

Welcome To Spooktown – Sophie Duker

[Spooky music]

[Wind and footsteps]

ED EASTON: God, it's a very gravelly path, isn't it?

KATH HUGHES: Where are we going? The Mad Bull?

ED: Hm?

KATH: Mad Bull community theatre? Is that where we're going?

ED: The Mad Bull community theatre, yeah. I've never been.

KATH: No, neither have I.

ED: I think it's because I think plays are trash.

KATH: Yeah, I think that's probably it.

ED: For the most part.

KATH: It would be weird to go and visit somewhere that you thought was trash. Or held trash in it. Like you wouldn't visit a bin.

ED: Oh, I go to the bin all the time.

KATH: Yeah. Oh, okay.

ED: Yeah, yeah. You said, 'visit a bin.' I don't like, 'oh, what are we doing today?' Charity shops? They're sort of like a bin.

KATH: Um...

ED: I love a charity shop.

KATH: Yeah, okay. Yeah, okay. I'll give you that.

ED: My godfather used to, uh, go skip diving.

KATH: Yeah, that is a thing.

ED: No, I know.

KATH: Well no, I'm just confirming that – I'm just confirming that I – I know it's a thing and you know it's a thing.

ED: So does that mean everything I said during our over a decade friendship, you don't – you don't agree with or don't believe it's true until right now? This is the first thing where you were like, 'that's a thing.'

KATH: Yeah, yeah, I – this is the first thing I've gone, 'oh yeah, that's a thing. Yeah.'

ED: Oh no. [laughs] Oh my god.

KATH: Look out for me saying that because then – yeah, that's me confirming.

ED: 15 years of like, 'he's talking out of his ass.'

KATH: What a nice reward. 'Yeah, that's a thing.' What a nice sort of gold star for you.

ED: [laughs] Jesus. It's windy, isn't it?

KATH: It is quite windy, yeah.

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

KATH: Oh, always. Um, so I had sleep paralysis actually this week.

ED: Mhm.

KATH: Um, but an unusual type. I've not had it like this before. Where I could actually move all of my body apart from my head.

ED: What?

KATH: So I – I couldn't move my head from the pillow but I was sort of flailing about. Like my legs were on the floor.

ED: What?

KATH: And I thought what had happened is that there was a nail in my cheek and it'd – I'd been nailed to the pillow. That's what I'd thought had happened. It was really strange.

ED: I fucking hate that, Kath.

KATH: How's your week been?

ED: [laughs] Do you know what? Now fine.

KATH: You've had any nightmares this week?

ED: Yeah, actually.

KATH: Yeah.

ED: Um, there's two storm warnings and they overlap on my house.

KATH: Oh.

ED: So I think I'm in the middle of two like very bad storms.

KATH: You're the eye of two storms.

ED: No, the eye's the middle.

KATH: The edge of two storms.

ED: I'm the – yes. Oh, um, another nightmare. My friend had sleep paralysis and she thought her head had been nailed to her bed. That's probably the worst thing that's happened to me this week.

[Kath laughs]

ED: Oh, here's the theatre.

KATH: Is that Sophie?

ED: We've walked up to the theatre.

KATH: We have walked up to the – yeah.

ED: What a treat. Oh, Kath. Just really quickly, so sorry, um, can you just call me Chipz in front of Sophie for today?

KATH: What? Why are we going to – oh, hey. Hey, Sophie.

SOPHIE DUKER: Hey. Nice boots, you guys.

ED: Thank you, thank you.

KATH: Oh, thank you.

ED: Thank you so much.

KATH: Thank you.

ED: That's really kind of you.

KATH: Yeah.

ED: Um, this is such a lovely – it's a lovely community theatre.

SOPHIE: I mean –

ED: Is it the Mad Bull?

SOPHIE: Yeah, the Mad Bull. As community theatres go, it's – it's not great, but thank you for your – your generous words. Um –

ED: I guess I just haven't seen one before. So I'm like, 'this is amazing no matter what it is.' So maybe I guess –

SOPHIE: Hm.

KATH: Yeah.

ED: It is quite bad.

SOPHIE: Yeah, it's – it's a little bit run down. But it's – it functions. It's good. Um, yeah. This isn't my first time here to it, obviously.

ED: Oh.

KATH: Oh, okay.

SOPHIE: No, yeah. Because, uh, Spooktown has like a sister – a sister town, doesn't it? Which is High Barnet, uh –

ED: [laughs] Yes. Yeah, yes.

KATH: Yeah. It does – it does sister with High Barnet, yeah.

ED: Yes, I'm glad you've done your research. That's, yeah, that's exactly correct.

SOPHIE: Uh, and I went to the – the Bull theatre in High Barnet as a – as a teen.

ED: Oh!

SOPHIE: Uh, so I thought I'd come and see the sister theatre, the Mad Bull in Spooktown.

ED: Love it.

SOPHIE: Oh, great.

ED: Love it. That's really good of you. Smashing. High Barnet, yeah.

SOPHIE: It's where – it's where Amy Winehouse went to – to be away from Camden.

ED: Is it?

KATH: Oh.

ED: Is that why her hair's so tall?

SOPHIE: Yeah. She's got lots of picture by the, uh, by the Cheeves sign. I know that's a joke but she literally absolutely rinsed that.

[All laugh]

SOPHIE: May she rest in peace.

ED: Yeah, very sad. Very sad.

KATH: Oh, bless her.

ED: Yeah. What a star. Just remembering – sorry, a genuine talent.

SOPHIE: I'm so sorry.

ED: A genuine star.

