

## Welcome to Spooktown – Athena Kugblenu

[Spooky music]

ED EASTON: [screams] Fucking hell, [you've got my heart there, you ghost?

[Thunder and rain sounds]

ED: Ugh.

KATH HUGHES: It's pissing down.

ED: It's horrible.

KATH: Hm. Grim.

ED: Like – what's that – I know rain's cold, but when rain's *cold* –

KATH: Like extra cold rain.

ED: Yeah, like fresh cold rain.

KATH: You mean snow?

ED: Uh, yeah. I think you're right.

KATH: You mean snow.

ED: I think I mean snow. This is like, um, wet snow.

KATH: Yeah.

ED: I've just described rain, haven't I?

KATH: Yeah.

ED: What a mess. Okay, yeah. Yeah. Yeah. How long have we been waiting for?

KATH: It feels like ages.

ED: It does feel like ages, doesn't it?

KATH: I'm pierced right through, I know that.

ED: Ugh. On top of the rain?

[Kath laughs]

ED: Have you had any nightmares this week?

KATH: Sure. Um, had one where there was a tarantula on the ceiling, but I couldn't move. And I was just like, 'oh no, it's going to drop in my mouth.'

ED: I hate spiders.

KATH: They're awful, aren't they?

ED: So was your mouth open when you were in...

KATH: It must've been. I – I think it was. I was like, 'well, if it lands on my – on my mouth –'

ED: It's going to – it's going to pop in discreetly.

KATH: I'm instinctively – yeah, yeah, I'm going to instinctively go like [gulps] and just – and – and um...

ED: Yeah.

KATH: Even though I don't want that to happen.

ED: Yeah. It's like when you um – when you drop something, and you instinctively go to get it. Yeah, the spider falls in your mouth. Yeah.

KATH: Yeah yeah yeah. So I do like – I'm going to go [gulps], and not delicious. Yeah. Yeah.

ED: Ugh.

KATH: Any nightmares yourself?

ED: Yeah, I'm living it right now. Waiting in the rain.

KATH: Yeah.

ED: My top one horrible thing to happen to me right now is this. I'd rather have ten spiders drop into my mouth and me accidentally gobble them up than be in this rain right now. I take that back immediately. I'm so arachnophobic that even the thought of it – I'd rather drown in this rain than have a – even look at a spider.

KATH: Where are we – we're meeting her in the bookshop, yeah?

ED: I assume – well, I assume we're meeting her in the bookshop, yeah.

KATH: Well should we just – should we just go in? Just go in?

ED: It's not open.

KATH: Yeah, I've got my crowbar.

ED: Is that your crowbar?

KATH: Yeah, it's my crowbar.

ED: I thought it was your mum's crowbar.

KATH: Eh, well, it doesn't get much use.

ED: Yeah, fair.

KATH: Should I give it a bash?

ED: I can't – I don't – I've never used a crowbar. You're the crowbar expert.

KATH: Alright. I guess I am. [grunts]

[Wood breaking] [thunder]

KATH: Oh, it's about to get – I can feel it, it's going to give.

ED: I think you'd better pull it in the door.

KATH: Just shush.

ED: Sorry.

KATH: Something's going to give. Something's absolutely going to give. It just might be me. Okay, okay.

ED: Ooh.

KATH: Okay. [crowbar clangs] We're in.

ED: [sighs] That's nice because now Athena doesn't have to use her own crowbar to get in.

KATH: That is nice.

ED: Yeah. She's got your mum to thank for that.

KATH: And me.

ED: Yeah, and you. Yeah.

KATH: Thank you.

[Spooky music]

ED: Athena, welcome to Spooktown!

ATHENA KUGBLENU: Thank you! Thank you for inviting me to Spooktown.

KATH: You're welcome.

ED: You're more than welcome. Thanks for inviting us to this bookshop. I love bookshops so I'm genuinely so excited to be in a bookshop. And even if your story is literally just us walking around a bookshop and having a – having a little gander, I'll love it.

ATHENA: Well, it's not. And it might change your mind about bookshops, actually.

[Ed and Kath laugh]

ATHENA: Be prepared to never walk into a bookshop again. You're just going to have to be – everything's going to be on a Kindle from now on. You know? You're going to get yourself an e-reader and you're going to be done with them by the end of this story, I'll tell you. If not, all your money back. That's a lie, you're not getting your money back.

ED: That's even worse, isn't it? Uh, wow. What a – what a heel turn immediately. Okay. Well, I hate that you brought us to this bookshop, because I absolutely love bookshops. Before we get started on your very spooky story, which sounds like it's going to be genuinely scary, which is great...

ATHENA: Yeah.

ED: Just so we get a sort of read on the room, how many ghosts have you seen this week?

ATHENA: Ooh, I think I've seen three.

KATH: Three?

ATHENA: Um –

ED: Three, yeah?

ATHENA: Yeah, I've seen three ghosts. And they were alright, yeah. I mean, it was calm. It was fine. I mean...

[All laugh]

ATHENA: I've got nothing to fear or hide from them. I've not like – it's not like I've – you know like in horror movies if you've like lost your virginity in a car recently and died, I've not done that recently, so –

KATH: So you're good.

