Rex ghost! And it's so big. It can't damage anything, it goes straight through. You're like, 'oh, this is awesome!' That's great. I'm so into dinosaur ghosts now.

KATH: That's the dream.

ED: Do you want to quickly re-write your story?

DARREN: I had no idea! Oh man.

ED: Because I also believe that probably 50% of the cats and dogs you see on a day-to-day basis, they're probably ghosts.

DARREN: Aw.

ED: Because also dogs like – old dogs don't wear like Victorian ruffs. Or you can't tell by their clothing.

DARREN: Yeah, yeah.

ED: It's not like an old Victorian dog because it's just still a dog.

DARREN: It's just a really old dog in a monocle. You're like, 'oh, there you go.' Yeah.

ED: That dog's got a top hat on!

[Spooky music]

ED: Kath, do you have a question for – for Darren?

KATH: Oh, yeah. Sure, alright. So goblin, boglin, hobgoblin. Shag marry kill.

DARREN: Okay, I need your help. The middle one. Boglin. What's a boglin? I know what a hobgoblin and a goblin is.

KATH: Oh.

ED: We had to Google that, so fair play.

DARREN: Well, I think so anyway. Just because of Spiderman. There's Goblin and then there's Hobgoblin.

KATH: Oh yeah, that's a really good point.

DARREN: Yeah, Hobgoblin is –

KATH: I hadn't thought about it in – in sort of Marvel universe Goblin and Hobgoblin.

ED: Yeah, I think we're talking about the sort of mythical, mystical creature rather than the Spiderman villain. But unless you want to –

DARREN: Okay, because I don't know, what was it? Snog, marry, avoid?

KATH: Snog, marry – uh, kill.

DARREN: Snog, marry, kill.

KATH: Please, we're in Spooktown. Come on.

DARREN: Oh no, sorry. I thought I was doing a bit of BBC into, uh, Spooktown. Not allowed, we know this. Uh, BBC 3. Um –

ED: Shag, marry, Don't Tell the Bride[All laugh]

DARREN: I'm going to go with boglin to, uh, kill. Get rid of.

KATH: Okay.

DARREN: I would kiss a goblin and marry the, uh, hobgoblin.

ED: We forgot to say what a boglin is, sorry.

KATH: Oh, yeah yeah.

ED: A boglin is like a little plastic toy, um, in like a cardboard cage that you bought in the 90s. And you put your fingers into the back of its skull and then you could sort of make it talk and be like, 'bla bla bla'. If you want to purchase one, there will be Spooktown branded boglins for sale at the end of the show. So it's kill a boglin –

DARREN: Uh, marry – no, kiss goblin. And marry the hobgoblin.

ED: I'm afraid it is fuck, but –

KATH: [laughs] I love how you saw –

DARREN: I've really PC-ed it up.

KATH: PG-ed it all.

ED: 'Kiss, avoid, date.'

[All laugh]

KATH: He's like Disney-fied it completely. 'This is one for the kids.'

DARREN: I – I don't know – I just don't know if this is pre-watershed or – so I'm just –

ED: I'd give the – I'd give the goblin a peck on the cheek, and I'd serve a roast dinner to the –

KATH: Hobgoblin. Lovely bloke.

ED: And I'd firmly shake the boglin's hand.

DARREN: I don't know what I'm doing, sorry.

ED: I think we've chatted outside this Poundland long enough.

KATH: Hm.

ED: Does your story have a title?

DARREN: Uh, it's called, 'Poundland.' Not really, I didn't really give it a title.

[All laugh]

ED: 'Poundland' it is.

KATH: You've committed to Poundland. That's what we're going to go with.

[Spooky music]

DARREN: What's the worth of a pound truly? [coins jingle] A hundred pennies? No! This is a place where a pound can get you anything you want. Dreams, toilet roll, or a Cadbury's Dairy Milk medium size. I ask because this is Poundland Spooktown, [crowd saying, 'ah'] situated in between FarmFoods and Shoe Zone. Which is currently having a bit of a re-furb. It's one day away from its grand opening, which will be covered by the local gazette, We Are Spooktown. [typing sounds] Pictures will be taken [camera clicks] and a ribbon will be cut [scissors snap] by local Spooktown celebrity, Dane Bowels, [gasping] one fourth of chart-topping band Grey.