SOPHIE: A genuine – a genuinely talented – yeah.

KATH: Sort of tragic character, yeah.

ED: Yeah. She's good, isn't she? Sorry, I just got very sad.

KATH: Yeah.

ED: Um, so Sophie, my first question, um, how was your journey here?

SOPHIE: It was fine.

ED: Hm.

SOPHIE: Like it was, um, it was quite uneventful. I don't see a lot of people out, which always makes me feel a bit uncomfortable.

ED: Yeah. Was this sort of like, um, Christmas day empty?

SOPHIE: No, because that is – on Christmas day there's a lot of people trying to pretend that they're happy families. So there's a lot of, you know, there's a lot of dogs on Christmas day. I noticed the distinct lack of dogs on the way to the theatre. It was all just sort of like, just lone people in their mid-40s I'd say.

KATH: Hm.

SOPHIE: Mid-40s or early 70s.

ED: Wow.

SOPHIE: So possibly like – so like mothers and sons but like adult – no young mothers and sons. Just adult mothers and sons.

ED: Oh god, my – when I was growing up, my neighbour was an adult mother and son. Not an adult son and mother. Obviously it was a mother – [laughs]

KATH: My neighbour also was that.

ED: Really?

KATH: Yeah. And, um, but then it got really creepy because she – she died, um, and then after she died he – he just took all the curtains down and put newspaper up in all the windows.

SOPHIE: Oh.

KATH: And it just stayed like that for years.

ED: Oh god.

SOPHIE: What? Ugh.

ED: He's not well.

KATH: Also had a driveway but never parked on it. Always parked on the street.

SOPHIE: Maybe there was a ghost car?

KATH: Very suspicious. Maybe. Could've been a ghost car, yeah.

ED: Yeah. Yeah, sold.

KATH: Yeah, that's it actually. That's – that's the answer to that, isn't it?

ED: My, uh, my adult son and mother neighbours, when the – when the father died they had – his hat was in the back, on the parcel shelf of their car, and they never moved it.

KATH: Ooh.

ED: That's like a respect thing? It doesn't feel very respectful, but... it was like, 'oh, we can't move that because it's his – dead hat.'

SOPHIE: I'm imagining a hat with googly eyes.

[Ed and Kath laugh]

SOPHIE: Just sort of – but like rotting.

ED: And then they go to crosses. Like they end up as crosses.

KATH: Yeah.

SOPHIE: Yes.

KATH: Yeah.

ED: And that's how you know they're dead.

SOPHIE: Yes.

ED: Um, second question from me. How many ghosts have you see this week?

SOPHIE: Um, I've seen – I haven't seen – wait, is that true? Yeah, it is true. I haven't seen any ghosts. I've felt a ghost.

ED: Ace.

KATH: Oh.

SOPHIE: Ooh.

ED: Ayay.

SOPHIE: You sounded – you sounded a bit intrigued by that in like a sexy way when I said I'd felt a ghost, Kath.

ED: Kath or me?

SOPHIE: Kath.

ED: Oh yeah, good.

KATH: Me!

SOPHIE: [imitates Kath] 'Ooh.'

KATH: No, just more of a –

ED: 'Oh.'

KATH: More of a, 'oh, that's a surprise.' Not a, 'oh, that sounds nice.'

ED: Oh, tell me more.

SOPHIE: Yeah, I felt –

KATH: Which, to be fair, both of those sounded similar when I just did them there.

ED: Hm.

SOPHIE: 'Ooh.'

KATH: I just needed to follow with a, 'oh, that's interesting.'
Instead of, 'how nice.'

ED: 'Oh, that's hot.'

KATH: 'That's – ooh.'

SOPHIE: I tried to see a ghost last night. Um, I lit lots of candles in my room.

KATH: Mhm.

SOPHIE: I lit three. I have four but one's new and I feel weird about starting a candle.

ED: Yeah.

SOPHIE: Uh, so I just went with the three. I thought the ghosts won't know.

KATH: Mhm.

SOPHIE: Uh, and then I realised that I could smell like something burning, but I ignored it for a really long time.

KATH: Okay.

SOPHIE: Uh, and then I realised that one of the candles was burning my bookshelf. Um, so I moved it.

KATH: Oh. That was a sexy 'oh', by the way. That one.

[All laugh]

SOPHIE: You just love burning books.

KATH: Oh.

SOPHIE: All those – all that literature crumpling. Uh, and then I, uh, I, uh, I spoke – I sort of spoke to the ghost with my voice, but I kept my eyes closed.

KATH: Sure sure sure. So when you say you felt it, where – did you just feel –

SOPHIE: Like I felt its presence. Its presence. And I also felt –

KATH: Oh, so it wasn't –

SOPHIE: I sort of held its hand.

ED: Oh.

SOPHIE: Like I clasped its ghost hand with my living hands.

KATH: Okay.

ED: That's one, um, massive leap from, 'well, I just sort of felt its presence,' and also physically touched its hand.

[All laugh]

KATH: And also like got purchase on a ghost.

SOPHIE: Very clammy. Very clammy little hand.

KATH: Really?

SOPHIE: It's a ghost hand.

KATH: I mean I'm just going to flag, you did say you never opened your eyes, right? So –

SOPHIE: So maybe, uh –

KATH: How do we –

SOPHIE: It could just have been a wet – a wet, slightly damp person.

ED: Yeah.

KATH: You could've been gripping the candle. You don't know. Like –

ED: I think – I don't want to – I don't want to – I think she could probably tell the difference between a candle and a hand. Is that – do you think I'm right?