ATHENA: It's not like I'm afraid of ghosts.

KATH: Yeah.

ATHENA: Yeah, it's not like it chases after me because I've let a man fiddle with me, like – we've got – I've got a mortgage with him, so he's allowed. Do you know what I mean? Like it's all – it's all innocent. It's all like respectable, so –

KATH: So you haven't done anything that a ghost is going to frown upon?

ATHENA: No. No, not at all.

KATH: Yeah.

ATHENA: So I don't really have to fear people from the afterlife. You might. I mean, I don't –

[All laugh]

ATHENA: So when I see ghosts we just nod and just go, 'yeah, what's up?'

ED: Yeah.

ATHENA: Yeah.

ED: I love the idea of the ghost about to haunt you and another ghost goes, 'no no no, they've got a mortgage.' It's like, 'oh shit, sorry. I didn't know, sorry. I didn't check the deeds.'

ATHENA: You know, 'they're living in sin, but it would take a lot of paperwork to split it up. You're probably alright with them two.' You know?

ED: Ghosts hate bureaucracy.

ATHENA: They share car insurance, so they're fine. They're fine.

KATH: It's okay, leave them be.

[All laugh]

[Spooky music]

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

ATHENA: Oh, wow. One time when we were watching 'Ghostwatch' as kids. Do you remember 'Ghostwatch'? That big thing in the 80s?

ED: Yeah yeah.

ATHENA: A picture fell off our wall. It was really – it was a replica of an old world map. So it wasn't an old picture, but it was a replica of an old picture, which is good enough. And when 'Ghostwatch' was on, it fell off the wall. I shit you not. Honestly, I remember – I said to myself, 'I'll remember this forever.' And I still remember it.

[All laugh]

ATHENA: Nothing will beat 'Ghostwatch'. I mean, I think it's insane how great 'Ghostwatch' was. It was brilliant. Do you guys remember it? Sarah Greene.

KATH: I – I know of it. I never watched it.

ATHENA: Oh my gosh. ‘Ghostwatch’ was insane. It was like this children’s TV thing or whatever where people – anyway, it was like a fake documentary. And it was just done so well. And it shit – it shit everyone up for years. We all – that year group got really bad GCSEs. I’m highly confident of that. They were just all – that was our Covid, do you know what I mean? We just never – we never recovered.

KATH: Close the schools.

ATHENA: Yeah.

KATH: [laughs] ‘Ghostwatch’ was on.

ATHENA: So – but yeah, genuinely too, a picture fell off the wall. And it smashed. And we still have the picture. So it was in a frame and there’s glass smashed in the frame.

KATH: Wow.

ED: That must’ve genuinely shit you up as a kid.

ATHENA: It was brilliant, yeah. Oh god, me and my brother, we were like [screams], it was terrifying. Um, and, you know, we have no idea why it fell off the wall. To this day.

[All laugh]

ATHENA: What happened to it? Was it a dial screw? Who knows? We’ll never know. I was too young to know these things and to ask those questions.

KATH: Just never checked.

ED: Kath, do you have a question you'd like to ask? I'm so excited to – for this ghost story, I'm trying to rattle through this intro.

KATH: Yeah –

ED: To this story. 'Kath, anything else?' [sighs]

KATH: Alright. Okay so do you believe in the theory, uh, that you swallow eight ghosts a year in your sleep?

ATHENA: [laughs] Um, yeah, why not.

KATH: Oh, you do? Okay.

ATHENA: I can't disprove it.

KATH: Okay, that's fair. You don't have like a recorder next year – like some people sort of record themselves.

ATHENA: Yeah, I can't disprove it. And I dream very vividly every night. Every night I have a very vivid dream. So yeah, that explains that, doesn't it? Like I'm inhaling someone else's life force and it's – it's manifesting itself in my dreams. Oh yeah, I like the idea. Do I exhale them or do they stay there?

KATH: I mean...

ATHENA: Is it like a tapeworm?

[All laugh]

ATHENA: Ghost tapeworm? Are they just there? That explains my appetite. But – but yeah, I can get with that. Yeah, sure. Why not?

KATH: Yeah. Okay.

ED: Great. I'm so excited. I love books, I love bookshops. I'm excited for my love of them to be scared out of my body by this story that you are trying to tell us happened in this very bookshop we're stood in right now. So –

ATHENA: Yeah. This is not a story. This is a documentary. This is real, by the way. This happened.

KATH: Okay. Okay.

ED: If any pictures fall off my wall, I'm – I'm going to scream and run out of the house. Um... are you ready to tell us your story?

ATHENA: I am ready. I'm going to bring it up, um, because – because it's so real, I had to write it down to make sure I got all the facts.

ED: Of course, yeah.

KATH: Yeah.

ATHENA: Okay. Are we ready?

KATH: Yeah.

ED: Um, I'm so – I'm so excited that my breathing's going weird. So just give me a couple... um... yes, okay. I'm ready. I'm ready.

ATHENA: You're ready?

ED: Yes. Okay.

ATHENA: Alright. Here we go.