We see inside the store. Like all Poundlands, there's plenty of choice of a quality array of products. Four tills, [scanning items] six self-service checkouts. ['place your item in the bagging area'] It seems very ready for business tomorrow. ['please wait for assistance'] Bill and Jill: our new management. Bill notices an old homeless woman outside the front of the store. [grunts] He isn't happy and gives her the old shoo. 'Shoo!' You know, with his arms. She looks at him, growls a bit, and then walks off. He grabs

a broom and starts sweeping a bit of dust in front of him and talks to Jill.

BILL: Spooktown, eh? What a load of bollocks. It's just a normal town. I don't see anything different about it. Except the locals, they look a bit feral. But I don't see any Ghostbuster nonsense here.

JILL: I wouldn't discredit all the stories, Bill. This town definitely has manner flowing through it, filled with malice.

BILL: Manner? What's that? Huh?

JILL: Manner is the spiritual life force that's in the universe and all around us. But I can definitely sense a very strong force in this town. And it's a demon one for sure.

BILL: Bullshit! You're just really cold, Jill. And I just haven't put any heating on.

JILL: Look, that's not it, Bill. I was reading We Are Spooktown on the train up. That fire at Shoe Zone next door. [sirens] No cause was found. And the case was dropped. And that was it. It was such a strange fire. The whole exterior was absolutely perfect, but everything inside was burnt to a crisp. And there was no smoke coming outside. It's all very spooky.

BILL: Bla bla bla. Fires happen, Jill. Plus those shoes are made from cheap, flammable materials. Trust me. I've shopped in there once. Absolute fire hazard. [match strikes]

Bill then immediately looks around the shop, knowing he's surrounded by cheap, flammable materials.

JILL: No, look. Cattle have been known to die from unknown causes. People have seen red coloured rain like blood. There's a reason why planes do not fly over here. [beeping] The plane crashes in this town are higher than anywhere else in the world. Because of this place, the Bermuda Triangle isn't even called the Bermuda Triangle anymore. It's just called the North Atlantic ocean.

[Circus music]

Jill, aka Jillian Tan, will be the assistant manager of the shop. She's worked in a few Poundlands all over the country, so she feels she can take on the prestigious Spooktown's new flagship store. She used to work in one in Wolverhampton. It's where she first met Bill. And they worked as sales assistants together. Their relationship is more just colleagues. I mean, Bill has sent her a Christmas card before and spelled her name wrong. So, there's that.

She doesn't want to be a shop manager. As she says, it's too much stress and she has enough stress at home looking after her mum, who is gravely ill [coughs], but she is unable to say no to her new boss and knows the importance of tomorrow's opening. So she has to come out and help Bill for a few hours. Jill enjoys orange chips from her local chippy, shoes with no laces, and Ronan Keating. [music plays] Jill loves to work. That's it. She's just all about work.

On the other hand, Bill Clementine is the newly appointed store manager. It's his first time managing a shop, but he has previous retail experience working in Computer Exchange and Woolworths. ['we're worth it'] RIP. He's still baffled by the demise of

Woolworths. ['why?'] It was his first ever job and he says Christmas hasn't felt the same ever since. Bill is generally a salty person. He peaked in popularity during high school and unfortunately he knows it. Sceptical of everything, he's not much fun. But he thinks it makes him the perfect boss. He likes Jillian because she's never combative and isn't trying to take his job, which makes him feel secure, manly, and partially aroused. ['oh, sorry about that'] He's a portly guy, has a kind of moustache. He looks more 47 than 27 but he wears that with a badge of pride.

BILL: I actually think it's better if you look a tad older. Young people don't really get managerial jobs, you see?

Jillian decides to start dusting down around the front entrance, near the batteries. A pack of batteries falls to the floor. [clunking] She picks them up and puts them back. And then two more packs fall to the floor. [clunking] Bill looks over, already annoyed [grunts] and gives the sort of eye roll that lets you know he was bullied in high school and learnt nothing from it. More batteries fall to the ground. [clunking] Jill screams. [screaming]

BILL: Oh, what the hell are you doing?

Shouts Bill as he rushes over to see Jill on the floor, covered in batteries, seemingly knocked out.

BILL: We don't have time for this, Jill! The shop opens in nine hours! You're meant to be a help, not a hindrance. For fuck's sake! Jill! Jill! This isn't funny, you know.

He shakes her frantically, but she's out. Bill starts to head into the staff room to get his phone to call for help. But he trips right over the Henry Hoover he was using earlier.