KATH: A ghost hand.

SOPHIE: I'd like to think so. I mean it might've been the unlit candle.

KATH: Hm.

SOPHIE: The candle that I got is actually the shape of an ass. So I don't think that would've –

[All laugh]

SOPHIE: That – that was the –

ED: You were right, Kath. It was sexy.

SOPHIE: So –

ED: I think that's arguably scarier if it was – if it wasn't a ghost's hand and it was just a person who'd crept up on you.

SOPHIE: Yeah, I think – I think –

ED: Took your hand.

SOPHIE: I'd prefer to believe it was the ghost's hand and not the hand of someone very quick and wet.

[Spooky sounds]

[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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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 sounds]

SOPHIE: But yeah, books are good. I like books.

KATH: That's a good quote. 'Books are good.'

SOPHIE: Books are good and so is truth.

KATH: Nice.

ED: Nice.

SOPHIE: Yeah. If there's a moral to any story I might tell, I think that probably is it. Books are good and so is truth.

KATH: Hm.

ED: Get that on a t-shirt. 'Books are good' on the front, 'and so is truth' on the back. With like a guy with shades on.

SOPHIE: Yeah.

KATH: What – put that on a mug. Like have – have 'books are good' around the edge, and then when you – if you put hot water in, or hot drink in, you get –

ED: It's a naked girl. Yeah.

KATH: It reveals – yeah. It reveals the –

SOPHIE: Oh, I have, um, my – so when my grandma died she had – she got a lot of merch. And she has one of those mugs – not one that says, ‘books are good and so is truth.’ But like –

KATH: What?

SOPHIE: When it’s like a blank mug and when you like fill it up with hot water there’s sort of a message that appears.

ED: Hm.

SOPHIE: Around the side of it.

ED: Yeah.

SOPHIE: And it’s like her favourite Bible verse. I’ve got three of those mugs.

KATH: That’s –

ED: Oh nice. [laughs]

SOPHIE: From my grandma’s death. Is that weird?

ED: You called it merch, that’s so good.

SOPHIE: Yeah.

ED: ‘I’ve got fucking loads of merch from my nan’s funeral.’ That’s great.

SOPHIE: Too much if anything. Yeah. I've got a key ring from my other gran, but she's still alive. So she's just got a key ring.

KATH: Does that count as merch in your – in your mind? Or do – does someone –

SOPHIE: I think – it's because she turned 90, so it's like, 'woah, you're 90.' And it's a key ring.

KATH: Have some merch.

ED: Does it say, 'woah, you're 90' on it?

SOPHIE: Uh, pretty – I mean I don't remember the exact wording, but it's something along those lines.

ED: 'Life begins at 90.'

SOPHIE: 'Life begins at 90.' 'Flirty, 90, and thriving.'

ED: [laughs] Flirty.

KATH: Flirty 90.

ED: Last question from me, Sophie, if I may. What is the scariest thing that's ever happened to you?

SOPHIE: I woke up and I could hear this like. [buzzing noise] And I was like, 'oh no, my phone is ringing in my bed. I should pick up my phone.' So I tried to pick up my phone and I couldn't move. And it was going like [buzzing] and then, um, my – the door of my bedroom opened.

KATH: No.

SOPHIE: And I saw this shadowy figure standing in the doorway and they were holding a chainsaw. And that was what was making the [buzzing] and then they like put the chainsaw over – over my head, uh, and then I sat up. And they vanished.

ED: Uh.

KATH: Atrocious.

ED: Horrible.

SOPHIE: Yeah.

ED: Yeah. Yeah, that's –

KATH: That's the most atrocious thing that's happened to you.

SOPHIE: That was – that was bad. That's –

ED: That's really fucking rank.

SOPHIE: Yeah. So I asked her to move out.

[All laugh]

ED: I don't know whether I've told this on here before, but my brother once woke up and he, uh, he had that same thing where he sort of opened his eyes but it was still pitch black.

KATH: Ugh.

ED: And then he was like, 'oh, I must just be –' you know, lying like – 'there must just be something covering my head.' So he sat up and he still couldn't see anything and he started screaming. And he'd – during the night he'd got his head into the pillowcase. So he just – [laughs] had the pillowcase over his head. [yells]

SOPHIE: If you found an adult – like an adult doing that, like an adult son, would you assume it was a sex thing?

ED: I think I'd always be inclined to think they're doing something sexual. Just because like –

KATH: See I wouldn't. I'd be like, 'how fun! They've got a pillowcase on their head.'

SOPHIE: What if you found someone in handcuffs in a bedroom? Would you be like, 'what's happened to you?'

KATH: I don't –

SOPHIE: I mean that probably is the right thing to say.

[All laugh]

KATH: In every case. In every scenario, really. 'What has happened to you?'

ED: Walking in and somebody's got handcuffs on. You go, 'oh gosh, I'm so sorry. I didn't realise –' Close the door shut. He's like, 'help me! Help me please!' So if you, Kath, if you walked into a room and somebody had a pillowcase over their head –

KATH: Mm.

ED: And they were wanking, you wouldn't think it was sexual? You'd just think it was like, 'oh, they've got a blanket so they're –'

KATH: Well you've moved the goalposts there, haven't you?

ED: I don't understand what you mean.

KATH: Uh... [laughs]

KATH: If he had a pillowcase around his head I'd be like, 'oh gosh, are you okay?' And then if they're fine I'm like, 'well, playing a game.' And then if they were wanking, I'd be like, 'I'm going to walk away from this.' That – that would be my – the order of response I think. Happy?