[Spooky music]

[Ominous music]

ATHENA: So this is a story about two collectors of rare antique books. Their names are Femi and Wayne. Okay. But they don't just collect first edition books like Harry Potter [bell chimes] or Fifty Shades of Grey [whip snapping]. They collect really traditional books that contain things like folklore, you know? Things that contain magical histories that have been handed down through centuries. [whispering] They bare knowledge greater than any human has ever known. So what they did was they booked a long weekend in Spooktown based on the name of the town. Because if you go into a bookstore that contains the kind of books you like to buy, which are like that, you're going to find it in a town called Spooktown, aren't you? It makes a huge amount of sense. So eventually they get to Spooktown and they wander around and they find exactly what they're after. It's a bookstore. And the sign above the store says 'Spooktown Books'. And it's just the kind of place that sells their magical, mystical books. It's got dusty windows, it's hidden in a dark, secluded street. And when they opened the door of the bookstore [creaking], the air smelt really stale. [sniffing] You know? Like old librarian knickers. That kind of stale. So it's a place they think, 'we're going to find some fine books to add to our mystical antique collection.' As soon as they walk into the bookstore, the door slams shut [slamming] quickly behind them. And they think, 'oh, it's just a gust of wind. That's all it is. It's not an invisible man. It's a gust of wind.' And the walk into the store [footsteps], and it seems like they're walking into a never-ending shadow encasing the entrance. And what they need is assistance. The place was really dark. It feels really empty. Then they hear a voice.

‘Hello! Welcome to my bookshop!’ [gasping] And they jump and turn around. Neither of them sensed the presence behind them. The voice didn’t match the body they see. It’s a small lady who looks like she hasn’t slept in days. And she smiles at them. She had yellow teeth. And they could see that easily in the darkness. [gasps]

They hear the voice again. ‘Over here!’ They spin around again, and an overly tall gentleman dressed as a clown towers over them. And he says, ‘what is your age?’

Femi’s terrified. He says, ‘34.’

Wayne’s even more terrified. He says, ‘36.’

And the clown laughs. [laughs] ‘Not you. What age is the person you’re buying books for? Didn’t you know? This is a children’s bookstore.’

And the woman behind them flicks on a light switch [light buzzes] and they were in a children’s bookstore. Music starts playing [lullaby plays]. Nursery rhymes. They can hear ‘Ba Ba Black Sheep.’ And they don’t take it personally like that. It’s just a random nursery rhyme. So they look around. Picture books are everywhere. There are colourful chairs, cushions, toys, and more books. Brightly coloured, big, bold children’s books.

‘Oh! We made a mistake!’ Wayne says. ‘We want antique books. Books that have value.’ [cash register opening]

[Hissing] The lady hisses because she’s offended.

‘You don’t think books have value?’ The clown says.

‘Oh no no no. They do.’ Femi says. He elbows Wayne for his impoliteness. ‘He means historical value.’

[Hissing] The lady hisses again. ‘You don’t think books have historical value?’

Now they’re circling the pair. They’re not happy.

‘No, we do. We do. We mean we want books adults want to read.’

[Hissing] The lady’s hissing again. ‘You don’t think adults want to read children’s books.’

‘No!’ They’re terrified now. They’ve made them mad.

The clown says this to them: ‘well, if you think adults *do* want children’s books, you can pick whatever you’d like and purchase an item. I recommend the first edition book of “Spooktown Fairy Tales”. A perfect gift that any child or adult that’s young at heart would enjoy. Tell me, are you young at heart?’

Femi and Wayne looked at each other. They play Xbox [video game sound], they play five a side football [yelling]. That keeps them young, innit? So they were like, ‘yeah yeah yeah. We are, we are. We’ll buy the book. We’ll buy the book.’

‘Good! Good! Then sit in the corner and let Mrs. Spankbottom [whip snapping] read to you. We don’t get so many kids to visit us anymore, but young at heart adults will do.’

So they have to sit on a rug that Mrs. Spankbottom directs them to, sit down cross-legged and listen to a Spooktown fairy tale. And Mrs. Spankbottom clears her throat [clears throat] and is

about to begin the story. And just as she opens her book, she shuts it again. [book slams]

The clown laughs. He knows what's happening. 'Mrs. Spankbottom thinks some nursery rhymes should be sung first. Come on boys, you know how it goes. Sing along! Sing along!'

And so they sing 'Wheels on the Bus'. It's a classic. [song playing: 'the wheels on the bus go round and round, round and round, round and round.'] Mrs. Spankbottom doesn't sing though. She just does the actions. You know, 'the wheels on the bus go round and round, the wipers go swish swish swish, the babies go wah wah wah, the people go up and down.' They sing and they sing and they sing, until eventually Femi and Wayne fall asleep [yawning] to the sound of the big clown laughing. [scary laughter]

Femi and Wayne wake up. [alarm beeps, yawning] And they're back in their Airbnb, not sure if they just visited Spooktown Bookshop or awoke from a dream. Femi needs to tell Wayne about this mad dream. And he opened his mouth and all he can say is ['the wheels on the bus go round and round'] – those aren't the words he wants to say! Those aren't the words he wants to say, so he tries again. ['The driver on the bus says move –'] That's not what he wants to say! Be quiet. Shut up, will you? Um...