BILL: Ow, Jesus! Oh, my knee! Ugh!

Suddenly all the lights go out and it's black. Bill is just on the ground, breathing heavily. He's perplexed as to what's happened. [heavy breathing] It's dark and eerily silent. The hustle and bustle of the people outside the shop seemingly no more. Just the heavy breathing of the man who once had three full English breakfasts in one sitting. [burps]

A sound of toys can be heard playing. [drums, children's music, child's voice, frog sounds] He can see the toy section is the only part of the shop that's lit up. All the toys are playing and sounds are coming from them and speaking. Bill, slightly more scared, gets up and runs into the staff room to get his phone. [gasping] He runs in and to his surprise, Jill is sitting there eating a sandwich.

JILL: Um, you okay, Bill? You look like you've just been chased. I know you're nervous about tomorrow but don't let it get to you, mate. Don't worry, I'll, you know, I've got your back.

She continues eating her sandwich, watching the TV. Bill explains what happened [laughing] and Jill finds it hilarious, asking if he's been drinking.

BILL: No.

Very annoyed at the accusation, Bill starts banging on the table, seemingly to get his point across. [banging] Jill looks worried. Not for her wellbeing, but more for his health.

JILL: This launch is really stressing him out.

Bill frantically looks back out the staff room and everything is normal. The batteries are all back in their place, the Henry Hoover is in the corner again. The shop looks perfect, like better than it did a minute ago. It looks ready for tomorrow. He's now doubting himself. But he never doubts himself! He's sure he saw what he saw. Jill has never seen him like this. He's usually, well, not the friendliest. But likes to carry a tough exterior so she gets it. But he's clearly shook up about something. This much vulnerability is rare from such a guy.

JILL: I was uh, going to go now and check on my mum. But I can stay a bit longer if you want, Bill. I mean, I feel like you really need me right now.

Realising he has shown too much of himself...

BILL: Ha! I don't need anyone! Nope, that's fine, Jill. You can leave. Do one. Uh, I've just hit my head and I feel a bit dizzy. I guess my mind was playing tricks on me. I know how cliché that is, but it's true. Um, yeah. No, you can go. I'll – I'll see you tomorrow. Oh and uh, tell your mum I said – I said, 'hey.' I guess. I don't really know her, do I? So, you know.

Jill leaves feeling bad for Bill. But she has to go back to look after her sick mother. Sitting in the staff room, still a bit confused, but now under the belief he hit his head and that was all. The TV, which is on in the background, [background TV noises] changes channel by itself, which alerted Bill. He looks around. The remote is on the table. Nothing's been pressed. A slow trickle of white noise is coming from the TV. There's a faint voice coming out of it, but it's hard to make out because of the white noise. The TV then switches off. Silence. Bill is frozen in his place. The TV switches back on. And a scream is being heard, like a banshee. [screaming]

It's such a loud, piercing scream the TV explodes. [explosion] Bill Clementine of 7 Wetherston Street runs out the staff room. [footsteps running] He's had enough of this. He notices his ears are bleeding. He trips again. [thuds] The lights have all turned off once more.

BILL: What's going on? What is this? Is this a joke?

Suddenly a breeze runs along Bill's back [spooky noises] almost as if somebody just ran past him.

BILL: Ah! Who's there? What is this? What – who are you? What do you want? Is this a game? What, do you want money? I've got no money, leave me alone! I pay my taxes!

You hear the basement power switch being turned off. [flicks switch] It was darkness before, but not like this. Hearing the generator being turned off has Bill scared and lost. He's holding onto the wall, trying to get himself to the exit, but he can't stop shivering.

BILL: Who's there? Answer me!

In the darkness, fairy lights from aisle 2, row C have been laid on the floor. [magical sounds] They light up bulb by bulb, revealing the path that leads to the toy section Bill could hear the sounds from earlier.

BILL: Yeah, good trick. I'm not scared of this, you know. I know it's fake. Yeah? When I get my hands on whoever's doing this, you're dead! You're dead!

Slowly, Bill starts to walk along the lit trail. He just can't stop shaking. But he's still trying to keep his composure. He doesn't believe in ghosts and spirits. That's the main reason he took a role in this place called Spooktown. He thinks it's all rubbish. Like paying the BBC license fee. It's rubbish. The closer he gets, the more agitated he becomes. He's now gotten himself to the taunting phase. To hide just how scared he is.