[All laugh]

ED: I just want to know what you'll do if you walk in on somebody wanking, Kath.

SOPHIE: Forget the pillow. Just the wanking.

KATH: The pillow's gone. Pillow's history.

ED: Listen, if you – if you walked in on somebody wanking and you thought they were playing a game, it doesn't make any sense, Kath. Man. Kath, do you have any questions for Sophie before we –

KATH: Yes. Before we, um, hear this tale? Yeah. Okay. So god, the devil, Richard Dawkins. Shag, marry, kill.

SOPHIE: Ooh. This is good. I feel like the natural thing is to like want to shag the devil. Because like –

KATH: Okay.

SOPHIE: You assume being like sinful and like sensuous he'd be like – he'd? They'd? She'd?

ED: They'd.

KATH: Yeah, who knows?

SOPHIE: Be good at it. But I think like if you marry the devil – no, that's turned out really badly for some people. No. I was going to say if you marry the devil –

ED: [laughs] Some people!

SOPHIE: No, I think – I think shag the devil –

KATH: Yeah.

ED: Uh huh.

SOPHIE: What happens if you kill god? Do like the tides stop? Like will there be a new god?

ED: I assume – and this might just be because of how I feel about myself – I assume – I assume you would become god.

SOPHIE: Oh, okay.

ED: I'm just guessing though.

SOPHIE: And if I – if I kill Richard Dawkins, will I become –

ED: Richard Dawkins, yeah.

SOPHIE: Richard Dawkins.

KATH: Yeah. Yeah. Whoever you kill, you become. In this universe.

SOPHIE: Okay. Okay. In that case I'd be – in that case I think I'd kill the devil.

KATH: Okay.

ED: Oh.

SOPHIE: Because I'd like to – I'd like to have the run of the place. I think I look good in red.

ED: Mhm.

KATH: Yeah.

SOPHIE: I think if I was king, queen, monarch of hell, then I wouldn't actually get involved of any of the torment. I'd just enact it.

ED: Hm.

SOPHIE: I can make it quite a fun like basement club type vibe.

KATH: Nice.

SOPHIE: Maybe with like a nice like chill-out smoking area. So I'd kill the devil to become the devil.

ED: Mhm.

SOPHIE: I'd shag god because he'd be embarrassed about that for ages.

ED: Yeah.

KATH: Yeah.

SOPHIE: And I'd marry Richard Dawkins.

ED: Aw.

SOPHIE: Yeah.

KATH: Nice.

SOPHIE: Is that cute? Is that cute?

KATH: Yeah, why not?

SOPHIE: Make a good couple?

ED: I think it just, um, because you haven't really talked about Richard the whole time. So it's suddenly quite nice that he gets the marriage.

KATH: Yeah, you want to spend the rest of your life with Richard Dawkins. I think that's – that's lovely.

SOPHIE: Yeah, well I'm like a child of divorce. So I'm not really like
—

KATH: Oh, so you're like, 'a few years and then I'm out.'

SOPHIE: Yeah, I'll annul this shit.

ED: Marry and get annulled. [laughs]

KATH: Got you.

SOPHIE: Got you.

ED: I think there's something lovely about Richard Dawkins having to marry the devil, though.

SOPHIE: Yeah.

ED: I think you absolutely check mated him there.

SOPHIE: I'm imagining the devil is Liz Hurley because of the film Bedazzled.

KATH: Of course. Yeah.

SOPHIE: Yeah.

ED: Yeah yeah yeah. They're all Liz Hurley.

KATH: They're — yeah.

ED: Even Richard Dawkins is played by Liz Hurley in this.

[All laugh]

ED: So I think we've chin wagged outside the Mad Bull community theatre for – for long enough. Word in the grapevine is that you have a sort of story to tell about this place.

SOPHIE: Uh, I have a tale that runs to a very – adheres to a very strict, uh, and traditional rhyme scheme.

[All laugh]

SOPHIE: Do either of you know anything about a Shakespearian sonnet?

KATH: No.

ED: No, we're – no.

SOPHIE: It's a 14 line poem. It's 3 quatrains. And two lines at the end. Couplet. Two lines at the end.

KATH: All in tech speak here.

SOPHIE: And it's the rhyme scheme ABABCDCDEFEGG. Recited in iambic pentameter. It – I just want an explanation for why it sounds bad.

[All laugh]

KATH: Because Shakespeare is famously bad. Of course.

SOPHIE: Oh yeah. But he had – he had a little bit longer. He didn't have to record it. He didn't have to record it on Audacity. He just sort of –

ED: Very true. He's not – he's not been on yet.

SOPHIE: Yeah, he's not been on. Himself and adult son. Um...

[All laugh]

SOPHIE: Should I – should I start the story?

KATH: Yeah, if you're happy to sort of stand outside the theatre. Or we could step in and do it. Yeah.

SOPHIE: Should we go in? I mean like there is a big stage inside there. We could –

ED: Oh, do you want to do it on the stage? Yeah.

KATH: Yeah, do you want to do it on the stage?

SOPHIE: I wanted to – no, let's start. I'll do it on the stage.

KATH: Yeah. Okay.

SOPHIE: I'll do it on the stage. I think it'll be more atmospheric.

KATH: Um, oh yeah. Crowbar to get in, yeah. Door's locked, isn't it?

[Clanging sounds]

KATH: [grunts] Done. There we go. We're in.

ED: Thanks Kath.

SOPHIE: Oh great.

KATH: You're welcome.

ED: I'm going to sit – sit at the back like a bad boy.