ED: [laughs]

ATHENA: He doesn't want to say that. He wants him to know about his dream. Wayne tries to reply and all he can say is, ['the door on the bus goes' –] – all he can say is 'wheels on the bus go round and round.' Before them on the table, right beside them, is a copy of 'Spooktown Fairy Tales'. And they realise it wasn't a dream. All they can hear and all they'll be able to say ever again

is how the wheels on the bus go round and round all day long, all lifetime, forever. I don't think the clown man liked being told children's books weren't valuable, did he? [Evil laugh]

['The wheels on the bus go round and round, round and round, round and round.']

[Spooky music]

['The wheels on the bus go round and round, round and round, round and round.']

[Rain sounds]

ATHENA: It's quite spooky isn't it? Because it just – it just plays it over and over again. It's a nightmare. I'll tell you.

ED: Really spooky.

KATH: That is spooky.

ATHENA: Is it spooky?

KATH: Yeah.

ED: Is it spooky? Of course it's spooky!

ATHENA: Oh, good.

[Ed and Kath laugh]

KATH: 'Oh, thank god.'

ATHENA: True story. True story, man.

ED: That happened in this – in the bookshop we're stood in right now?

ATHENA: Absolutely, yes.

KATH: So wait – so where's, uh, Ms. Spankbottom and, uh, and the clown?

ED: Mrs. – Mrs. Spankbottom.

KATH: Sorry. My mistake, sorry.

ED: She's married.

ATHENA: Oh, it's, um, it's a bank holiday. It's a bank holiday so they're not working. We've obviously just broken in for the purpose of this podcast.

KATH: Oh, is that why we crowbarred the door? Okay.

ATHENA: Yeah. I mean I would never have you come here whilst they were there. Otherwise you'd be on like, 'zoom zoom zoom we're going to the moon' forever. Your podcast would be a nightmare, you know? People wouldn't – after a few episodes, people would be like, 'yeah, we get it. We've gone to the moon.'

[Ed and Kath laugh]

ED: Still a few episodes in, though.

ATHENA: So no. I wouldn't do that to you guys. No no no. You'd be doomed.

ED: You've got to stick with the podcast for a couple of episodes, haven't you? Before you can really – 'I think I've got the measure of this one.'

ATHENA: Just in case.

ED: I'll be honest. So I bought into it pretty heavily as soon as you said they – they came to Spooktown. They searched out Spooktown and came to Spooktown. I was pretty in then as it sounds legit. Like it was – it was here.

ATHENA: Oh yeah yeah yeah. Like I said, if you – it's like, you know like 'Buffy the Vampire Slayer'?

KATH: Yeah.

ATHENA: Like Giles. All those ridiculous books.

ED: Sure, yeah.

ATHENA: That's what they – that's what they were after. But you can't buy them off Ebay or Amazon, you know. Could you imagine? No. You've got to go to a place like Spooktown. And they're very, you know, Femi and Wayne – I mean, I knew them before this story. That's how they could tell me.

ED: Right.

ATHENA: That they were going to Spooktown. Now they can't say shit because they –

KATH: I was going to say, yeah, 'how did they communicate it?' Yeah.

ATHENA: Yeah, now all they say – but the good thing about ‘Wheels on the Bus’ is you can find ways to communicate. You can say like, you know, um, I can’t think of how. But there are ways.

ED: You sort of have to be there.

[All laugh]

ATHENA: There’s flexibility. There’s things you can – there’s lots of things on a bus that you can do, like ‘the bell on the bus goes ring ring ring’. And that’s what you can do when you’re saying the doorbell’s going or something like, you know, you can find ways to match your life with the bus that go – happen in a repetitive way.

ED: Yeah.

ATHENA: So that – Mrs. Spankbottom was kind it was that nursery rhyme.

[Spooky music]

ED: Mrs. – Mrs. Spankbottom. I’d like to delve into her a little bit.

ATHENA: Sure.

ED: I mean, with that surname I can’t imagine her doing much else than work in a library. But is there a Mr. Spankbottom?

ATHENA: Well, there might be. There might be a Mr. Spankbottom. I mean, she’s Mrs., right? So she’s got – she has a husband. But we haven’t seen him for a while. Now rumour has it she’s married to the big clown, okay?

ED: That's what I thought! That's what I thought.

ATHENA: Rumour has it she's married to the big clown. However – however, everybody knows clowns don't get married.

KATH: Of course.

ATHENA: Eagerly. They're afraid of commitment. Do you know what I mean? If you could tie down a clown you must, you know, you're doing something right. They, you know, they're very fleeting. They go from town to town in their little circuses, you know. When people said, 'oh, the clown and Mrs. Spankbottom are together,' I was like, 'really?' Because she doesn't seem like the kind of woman a clown would settle down for, you know? So I don't know what – you know, I don't believe it myself. But then at the same time, one should not judge. Love is blind. And maybe he did find something in her that other people couldn't see, you know?

ED: And I suppose it's – it's that thing of he, you know, if they have a bookshop together, it's already a little harder to break up.

ATHENA: Paperwork.