BILL: Yeah, pretty great trick. Making a TV explode. I'll face you. You're hardly David Copperfield, huh? This is my store, yeah? What are you – where are you from? Are you from the 99p store? Is that was this is? Are you our rivals, huh? Huh? Well yeah, we're going to take all your customers. Yeah, we have 16 loo rolls for a pound. Better than your 12 for 99p. And all the kids' toys start to play and light up again. [Toy sounds] The closer he gets, the more intense the sounds. The louder. It's more distorted now. Sweat's pouring from his forehead.

BILL: Who's there? You think this is a joke? Who's there? Answer me! Answer me!

He looks over into the aisle and he sees a woman staring at him.

BILL: You're – you're –

She looks just like the homeless woman from earlier. Before Bill can say anything, she opens her mouth and a screech just as powerful blasts into the room. [scream] Bill is frozen. He can't get up. [dramatic orchestral music] We see Jill entering her home and going into her mum's room to check up on her. But her mother isn't in the bed. We get a close up on Jill and she starts laughing. The following day is the launch day. Everything is in place. We see a small crowd of people gathered. Sweets are being handed out

by members of staff for the new Poundland. Haribo fantastics, from the upcoming Halloween Poundland supply. Very fitting for Spooktown. Dane Bowels is there. He's asking anyone if they want his autograph. So far he's 0 out of 15 tries. But keep going, Dane! We see Jillian wearing a badge, standing next to the mayor. The badge we can make out. It says, 'manager.' And all the staff members are all around her. But no Bill.

We are then taken inside the shop. Past the tills, past the loo rolls, past the sweets, the blocks of cheese, the gardening equipment. Past the staff room. A sharp right downstairs into the basement. The last facial expression of Bill was petrified. And it is now etched into the wall of the basement. His soul is now the sustenance for this Poundland.

Jillian Tan has for three years now worked undercover for We Are Spooktown. Her job is to analyse the resolve and mental fortitude of potential workers by putting them through the Spooktown trials. Why are the Spooktown trials needed, you ask? The thing about Spooktown stores are they all need the usual stuff all stores need to operate. A building, appropriate equipment, shop name, staff. And of course, the souls of the scared. The more broken they are, the more broken they become. The better the power to run the store.

However, when this power runs out, a fire erupts, burning all inside of the building and the basement where the soul will finally be freed. The soul is a power source that has electric currents running through it. It is believed to be the reason for so many fires in Spooktown. Spooktown fires don't really follow the laws of physics or fire. Jill lost her brother a few years ago. His soul, until recently, was being held at the Shoe Zone next door. Once the power finally ran out, his soul was freed. She started this job to

find out where her brother's soul was being kept, which led her to Shoe Zone. She heard about the Poundland opening next door, and then found out Bill was going to be the manager. And figured she could make an exchange. You see? As a member of We Are Spooktown, you're entrusted with finding the next suitable energy source, soul or manner.

Pressure was being applied to Jillian by management to use her mother's soul, since she was about to die and a powerful witch. But her mother is crafty and wanted her soul to be free immediately so she could finally be with her son. Jillian and her mum agreed to use Bill as the power source for the store. The once sceptical and tough Bill became a broken man in his final moments. Screaming out in horror as children's toys played in the background. That swift change of attitude alone will fill this shop's power for at least a year until they run out of power.

She knows she had to become the manager of the store even though she doesn't want to. But for her plan to work perfectly and her mum to be free with her brother, she will do it. A soul or manner is always needed to run any store here. And any worker of any kind has to sacrifice someone's soul. This, however, isn't known by all who inhabit Spooktown. Hence, there have not been many shops. In case you're wondering what happened to Bill's body, Jillian burned it later that night in a very controlled fire in her back garden. With the souls of her mother and brother as company.

[Spooky music]

[Music playing, singing 'Here to judge. Here to judge.']

PRIYA HALL: Hello! Here to Judge is a new weekly podcast from Little Wander where we dismantle predicaments posted online.

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

ROBIN MORGAN: I haven't stopped giggling since you said the word poo. To 'am I being unreasonable' quandaries on Mumsnet.

PRIYA: I'm an adult. And I'm reading this aloud. Join me, Priya Hall.

ROBIN: Me, Robin Morgan.

LEILA: And me, Leila Navabi. Subscribe to Here to Judge now on Apple, Spotify, or wherever you get your podcasts.