SOPHIE: Alright. I mean you will have a restricted view, but I guess every – everyone listening also has that.

[All laugh]

ED: I've got to – you've made a good point. I've got to move.
Move to the front. Sit in the front row. There we go.

SOPHIE: Um, yeah.

KATH: That was quick. That was very short. This is two rows.

[Spooky music]

[Slow strings music]

SOPHIE: For those of you who live in town of Spook
And think the arts are just a waste of time,
I urge you [bleep] read a fucking book
And then come glean some knowledge from my rhymes.
The hovel that these townsfolk call a theatre,
Which is the setting where we lay our scene,
Was mainly busted pipes and broken heaters

Fuelled only by one flashy Spaniard's dream.
The owner, who called himself Enrique,
Had flown in from the continent years ago.
And though the townsfolk find him slightly creepy,
His great – [laughs] his greatest wish was to sell out a show.
How planned this Spanish man a crowd to get?
Through staging Romeo and Juliet.

Minors were to be the project's actors,
By which I mean the cast were merely kids.
Due to many complicated factors,
Youth theatre wins the biggest funding bids.
One teenager of indeterminate gender
Refused to learn lines or to stand still.
They called mister Enrique 'señor Bender'
And constantly would quite defy his will.
This rebel had impressed in their audition
And had been cast as suave Mercutio.
Yet due to the child's daily imposition,
Enrique cursed their casting in the show.
Enrique fumed in European finery
But feared to reprimand someone non-binary.

The conflict twixt the two was controversial
Because the teen, Leslie, would ne'er back down.
The pair would argue all through rehearsal
And turn Enrique's smirk to monstrous frown.
One morning from set young Leslie was sent,
Vanished to basement to pick up some props.
They muttered to themselves, 'Enrique's bent,'
While navigating costumes, wigs, and mops.
Les struggled with maintaining their focus
And inevitably got out their phone.

When suddenly, with hocus and with pocus,
The young one heard a nasty fucking groan.
Hell hissed as the youth fled out of the door.
[raspy voice] 'Leslie, no confías en el director!'

Les ran to set, restoring their safety,
Spoke nothing of the ghastly, gruesome voice.
Just stepped into the scene, almost too hasty,
And good as gold they acted all by choice.
This good behaviour carried to the classroom.
Star pupil Les became of their school.
Where once their A-levels had seem doomed,
They no longer were keen to act the fool.
In libraries they sat and studied Locker.
Till late at night over dictionaries they poured.
So studious was the erstwhile talker,
They even planned to spend a year abroad.
Les never once mentioned their terrible fright
But kept their head down until opening night.

The young cast played their grand parts to perfection.
Enrique burst in glory from the stalls.
But somehow, avoiding all detection,
Les slipped out right before the curtain call.
While lovers died by poison and by dagger,
Les went to see the ghoulish beneath the stage.
And though the being they brought up could but stagger,
It shook with years of hot and boiling rage.
Enrique stepped onstage to claim his flowers.
The parents nodded and politely clapped.
And as he opened his mouth to boast his powers,
The flamboyant director was attacked!
The ghoulish squeezed his neck and twisted his head

And laughed as he shrieked, 'now Henry is dead!'

'What happened on that night?' I hear you question.
Why'd Les summon a spook to make men quake?
Well dummies, if you've been paying attention,
You'd know by now Enrique was a fake.
Juan's message muttered during that rehearsal
Alerted little Leslie to the ruse.
Yes, Spanish as a tongue ain't universal,
But Leslie knew Enrique was bad news.
Juan knew Henry because they met on Grindr.
But Henry, it turned out, was raving mad.
Let this old tale serve as an apt reminder
A one-night stand can end up really bad.
Teens don't react well to being treated ill
And if you cage Spaniards, you might just be killed.

[Spooky music]

[Clapping and whistling]

SOPHIE: Thanks guys, it's nice to be clapped in a theatre!

KATH: Yeah, I really enjoyed that. And, um, you know, I – I like that you updated Shakespeare's language with things like, uh, fucking, uh –

ED: Yeah.

KATH: In this, I mean, maybe that is a Shakespeare thing. I don't know. Um –

ED: Grindr.

KATH: Grindr.

SOPHIE: Grindr, yeah. Yeah yeah yeah.

ED: Um...

SOPHIE: Did they have that in Shakespeare's – Shakespeare's time? I think it's –

KATH: I don't know. See I'm just – I'm not like familiar – I'm not –

ED: Not without the E.

SOPHIE: Yeah, no. I think they had – I think they had literal grinders who were all fucking gay. Um, yeah. Blacksmith-cum-grinder.

ED: Gross!

[All laugh]

SOPHIE: That was – that was a good job.

ED: Blacksmith-cum-grinder? Horrible.

KATH: Yeah, you need to be careful with the intonation of that one I think.

ED: Oh my god. Yeah, you forget how hellish, um, was it Victorian England? When was Shakespeare? Shakespearian England, I guess.

SOPHIE: Shakespearian England, yeah.

ED: Okay.

SOPHIE: He ran the – he ran the show.

ED: I'd like to try and say what I think happened.

SOPHIE: Yeah. Yeah.

ED: There was a play on.

SOPHIE: There was, yeah. Yeah.

KATH: Tick.

SOPHIE: Yeah. Yeah. In this theatre.

KATH: Romeo and Juliet.

ED: In this theatre. Uh, it was directed by a Spanish lad called Enrique?

SOPHIE: Yes.

ED: Was he also the main character in it?

SOPHIE: No, he was – he was just the director.

KATH: Yeah.

ED: He was just the director.