ED: Paperwork. It's the paperwork.

ATHENA: Paperwork. Yeah, but – or she might be an employee and it's just an inappropriate relationship thing. Where like –

KATH: Oh, they've not disclosed it to HR?

ATHENA: Yeah, like a 'Mad Men', you know?

KATH: Yeah.

ATHENA: The clown is just like accepting sexual favours for, you know –

ED: Yeah.

ATHENA: Career advancement.

ED: That's sort of the vibe I got from the story, is there was something going on between those two.

ATHENA: And you know she doesn't talk? No one's ever heard her speak.

ED: Oh, really?

ATHENA: But yet the clown always knows what she's thinking.

KATH: Ooh.

ATHENA: How?

ED: Love.

ATHENA: Yeah. Maybe because the clown is telling her what to think. Controlling, you know?

ED: Oh shit.

KATH: Yeah.

ATHENA: Psychological torture. That's what people do. They'll find – apparently, you'll get like a very well sought-after individual and what that person will do is they'll start a relationship with somebody who isn't that desirable just so they

can control them. Because they think the person will be grateful for the relationship.

ED: Fuck.

ATHENA: I wouldn't know anything about that myself, personally. I've always wanted – when you're a ten you've got to go for a ten, you know what I'm saying?

[All laugh]

ATHENA: Why get involved in those politics? But apparently some tens don't have the same values that I have. They go for some sevens and make – just because – like an insurance policy thing, you know? I don't condone such behaviour.

ED: So the – the clown's a ten? And Mrs. Spankbottom's...

ATHENA: Absolutely. I mean, who doesn't want to be with a clown? Like you can laugh somebody into bed, right? Right, guys? Am I right? Yeah?

ED: Yeah. We've had a few people fall asleep at our gates, yeah.

ATHENA: There's a hold up in court: 'I laughed him into bed!' It's like, 'guilty!'

ED: I like the – I like the hissing that, uh, Mrs. Spankbottom was doing. [hissing]

ATHENA: Well, when you're angry but you can't talk. Maybe the clown has put a spell on her so she can't talk.

KATH: Well, that's what I was thinking. Because like if they can now only say, 'wheels on the bus,' has the clown done that to her? That she can only hiss?

ATHENA: I hadn't thought about that.

KATH: That's what I was thinking.

ATHENA: Oh wow. Yeah. That's made me very afraid of being in this store right now. I hadn't realised –

KATH: Yeah. Thank god it's a bank holiday.

ATHENA: That they were both powerful. I thought it was just Mrs. Spankbottom. But the clown might have powers too. That's exactly it. That's exactly what happened.

KATH: Yeah.

ATHENA: He cursed her so she couldn't talk. And then he cursed Wayne and Femi so all they could do – sing or say – for all of eternity was the lyrics to 'Wheels on the Bus.' So yeah, I mean, come on guys. Let's get this over and done with. Do you know what I mean? Like –

KATH: Yeah.

ATHENA: Do you know what I mean? Like let's get it – anymore questions? Come on. Chop chop. My voice is my money, I can't afford to lose this.

[All laugh]

ED: I think it's weird that he's still a clown if he has those powers and he also owns a bookshop. I think it's weird.

ATHENA: Why is that weird? If you had all the powers in the world, you love bookshops, that's what you'd do. Get a bookshop out of it and then you'd become a clown.

ED: It's the clown bit that throws me.

ATHENA: I mean, I think it's a perfect use of superpowers.

ED: I guess I just can't imagine anyone wanting to be a clown.

ATHENA: Come on. What? What?

KATH: Do – I mean, would you want to be?

ATHENA: Would I want to be a clown?

KATH: Would you want to be a clown? Like full on clown?

ATHENA: Yeah, but like – not like a French clown that does all that mime shit.

KATH: No no no.

ATHENA: Like a proper clown with like a red nose, and like big shoes, and like big trousers that you pour jelly down. Absolutely. Yeah.

ED: I didn't realise he was that kind of clown. That's my fault, I'm sorry.

ATHENA: Yeah, no. but handsome with it.

ED: Oh.

ATHENA: Yeah.

ED: Oh, well there's a twist.

ATHENA: Imagine George Clooney but a clown. Yeah yeah yeah. George Clooney in his ER days as well. Not now. Not – not Nespresso George Clooney. We're over him now. We want ER George Clooney. Yeah, as a clown.

ED: But with the red nose, yeah.

ATHENA: Them days were – oh, yeah yeah yeah. We all loved a bit of George Clooney in ER. Dr. Ross. Doug Ross. We love Doug. We see you. Make you want to shoot myself. Come into the ER.

ED: 'I've been shot again, doctor.'

KATH: 'Whoops.'

ED: 'Third time this week.' I'm really trying to – because obviously the – we can't just let any old story into Spooktown. And I'm trying to find holes in it. But it feels pretty airtight to me.

KATH: There's no ghosts, though.

ED: There's no ghosts, Kath. That's a really good point.

KATH: Clowns and magic.

ATHENA: Is there no ghosts?

KATH: Well, there was an invisible person who opened the door, actually. Wasn't there?