[Music stops]

LEILA: I love this podcast so much.

[Spooky music]

KATH: Oh, wow.

ED: Wow.

KATH: And I've got to say, the – the lighting is, uh, is bright here in this Poundland. It is very bright.

ED: It's Bill's soul.

DARREN: It is! I'll tell you, got a great soul. And that's what happens. You try and have that tough bravado all the time and, you know, you don't believe in spirits and souls. Perfect. Ripe for the picking.

ED: And am I right in thinking it's green-ergy?

DARREN: You could say it's green. Yeah.

ED: Yeah. That's great then.

DARREN: It's very green.

KATH: Very sustainable. That's great.

DARREN: I mean, think about it. It takes one soul to last you a whole year. And there's never any – even the fires, there's no smoke. It's all very in house.

ED: Oh, wow. It's very, very in house, yeah.

KATH: Very in house.

DARREN: I feel like you guys have put a lot of attention on Spooktown. And right now I think it's at the fun phase, but eventually there might be a few locals who are not happy about it. Because there's too much attention being brought in. And that's – that's all I'm going to say.

KATH: Oh, do you reckon?

DARREN: I think so.

ED: Is that a warning?

DARREN: Because – I mean, it's not a warning necessarily from me, but –

KATH: Is it a threat?

DARREN: I mean, I wouldn't say it was a threat from me. I would just say –

KATH: Uh huh.

DARREN: There's a lot of skull and, uh, skull and crossbones type people around here drinking goat's blood, uh, as well as spirits, of course. And I think that too much attention being brought in might be a bit of a problem for them. But I was happy to show you the Poundland and what happens in the Poundland and the story of the Poundland. And I, you know, technically it's actually you guys who have told the world about the – the, uh, energy source.

ED: Have you been threatened by anyone? It feels like you've been threatened by someone.

DARREN: No! No, no.

KATH: Maybe trying to shift the responsibility and shift the blame –

DARREN: No, come on. It's not – come on! You guys are – you guys are making it very obvious when they might be here. Ah, stop it. No, no.

ED: Oh, sorry sorry sorry sorry.

KATH: Oh. Oh god, okay. Okay.

DARREN: Thank you, thank you. Thanks.

KATH: Yeah. Got you. Got you.

DARREN: That's the thing about Spooktown. I feel like a lot of old stores come here and they do really well. That's why I mean. I mean, you've got a Mother Care still going really strong.

ED: Mhm. C&A.

KATH: Mhm. Austin's.

DARREN: Yeah.

KATH: Quick save.

DARREN: Quick save. Exactly, guys.

ED: What was, you know, Dane Bowels, member of Grey. What was their hit again? What was their big song?

DARREN: Uh, his hit was 'All Rise', which does sound like a Frankenstein type thing as well.

ED: 'All Rise'. So is this – it was the same as the band Blue's song, then.

DARREN: Yeah, there you go.

ED: Just exactly the same one.

KATH: That's a coincidence.

DARREN: Uh, 'All Rising.'

ED: 'Some Rise.'

[All laugh]

DARREN: Yeah.

KATH: And presumably he's still powering the store?

DARREN: He's still powering the store, yeah.

KATH: Right.

DARREN: Yeah, he's – he's still powering. But then they have to get somebody else.

ED: Yeah, how long has he been powering the store for?

DARREN: I think it's been about six months.

ED: Oh.

DARREN: About six months. The toughest thing is he's actually got to get – he's definitely going to go through Christmas, and Christmas is a lot of stuff to really light up. So I mean –

KATH: Gosh, yeah.

DARREN: They're going to be so lit up. I feel like they're going to be really lit up with him.

KATH: Yeah. Yeah, I think you're right.

DARREN: Decorations – decorations going through the roof, mate.

ED: And is this all – all of the stores in Spooktown are powered by souls? Is that – am I right? Is that right?

DARREN: I believe so, yes. All of the souls are powered, uh, through – in Spooktown. Or else you can't get the shop to come – to work. And then if you don't – and you have to replace it in time. Uh, because if you don't replace it in time, that's how we end up with fires. Yeah.

KATH: Yeah, that does explain all the fires. Yeah. Um, I have to ask. So the We Are Spooktown –

DARREN: Yeah.

KATH: That – that Jill was sort of undercover for. Am I correct in thinking that it's their responsibility to pick the next – the next battery? The next –

DARREN: Yeah.