SOPHIE: The main characters were just, um, some kids.

KATH: The kids, yeah.

SOPHIE: Some teens.

ED: Yeah, minors. Great.

SOPHIE: Minors, yeah.

ED: Great bit, that. Um –

KATH: He came onstage at the end, though, to be like, ‘thank you! Thank you!’

ED: That’s why he was onstage. Okay okay. So he was taking all the credit.

KATH: Yeah. And that’s when the ghoul got him.

ED: And there was ghoul down in the costume department underneath the stage?

SOPHIE: Yeah, like in the like costume parts cupboard beneath the stage.

ED: Yeah.

KATH: Is that like where the trap door would be? Like you’d fall –

SOPHIE: That’s where the trapdoor would be.

KATH: Yeah, so the ghoul was hidden down there.

ED: Yeah. Fucking tight.

KATH: Yeah.

ED: So like – so like there was production values to the murder.

SOPHIE: Yeah yeah yeah yeah yeah.

ED: So like he came through the trap door and it looked good.

SOPHIE: Yeah.

ED: Obviously it sucks that somebody died, but –

SOPHIE: Yeah, that was – that wasn't said directly in the – in the story. But yeah, that is what happened. He came up through the trap door.

KATH: Nice.

ED: Nice.

SOPHIE: Yeah.

ED: Nice. And that he – so he – the ghoul?

SOPHIE: Yeah.

ED: Who murdered Enrique.

SOPHIE: Yeah.

ED: Was a former lover of his that he met on Tinder.

SOPHIE: Yes.

ED: And murdered himself.

SOPHIE: On Grindr.

KATH: Oh, Grindr.

ED: Grindr, apologies.

SOPHIE: Yeah.

KATH: Juan?

SOPHIE: Juan, yeah. His name is Juan. He was a Spanish man called Juan. Yes. A Spanish man called Juan that he'd locked in his basement because he was just – he's just not a nice guy.

ED: Yeah, horrible.

SOPHIE: Yeah.

KATH: Yeah, that's dark, isn't it?

ED: And he died in there but – but bad spirits turned him – uh, revenge kept his body going?

SOPHIE: Yeah, revenge. He was – he was driven by revenge. And he – yeah.

ED: Nice.

SOPHIE: Twisted his head, which will kill you if done hard enough.

KATH: Are there just two ghouls now knocking about underneath this stage?

SOPHIE: Yeah, it's probably Enrique and Juan.

KATH: Is that – is that potentially – yeah.

SOPHIE: Except Enrique's name isn't really Enrique. He's, um –

ED: Ah!

SOPHIE: He's called Henry.

KATH: Henry.

SOPHIE: Yeah.

KATH: Yeah, because he was a fraud, right?

ED: Oh, piece of shit.

SOPHIE: He's just a frood. He's just – he's a frood?

KATH: A frood.

SOPHIE: He's just a...

KATH: An absolute frood of a man.

SOPHIE: A frood.

ED: It's that Freudian slip.

SOPHIE: Yeah, he's just like – yeah, a little Freudian slip. Uh, yeah. He was just, uh, it was just that he – so he called himself Enrique at the start of the – of the poem.

KATH: Yep.

SOPHIE: But he wasn't actually called Enrique. And he was actually creepy.

ED: God.

SOPHIE: Because he'd killed a man.

ED: Great. So I can see on the stage there that there is a, um, there is a trap door. So that stands up.

KATH: Yeah.

SOPHIE: Yeah.

ED: Um, it's hard to – to pick holes in this. It seems pretty watertight.

KATH: Hm. How – how – did you say what year this happened?

SOPHIE: Uh, I didn't say what year this happened. But I think it happened in 2006.

KATH: Okay.

SOPHIE: Yeah.

KATH: And how do you – how do you know this happened?

SOPHIE: Um, I know this happened because obviously when, uh, the director of the Mad Bull, our sister theatre, was murdered onstage by a Spanish apparition.

KATH: Oh, of course.

SOPHIE: And my parents had to be informed of something.

ED: Yeah.

KATH: Mhm, okay.

SOPHIE: Uh, so they just sort of – they put a little – they put a little stop to, um, plays. Uh, for a little while. While they just figured out –

KATH: Right.

SOPHIE: What the fuck was happening.

KATH: Yeah.

SOPHIE: And they thought, 'let's not – let's not have this –' we were doing a – we were doing a production of Bugsy Malone.

ED: And who did you play?

SOPHIE: I played, uh, a member of Dandy Dan's gang.

ED: Yeah. Good.

SOPHIE: A minor part, but a big commitment. So –

[All laugh]

ED: We, uh, we did our production of Bugsy Malone in year 6. And I wanted to be a gang member but there weren't enough gang members. So I just stayed onstage and called myself Chipz. With a Z. So I –

KATH: Oh, Ed.

ED: I feel you. What?

SOPHIE: It's just – yeah.

ED: I'm Chipz. [imitates old mad] It's me, Chipz.

SOPHIE: Chipz. I –

ED: Stuff like that.

SOPHIE: Did you make up your own lines?

ED: Yeah, just – I think everyone sort of introduced themselves. And at the end I went, 'I'm Chipz!'

KATH: Oh my god.

[All laugh]

ED: And then like every other scene where the gangsters came in, I'd just come in as well. You know like –

SOPHIE: Oh, that's heartbreaking.

KATH: Did you just keep saying you're Chipz? Or just to remind everyone? Or –

ED: Yeah, I wouldn't say I was a writer back then, Kath. No. Um, I think I did just keep on reminding everyone that I was Chipz. But I said that so you could really hear the Z. 'I'm Chipz!'