ATHENA: Well, we don't know. It could've been a gust of wind. I mean, it's inconclusive.

KATH: Oh, fair.

ED: I respect – I respect that you're not pandering to us.

ATHENA: You're right, there were no ghosts. Okay, but do you know what? Ghosts aren't scary. Like we've all agreed that we swallow them every night. Do you know what I mean? Like if I was to include ghosts in this story, it wouldn't have been scary. What is scary? Women who smell of librarian knickers, tall men who look like George Clooney clowns, and this: ['the wheels on the bus go round and round.'] Just to put you out of your misery, it's just a little puzzle where if you take off the pieces it just – it just. So there's the wheels, there's the doors.

ED & KATH: Oh!

KATH: I wondered how you were sort of...

ATHENA: Yeah. I have a child, this isn't mine.

[All laugh]

ATHENA: Just to be clear. I don't think I clarified that at the start. Like this doesn't belong to me.

KATH: Hey, we've all got different tastes in music, it's fine.

ED: That's sort of like an original icon.

[Spooky music]

ED: Right, uh. The clown. I think I've got some issues with the clown. For starters, if they – are they doing that every time someone comes into the shop? So where are they getting their money from?

ATHENA: Yes. Every time somebody comes into the shop and slags off children's books, okay?

ED: Right, right.

ATHENA: Because they're sick of it. They just want to sell books to children, right? But every so often, some idiots come in looking for some 'Buffy the Vampire Slayer' ghost book, you know, to raise some ghoul. And all he wants to do is sell his 'Hungry Caterpillar' and 'Dear Zoo' and all those classics. And he's not attracting the clientele. Now, if only the clown could understand it's all in the marketing. Do you know what I mean? You know, if he just had the lights on all the time, as opposed to when people came in and asked for assistance, it would solve a lot of problems. But the main thing is that –

KATH: Has he –

ED: Yeah.

ATHENA: Sorry.

KATH: Has he ever sold a book? Is that what he's taken issue with? Like everyone who comes in as an adult and he curses them and they leave.

ATHENA: Yes, that's basically it. He's taken out, he's –

KATH: So the business is failing.

ATHENA: He's taken out his own inadequacies on his clientele, you know?

KATH: Right.

ATHENA: And all he's really got to do is clean his windows and, like I said, turn the lights on.

KATH: So it's a simple fix.

ATHENA: But he can juggle. I missed out that part.

ED: Oh!

ATHENA: Because it wasn't relevant to the story.

KATH: Okay. Okay.

ED: Oh, okay.

ATHENA: But he can juggle. So give, you know, credit where it's due.

ED: It's a skill.

KATH: How many, though? Like, just two or three?

ATHENA: Look, three is enough. If he – if someone juggles three balls and you go, 'it's only three', you're rude.

KATH: Yeah.

ATHENA: Three is hard, man. Three is enough, do you know what I mean? Give him a break.

KATH: I can't throw one side to side, let along three.

ATHENA: Yeah, exactly. So how many? Three, that's plenty.

KATH: I'm just checking. I'm just checking. I want to know if he's committed to the clowning biz, you know?

ATHENA: Well, you know, he's committed. He's committed but he doesn't have the resources. It's a very middle-class industry, clowning. That's the other thing too. Spooktown, you know, doesn't afford him the facilities he would need to get good at – he needs a tightrope, he needs an exceptionally small car that he can fit six clowns in. Where do you get them from?

KATH: Yeah. Yeah.

ATHENA: What else do they need?

KATH: That must be custom built, surely.

ED: Yeah.

KATH: A lot of money.

ATHENA: Yeah, exactly. He's – you know, he wants to go to clown school. But he can't afford it because he can't sell any books.

ED: Fuck. We should probably buy some books from him. Can we – can we get a couple?

ATHENA: Yeah. Oh god, yeah. I mean, obviously now we've broken in, you can just steal them. But I wouldn't recommend that.

ED: No, I want him to go to clown school.

KATH: Yeah, I feel like that would go real – real bad. I suppose we could come back on a – tomorrow, I suppose. And uh...

ATHENA: Yeah, tomorrow they'll be in.

ED: We'll pop back tomorrow.

ATHENA: Yeah, tomorrow they'll be in and then you can buy. But probably don't buy that book. You know, don't buy the fairy tale book. That seems a bit haunted. Buy something that's been a commercial success because then you know lots of people will own it and they haven't been like, you know, put under any spells.

KATH: Okay, yeah, that's a good point.

ED: That's a good shout. Thank you.

ATHENA: Something like 'Judy Blume'. Get 'Judy Blume'.

KATH: An Ahlberg Ahlberg? 'Jolly Pocket Postman'.

ATHENA: Oh, there you go. Yeah.

ED: Oh! Love 'The Jolly Christmas Postman'.

ATHENA: Just get something – get something really popular. Then you can't go wrong.

KATH: Yeah.

ED: I'm genuinely going to get 'The Jolly Christmas Postman'.

ATHENA: Yeah, that sounds great.

[Spooky music]

ED: Can I ask a question about Femi and Wayne?

ATHENA: Yes.

ED: Are they still collecting – are they still collecting? Or is it sort of – you know when you have a bad experience and it's like, 'I don't want to do it anymore'?