KATH: Person? Or was it just for Poundland because she was hired as assistant manager?

DARREN: I believe that it's – it's up to We Are Spooktown. Basically We Are Spooktown I think, I mean I'm not 100% on this, but I think that they are sort of underground, sort of definitely –

they're not just your normal – you know like the way especially people on the right look at the media? What they think the media is?

KATH: Yeah.

DARREN: What they think that is is what people at We Are Spooktown are doing. And they –

KATH: That is –

DARREN: They decide who. Because at the end of the day, they're still – they're still a paper. They're still a gazette. They still want to sell stories. So they fabricate things, they add to certain things as well. And then – and then they will purposely make things happen for stories. And it's quite easy to make – a lot easier to make things happen in Spooktown because there's a lot of spooky stuff going on anyway. So you don't really have to do necessarily that much.

KATH: Yeah.

DARREN: But yeah, they are the ones who decide and they were leaning on Jill.

KATH: We Are Spooktown.

DARREN: Yes.

KATH: The gazette. Are they the only people that have ever reported that the shops are powered by souls? Has anyone else in the public or anywhere – has Dane Bowls? Bowels? Dane Bowls's brother, um – has anyone else seen it?

DARREN: Yeah, it's definitely – it's definitely known in Spooktown specifically.

KATH: Okay.

DARREN: There's a few people outside of Spooktown who know. But they're the same people who believe in flat earth, so no one – that's the problem. They're immediately discredited. But in Spooktown it is quite a –

KATH: Okay.

DARREN: It is known by the people of class. We'll say that. I don't feel like the people of the lower class know because they don't own shops. And that's how you find out.

KATH: Interesting.

ED: It's sort of like a shield thing with the flat earthers, where they believe in flat earth, which isn't true, you know, according to mainstream media, but this one is true. So if you throw in a lie with a truth, the truth looks like a lie.

DARREN: Yeah. Yeah, they – I mean, they can do that. But I think with a lot of the sort of flat earthers or, um, the Spooktowners as they've started to call themselves, uh, they're very – they don't come across believable or that likeable. So it's quite – it becomes quite hard for people to be – to really listen to one. And let's be honest, I mean it's probably easier to uh, to convince the world that the earth is flat than what's happening at Spooktown with the shops.

ED: Yeah yeah yeah. I agree. I agree with that.

KATH: Yeah.

ED: Wholeheartedly. Um, and it does sort of make sense because there's no, um, sort of power grid or power structure in Spooktown at all.

DARREN: No.

ED: Um, so it would make sense that that's how the shops are being – because I always wondered like, how's – because we used to have fires for heat and water and you know, we'd use logs and that.

DARREN: Yeah, classic.

ED: So it's – yeah. Thank you. It does sort of beg the question, 'how do shops have their strip lights on and, you know, their TVs in their break rooms and stuff?' And this does explain that really well.

KATH: Yeah.

DARREN: There's – yeah.

ED: So I'm inclined to agree with it. But at the same time, if it is a ruse by, um, We Are Spooktown the gazette, that's a story in and of itself. That they're setting fires and murdering people.

DARREN: Yeah, but I feel like generally it's – it's a bit like Trump's taxes to his people. They don't really care. They don't really care. They're like – I feel like to live in Spooktown you have to be a

certain type of person. Uh, to really truly appreciate what it is and what happens – what goes on. And I think for somebody – I suppose if somebody like a Bill, he was set-up. He was set-up for this. He was perfect for it. He was the perfect guy there. His own arrogance brought him there as well. He's like, 'oh, I don't believe in any of this nonsense that's going on.' And he was – he was tricked and completely played. And now he has to – his soul is generating a Poundland.

[Spooky music]

KATH: Oh, are we able to um, do you reckon we could sneak in and go down to the basement? Are we allowed to do that? First of all I'd like to see the TV in the staff room.

DARREN: I mean –

KATH: If we – if we could swing by.

DARREN: I don't have the – the keys, necessarily. Uh –

ED: Yeah, fair.

KATH: Okay.

DARREN: I mean, I – normally, you know, I'd – I'm not really one for sort of going into sort of spooked-out places and stuff like that. But I don't mind standing outside. So I think we can feel the sort of manner in there, the energy outside.

KATH: Okay.