SOPHIE: Oh, you were Chipz. Chipz with a Z.

ED: Chip-z. Chip-z.

SOPHIE: I love the idea that real sticklers, like real super fans of Bugsy Malone would be watching you at every scene being like, 'who's this guy?'

KATH: 'Who's Chipz?'

ED: 'Who's Chipz?'

KATH: 'Who's Chipz with a Z?'

ED: I like the idea that there's super fans going around the country watching all of the year 6 versions of Bugsy Malone. 'Let's see how this one stacks up.'

[All laugh]

[Spooky music]

[Guitar and flute sounds]

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[Spooky music]

KATH: So did this happen? So we see the trap door. Happened in 2006. I don't remember hearing about it, but then, you know, I –

SOPHIE: But we were busy in 2006.

ED: Was Grindr a thing in 2006?

KATH: Oh.

ED: That's my one question, I guess.

KATH: Ooh.

SOPHIE: I mean if it was like, you know, the Shakespearian cum grinder, then that was –

ED: Oh god, what a band name.

SOPHIE: That had a revival in the – a revival in the 80s.

ED: 'Hello, we are Shakespearian Cum Grinder.'

KATH: Well can we – can we open this trap door? Can we have a little – can we see if there's something down there?

SOPHIE: Oh yeah, please. Please do.

KATH: Would we see the ghouls if – well, let's just have a look actually. Okay.

[Door creaking]

KATH: Okay. So there's – there's still some costumes in that – down here. Should we just climb down?

SOPHIE: Yeah, there's –

ED: Yeah.

SOPHIE: Oh yeah, you first.

KATH: Thank you.

[Door creaking]

[Footsteps]

KATH: Ah! I've landed. It's quite a drop.

ED: [laughs] Fucking hell, are you okay?

KATH: Yeah. Just sort of – just sort of when you land you have to sort of roll.

ED: Well why don't you just have a look around? Look around on your own?

KATH: I don't want to.

ED: Okay.

KATH: Thank you.

ED: I'll just jump down myself then.

[Footsteps]

ED: Ah. Ooh.

KATH: It's really abandoned.

ED: It's a – there's a vibe in here, isn't there?

KATH: Yeah. I can't tell if that's just sort of musty old clothes, though.

ED: Yeah, it stinks.

KATH: Mhm.

ED: Is that corpse or is that clothes?

SOPHIE: Should I turn the light on?

ED: Yes please.

KATH: Yeah, go on then.

ED: Well there's – I mean there's nothing – it doesn't seem like there's anything down here at the moment.

SOPHIE: Yeah.

KATH: No.

SOPHIE: But what's – what's that? That sort of patch?

KATH: Oh that like stain?

SOPHIE: Yeah, that – that big old stain.

ED: Oh god, yeah. Corpses leave stains, don't they? What's that called?

KATH: Yeah.

ED: There's a name for that. Like the death something.

SOPHIE: When you shit yourself?

ED: I think it's – I think it's more like the body just starts to like eviscerate?

KATH: Leak?

ED: Yeah.

SOPHIE: Ooh.

ED: Yeah so all of the liquids just fuck off. But then they go into the carpet so it's like a death, uh, shadow. And that's that.

KATH: Oh god. Oh god, right, so that confirms that there was a death down here. Very convincing smell.

SOPHIE: I mean many people died on the Mad Bull's stage.

KATH: Oh, very good point. Very good point.

ED: It is a touring venue.

SOPHIE: There was a lot of – a lot of young comics waltzing through those doors.

ED: Small capacity touring venue. There's going to be – there's going to be deaths.

KATH: I mean that – yes, that is a nasty stain. That looks like a body could've been there. But I mean we don't know whose. We don't know. Was that Juan or Henry or –

ED: It feels weird that – it feels weird that Sophie would have this entire poem about that death and then this is a different dead body, though.

KATH: Yeah, I guess that is weird.

SOPHIE: Do you see like that – that over there? Those like little notches in the wall?

ED: Mhm.

KATH: Yeah.

SOPHIE: Yeah. I mean that could be how many days Juan was down here. Possibly how many –

KATH: Oh god, yeah. Just losing his mind.

SOPHIE: Yeah.

KATH: Marking off the days.

ED: But do you think the – the sort of scratch mark here that says, um, 'death to Enrique – open brackets – Henry – close brackets – I'll – I'll kill you when I'm dead.' Do you think that might have something to do with –

KATH: Um...

SOPHIE: Hm.

ED: Or is that a coincidence or –

KATH: I think that might be a coincidence.

ED: It could be a coincidence.

KATH: Yeah.

ED: Okay.

SOPHIE: It's – it's quite – that looks – I feel like that's probably planted there. Because obviously Juan is Spanish, so like – he couldn't have anticipated that the poem I wrote would be in English.

[All laugh]

KATH: It's a really good point. Really good point. Hm.

SOPHIE: Probably planted by Henry's family.

ED: I think I'm ready to – to have a little chat about this, Kath.

KATH: Okay. Yeah. Okay okay.

ED: Um, Sophie, do you want to pop back up onto the stage and Kath and I will have a little chat down here?

SOPHIE: Yeah, okay. I'll do that.

ED: Thanks.

SOPHIE: [squeaks] That was my getting on stage sound.

[All laugh]

ED: I've – I've seen your show, Sophie. I know – I know it is.
'Please – please welcome to the stage Sophie Duker.' [squeals]

SOPHIE: [squeals] I should – I know that – yeah. I should've – I'll use the stairs next time.