ATHENA: It's kind of taken a backseat. Um, it's not really a priority of theirs at the moment. Because like they can only communicate at the moment via the lyrics of 'Wheels on the Bus'. So it's really hard for them to go into shops and ask for what they want. Unless what they want, of course, is a book called, 'the windows go open and shut.' Um, and it's highly unlikely that that's the title of a book they want. Um, they can of course write things down.

ED: Right.

KATH: I was going to say, can they – do they only write 'Wheels on the Bus'? Or –

ATHENA: Yeah. Yeah yeah, they can still write. Um, but their priority now is trying to kind of get rid of this curse that's been put upon them. And they've not been successful thus far. And that's, you know, really destroyed their lives immensely.

ED: Shit.

ATHENA: It's ruined them, really. Because, I mean, what – what have they tried? They've tried, um, they've tried drinking it away.

A lot of people think the answers to their problems are at the bottom of a bottle.

ED: Oh, no.

ATHENA: They're not, guys.

ED: No.

ATHENA: They're not. You won't find answers at the bottom of a bottle. Um, they've tried – they've tried going back to the bookstore.

KATH: Mhm.

ED: Smart.

ATHENA: They tried going back, uh, to complain. But every time they go back, there's nobody there.

ED: Oh, fuck.

ATHENA: Isn't that funny?

KATH: Ugh.

ATHENA: Like when they go, no one's there. But if we go, someone might be there.

ED: Yeah. They want to be like, 'the wheels on the bus go – I'm so sorry for being rude'. Would they be able to apologise through the song?

ATHENA: No no no no no. That's all they can say, is 'wheels on the bus go round and round, round and round, round and round.

The wheels on the bus go round and round. All day long.' That's all they can say. They can't say – they can't say, 'excuse me'. They can't say, 'black americano, one sugar, please.' They can't say that. Nothing. No words. No.

ED: What other things can't they say?

ATHENA: How long's your podcast? Well, let's think of all the things they can't say.

[All laugh]

ATHENA: They can't, uh, they can't – it's awful. Like when their broadband goes down, they've got to do everything online. They can't just call up the company, you know.

ED: Fuck, of course.

ATHENA: I mean, it's quite good now. Most – most companies have very good webchat functions on their websites. So that's quite good, you know?

ED: Yeah.

ATHENA: Good thing it's happened in 2020 and not like 1998, which would be a nightmare. Um –

ED: Yeah. Can you imagine like having to be on the chat and they're like, 'oh, it's better if you call up.' And like, 'I can't call up.'

ATHENA: No, they can't say that though. They can't. All they can say is –

ED: They're typing.

ATHENA: Oh, they can type it. Yeah, they can type it, yeah.

ED: 'I can't.' And then they're like, 'why not?' And you go, 'because I can only verbally say' –

ATHENA: They can't do anything. I mean, Femi was engaged, okay? Then he had to call off the – he had to call off the wedding!

KATH: Oh god.

ATHENA: Because, 'do you take this woman to be your lawful wedded wife?'

KATH: Oh, no.

ED: 'The wheels on the bus go round and round.'

ATHENA: Exactly. Exactly. 'The wheels on the bus go round and round.' People think he's taking the piss. You can't do it, okay? So that was, you know, went down the pan.

ED: Yeah. What were their jobs before – before this?

ATHENA: Well, one of them's a bus driver.

KATH: Oh, thank god.

[All laugh]

KATH: What a happy coincidence.

ATHENA: But then it got – it got complicated, okay? Because what happens on a bus? Particularly in London, people don't know where they're going. So, 'excuse me, does this bus go to

King's College Hospital?' What do they have to say? 'Uh, the doors go open and shut, the people go up and down, babes go wah wah wah, the parents go be – sh sh sh.' 'Right, that's not what you were asked. Does it go – yeah, that's fine, we know all this. We know how buses work. Does the bus go to King's College Hospital?' 'The wheels on the bus go –' 'Yeah, but where do the wheels go?' 'They go round and round.' So you think, 'oh, it's fine that he's a bus driver.' But it doesn't work. So currently, um, currently they're on like sick leave. Just one of them. It was Femi that was a bus driver. So Femi's on sick leave. There's that.

ED: And Wayne works at...?

ATHENA: Wayne... Wayne's, uh, Wayne's a life coach.

ED: Oh, no.

ATHENA: So that's – to be fair, life coaches talk such shit that he just about gets away with it. He just about gets away with it. So, it has – it's worked out okay with him, just. Only just.

ED: He's got enough people going like, 'wow, yeah. I guess the wheels on the bus do go round and round.'

ATHENA: 'Wow! Like there's nothing we can do to change the inevitability of life forces, right? That's pretty – that's pretty wise and sage.' So he's got – yeah. He'll do alright, Wayne.

ED: He's just staying above water.

ATHENA: Yeah.

ED: I think that's good to know.

KATH: Yeah, that's good.

[Spooky music]

ED: Lovely. Um, I think – I think it's time for Kath and I to decide whether – whether or not we believe that this really happened here.

ATHENA: Oh, okay. This is nerve-wracking for me.