DARREN: But um, I feel like going in there is kind of – it's a bit – it's a bit past my, uh, my jurisdiction, ma'am.

KATH: Okay.

DARREN: My jurisdiction.

ED: Okay, yeah. Well, that's a shame because that would've proved it.

KATH: That would've, absolutely.

DARREN: I mean it's definitely – I mean, you can feel the power.

ED: Yeah.

KATH: Well no, it's very bright. It is bright.

ED: It is very bright.

KATH: Um, it's like – it's like when you go past a – a shop where, you know, and it sort of widens your eyes a bit? Because it's uh, so bright.

ED: Yeah, it's giving me a headache.

DARREN: Or there – or it's like a McDonalds.

ED: Yes.

KATH: Yes.

DARREN: That's because of the power. It's because of the – the power, guys. And I mean, I personally think they need to sort of set up like more of a system where people can offer their souls to sort of open shops.

KATH: Oh, like volunteers.

DARREN: Yeah, why not? If someone's on their deathbed and about to die, why not do that? Then maybe they can generate a Tesco.

KATH: That's interesting.

ED: Yeah, they could have a little – nice little plaque or something.

KATH: It would be nice to have a Tesco, wouldn't it?

ED: 'This shop is powered by Nathan, who, you know, was going to die of whatever disease, and instead –'

KATH: Probably don't need that detail, but...

ED: Yeah yeah, okay.

KATH: Bit morbid to say, 'from Nathan.'

[All laugh]

ED: Should we have a – should we have a convo about this, Kath?

KATH: Yeah, we'll have a little debrief. Yeah.

ED: Do you mind if – just give us a second, Darren, while we um –

DARREN: Yeah, sure.

ED: We're just going to go and really double check whether we believe you or not.

DARREN: That's fine. That's fine.

KATH: We'll, um, we'll just shuffle over to the other side. Well, we'll be back in a second.

DARREN: This is like a drug deal. I'm standing here like they're deciding whether they're going to buy something or not.

[All laugh]

ED: How much is weed these days, Kath?

KATH: I don't know. I don't know!

ED: Just give him £50 and ask for some. Um, what do you think? What do you think?

KATH: Oh, I mean it does stack up. The story was really solid. Like – but I'm very suspicious that the We Are Spooktown gazette is involved. I – they could be spreading lies.

ED: Yeah.

KATH: And also we weren't able to go into the basement.

ED: That's my only suspish on his story. Is that he was like, 'oh, we can't go in. We can't go in there.' That's the only thing I was like,

'this is a bit – this is a bit off.' The gazette, for me, is almost a separate issue.

KATH: Okay.

ED: I think it's – it's freaking me out a bit. But I don't think – I don't think it bares any – I believe the story. But like how else are the shops getting powered?

KATH: I don't know.

ED: Show me a power line.

KATH: It can't be anything else. Yeah, no. You're right.

ED: Point to a power line. Are they still in the air or do they bury them now?

KATH: I don't know.

ED: I believe him.

KATH: Yeah, if it's not a person powering it, it would have to be a bloody big battery, wouldn't it?

ED: It would have to be a bloody big battery. And they don't sell them at Poundland.

KATH: No, no. It's a begrudging yes, yeah. We don't even need to shuffle back over. He can hear us.

DARREN: Oh yeah.

KATH: It's a yes!

DARREN: Oh, awesome! Thank you guys! Maybe next week we'll go and, uh, check the basement out. But uh –

ED: Oh!

KATH: Oh, so you'll have the key then, will you?

DARREN: I'll be able to –

KATH: Now I'm – now I'm rethinking, but yes.

DARREN: I'll try and get a key. I'll – I'll see what I can do.

ED: I hope that you don't get in a – you sort of alluded to a bit of trouble maybe with the FarmFoods. I hope that – sorry that I'm yelling this, but I hope that nothing bad happens to you on your journey back.

DARREN: Oh, I appreciate that. Yeah, sometimes they can be a little bit – a little bit fighty with their chicken drumsticks in their hands. It didn't sound painful but they are frozen, so – I'll be alright. I'm just going to run and get this train.

KATH: Bye!

DARREN: Footsteps.

[All laugh]

KATH: Footsteps footsteps footsteps footsteps.

ED: The one sound effect in the whole thing. Footsteps.

[Spooky music]

This has been a Little Wander production. Music from Rhodri Viney. Local artwork from Suze Hughes. Voice from 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.