ED: Kath, what do you think?

KATH: Um, I do – I think – I think it happened. I don't – because I don't really know how to disprove it. And as you – as you've pointed out then about the, um, the sort of carving, you're right. Like Juan is in – in an English speaking place that's sistered with another English speaking theatre. So it's like you would write it in English.

ED: In High Barnet, yeah.

KATH: So it's like you would write it in English.

ED: Yeah.

KATH: You – you would, wouldn't you? Because you'd want people to know.

ED: Yeah, exactly.

KATH: Yeah.

ED: You wouldn't write it in Spanish and – and hope that people – you would write it in English.

KATH: And – and like fingers crossed someone who knows Spanish pops in.

ED: Yeah. Yeah.

KATH: Yeah.

ED: I think that's a big – big sign for me. Um –

KATH: Yeah, it is. The stain, yeah. I mean that could be anyone. There's a trap door above us, you know? And it is a drop.

ED: You're obsessed with that, 'anyone could've – anyone could've died here, Ed.'

KATH: Yeah.

ED: I think it's – I think it's more than likely that it's the story. I don't know why I'm finding it so hard for the story to be in. I think it's because I love the community theatre.

KATH: Yeah.

ED: And I'd love it to be part of Spooktown lore.

KATH: Yeah. No, I'd like that as well. And I do – I do think it – it happened. Um, yeah. Because there's – there's not that many holes, I don't think. In the tale.

ED: Yeah yeah, in the story. Yeah.

KATH: Yeah, there's a hole in the roof where we are, obviously.

ED: Yeah.

KATH: Um –

ED: I've got one question to ask Sophie and then I think that'll help solidify our position.

KATH: Okay.

ED: So I'm going to ask her one question and then I think we're done.

KATH: Are you going to use the stairs or are you going to jump?

ED: I'm going to jump. I'm going to try Sophie's way.

KATH: Okay, same.

ED: [squeaks] Hey, Sophie!

SOPHIE: Oh, hey! Nice of you to come up.

ED: Thank you. I've one – one question for you if that's alright. One more question.

SOPHIE: Yeah.

ED: One more question.

SOPHIE: Yeah.

ED: Um, did this – did this happen?

SOPHIE: Yeah!

ED: Oh!

KATH: I'm going to, um, sorry. I – I couldn't hear any of that. I'm still down here. I'm just going to, um – [grunts]

[Metal clanging]

ED: I'll say it, groovy. I think you're in. I think your story's in, Sophie.

SOPHIE: Yes! Yes! Thank you.

ED: And we'll see you later. Kath and I are going to head now. Goodbye!

SOPHIE: Goodbye!

KATH: Goodbye! Bye, thank you!

SOPHIE: Bye!

[Spooky music]

[Wind and footsteps]

ED: [singing] 'Hey, what's wrong –' [yawns]

KATH: [singing] 'You're looking kind of down.'

ED: Have I ever told you about that game? You know the game. The song game. You – you sing a song but then you change it just at the point where somebody else would join in. Um, so a good example is, uh, [singing] ‘if you’ll be my bodyguard, I can be your bodyguard. Then we’ll both be bodyguards, bodyguards are friends.’

[Both laugh]

KATH: I enjoyed that, Ed.

ED: Thank you very much. Anyway, uh, that was nice.

KATH: That was really nice.

ED: Kath, that was nice.

KATH: Mhm. That was nice.

ED: I don’t often say this. That was a nice one.

KATH: Hm.

ED: Hm. Hm.

KATH: Hm.

ED: Hm. You don’t hear that often, but hm. Hm?

KATH: Hm?

ED: Hm.

KATH: Are you meeting, uh, are you off to meet someone now?

ED: Huh? Oh, yeah.

KATH: Who are you meeting?

ED: Na-naturellement. Um, who am I meeting? Let me get my phone out. Oh, fuck. Yes. I'm meeting Richard Madeley.

KATH: Oh, Dick.

ED: Yeah yeah yeah. Old Dicky Madeley.

KATH: Hm.

ED: Um, he wants to meet me at the bakery?

KATH: So you don't know?

ED: I think it's the pan bakery. Um, he's saying he's worn his Saturday jeans on a weekday.

KATH: Oh right.

ED: And so he thinks he's haunted.

KATH: Right. What's Judy got to say about that?

ED: Exactly. I mean exactly. You know where I'm going with this. Judy – she's like, 'he's only got one pair of jeans.' But she – when she puts them out for him, she's like, 'here's your Saturday jeans!'

KATH: Oh god, okay.

ED: And she – and then he’s – I don’t know whether she’s accidentally gone, ‘here’s your Saturday jeans’ on a – on a Wednesday.’ Wednesday.

KATH: Hm.

ED: Or whether he’s gone – he realised for the first time like, ‘these are my fucking Saturday jeans!’ Even though it’s the same pair of jeans.

KATH: Hm.

ED: He only wears one pair of jeans these days. Ever since – [laughs] ‘these aren’t – these aren’t my good jeans!’ The funniest bit of footage in the world. Um –

KATH: Yeah. Oh, well good luck unpacking that. Jesus.

ED: You’re not coming with?

KATH: Absolutely not, no.

ED: Who’s Judy going to talk to then?

KATH: I – I don’t want to get involved in Dick and Judy’s thing.

ED: She’ll be asking after you, but okay.

KATH: I know. I know. I know. That’s why I’m going to just steer clear. Too much history.

ED: I'll say you're very ill.

KATH: Thank you.

ED: See ya.

KATH: Bye.

[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.