ED: Do you mind if we just stand over by the – the um, sort of little children's area over there?

ATHENA: Yeah, go ahead. Just go and have a little – go and have a conversation with yourselves about Femi and Wayne. And think about what they're going through right now. And think about how if they go through all of that and their story doesn't make it to Spooktown, it was for nothing.

KATH: Ooh, okay.

ATHENA: You know? So think about that. You think about that.

ED: Wow. I was going to say, 'do you have any final words to convince us,' but you've absolutely smashed that.

KATH: I think that was it. Yeah, yeah.

ED: Yeah. Yeah, that's like lawyer stuff. Amazing. Closing remarks. Um, Kath, do you want to come over there?

KATH: Yeah, okay.

[Footsteps]

ED: What do you – what do you think?

KATH: Um, I do feel for Femi and Wayne.

ED: Not so much Wayne because of the job.

KATH: Yeah, he's doing okay. But Christ, Femi. Ugh, what a year.

ED: Yeah, first the pandemic and now this.

KATH: Yeah. Then then marriage and – god.

ED: Yeah.

KATH: Anyway, um, there's – there's no ghosts.

ED: No ghosts.

KATH: No ghosts. But it does seem very specific to Spooktown because they did come here to look for books.

ED: I loved that bit. Turns out all you need to convince me is to say the word 'Spooktown' in your story and I'm like, 'yes! Yes, I believe you.'

KATH: 'I guess it did happen.' And it does stack up that they keep coming back and there's no one here. Because yes, it is a bank holiday, but there's no one here. Thank god.

ED: Yeah. I don't know whether I believe that, Mrs. Spankbottom. But I do believe that the clown was here. I think – I think I'm going to say yes even though there's no ghosts.

KATH: Okay.

ED: I think I believe her.

KATH: Yeah, okay.

ED: Yeah?

KATH: I think we should welcome her to Spooktown then. Yeah.

ED: Let's go back.

[Both laugh]

ED: Let's walk back on over there. Let's head back over. Hello.

ATHENA: You're back. Good. Excellent, guys. I'm dying to know. I'm dying to know what the – what you decided.

ED: I think it's a quadruple thumbs up from us re: your story.

ATHENA: Woohoo!

KATH: Yeah.

ED: Athena, welcome to Spooktown.

ATHENA: Ah, this is amazing! Wow!

ED: Femi, Wayne, the clown who – the clown with no name? Is that –

ATHENA: Just the clown, he has no name. We call him the clown.

ED: He didn't get a name, did he?

KATH: Potentially Mr. Spankbottom, but we don't know.

ED: Yeah, definitely Mrs. Spankbottom, maybe Mr. Spankbottom.

ATHENA: I think Mrs. Spankbottom, that's her – you know, her original name. That's her maiden name.

ED: First name Mrs., second name Spankbottom.

ATHENA: Yes.

KATH: Yeah.

ED: Oh yeah. Great, yeah. Does the – does the story have a name?

ATHENA: Yeah, it does. It's called um, it's called, 'All Day Long.'

ED: Nice. Nice.

ATHENA: Called 'All Day Long.'

ED: Genuinely. At first I was like, 'what?' And then – and then I remembered the song again.

KATH: Yeah.

ATHENA: Yeah, you've got to think about it.

ED: I love that.

ATHENA: Only this is – because it's American, it says – instead of 'all day long,' it says, 'all through the town.' Look, it goes ['the wheels on the bus go round and round, round and round, round and round. The wheels on the bus go round and round, all through the town.'] Right? That's nonsense. I did a Twitter poll and everyone agrees it's 'all day long.'

[Ed and Kath laugh]

ATHENA: So I don't – I mean, you know, it is what it is.

KATH: That sorts that out, then.

ATHENA: Yeah.

ED: I also think the tune's slightly out. I thought it's [sings] 'the wheels – the wheels – the wheels on the bus go round and round, round and round, round and round.'

ATHENA: No, it is! You're right, you're right. It goes flat when it should go to like a sharp or something.

ED: Yeah.

ATHENA: It's not quite – yeah, it's all... I mean, Hamley's you know? You think... you think you go to Hamley's, you're not going to get bobbed off with this nonsense.

KATH: Yeah, you think –

ED: Yeah, I can see why it's reduced.

ATHENA: Yeah. But there you go. I mean, you can't – we try not to be fussy. You know, what was I going to do, take it back? 'Oh, why?' 'Because it says "all day long"... like a bloody dickhead. Do you know what I mean? It's the kind of thing you deal – it's the kind of thing you live with.

[All laugh]

ED: Yeah.

KATH: 'It's a bit pitchy, so...'

ATHENA: It's not the voice, is it? It's just –

[All laugh]

[Spooky music]

[Rain sounds]

ED: That was nice.

KATH: Yeah, yeah it was nice.

ED: Nice. Really nice.

KATH: Who's next?

ED: Uh, no one, really. I'm going to go head to the Tesco to meet Eddie Redmayne. He owes me a fiver and says he's got it in petrol. So I can ask him if he's got any stories about Spooktown.

KATH: That's a good shout.

ED: Yeah.

[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

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