

Welcome To Spooktown – Easter Special

[Spooky music]

ED EASTON: Ah! It's a ghost!

[Wind sounds]

[Splattering, sloshing]

ED: Oh, there's one.

KATH HUGHES: Oh, get it get it get it get it! Get it get it get it!

ED: [grunts] Nice.

KATH: Nice. Nice.

ED: Done my research.

KATH: Oh yeah?

ED: Done a bit of my research, yeah.

KATH: You've been to the library again?

ED: Yeah, yeah.

KATH: Bloody hell, boy.

ED: I saw the – the old, uh, library master. What are they called?
Librarian.

KATH: Librarian. Yeah.

ED: Librarian.

[Both laugh]

KATH: If only there was a word for that.

ED: Yeah, I've been in there, had a little research, um, on the old egg hunt we're on.

KATH: Really?

ED: Yeah.

KATH: Oh, quickly. There's one there, there's one there behind – behind the hedge.

ED: Oh, thank you, Uh, may I?

KATH: Yeah, you may.

ED: [grunts]

KATH: Nice.

ED: So you know the play, the Spooktown play that every – every Easter the kids put on the play.

KATH: Yeah, I remember we did that in school.

ED: Yeah. Yeah yeah yeah yeah.

KATH: Yeah, I think I –

ED: You played the post? Weren't you the post? Or –

KATH: Yeah, I think I played the post. Uh...

ED: You played the post mate. And I – you – in your year you played the post mate and in my year I played the post mate.

KATH: Yeah. Yeah. Good role.

ED: Yeah.

KATH: It's the role you want, really, isn't it?

ED: It's... the main part.

KATH: Yeah.

ED: Some would say. Anyway, in the library I found a novella-isation of the play of the true events.

KATH: Oh. Oh, okay.

ED: A book – a book based on the play.

KATH: On the play.

ED: Which is, I believe, originally based on a book that was based on the true events. So it's a novelisation of the play of the book of the events.

KATH: So it's deffo legit.

ED: [laughs] So it's 100% legit.

KATH: Great.

ED: Straight from the horse's friend of a friend's mouth.

KATH: [laughs] Yeah. He wrote a play and a book –

ED: Straight from the horse's friend's mouth who wrote a book based on the play of the book of the – of the event.

KATH: Yeah. Yeah. Who was or wasn't there at the time it happened.

ED: Was not there, yeah.

KATH: Was not there. Great, okay. Yeah.

ED: It's a tale handed down, uh –

KATH: Yeah.

ED: Verbally.

KATH: And acted out.

ED: The old, uh, oral tradition of storytelling.

KATH: Yeah.

ED: Then written down, then written into a play –

KATH: Then – play, yeah.

ED: Then written into a novella.

KATH: Yeah.

ED: Which I have taken out of the library.

KATH: Great.

ED: To read to you.

KATH: Yeah, okay. I'm – I'm with you now.

ED: On this walk.

KATH: Oh, well that would be nice.

ED: Maybe not nice. It will be long.

KATH: Huh. Okay. I feel like we've still got plenty of, uh, of eggs to – to trash. So, uh, we got time.

ED: Alright. So this is the, um, this is the story of what we now call an Easter egg hunt. Hunk.

[Both laugh]

ED: We – we now call it –

KATH: Yeah, 'the sexy Easter egg hunk'.

ED: Yeah. We call it an 'Easter egg hunk'.

KATH: Yeah yeah.

ED: But back then they called it an 'Esther egg hunt'.

KATH: Interesting.

ED: So there's two words that have been bastardised. Yeah, yeah.

KATH: Okay.

ED: Yeah. Esther turned into Easter.

KATH: Mhm.

ED: But – but hunt –

KATH: Hunt turned into hunk.

ED: Hunk. Very recently. Very recently, that one. I'd say the last couple of – couple of seconds.

KATH: Have they sort of changed – changed the face of Easter and made it –

ED: Yeah. Yeah, it used to be that sexy bunny –

KATH: Yeah. But now it's –

ED: Hashtag 'me too.'

KATH: Yeah.

ED: Now it's a hunk.

KATH: Now it's a hunk.

ED: Yeah. Anyway.

KATH: Great.

ED: May I? May I?

KATH: Yeah, go on then. If you can read and walk and smash.

ED: I'll just open up this book and have a read. [cheerful, calm music] One thing people forget about spring, distracted by the flying rabbits and the flowers lifting their skirts and pulling down their pants with equal vigour, is that while the dark ulcer of winter retreats from the lengthening grin of spring, the evil that retreats with the shadows gets angry, denser, colder. And it begins its own multiplying. Its own skirt lifting.

Back through the cobwebs of history, an ancient scar on the landscape had been cut open once again by a village. A village which people came to from far and low, having lost everything and wanting to lose themselves too. The inhabitants of old Spooktown. Old even when it was new.

These parasites, the inhabitants of Spooktown, who bloated themselves off what nutrients the ground could provide, had no celebration for the coming of spring. There was nothing to celebrate. Yes, it made the nights shorter, but the evil had nowhere to go. Like a cupped fart, its potency deepened in the dry mouth of spring.

This is why no one travelled during those blood-tepid nights in early April. No one except Esther, the post mate, named so because they were the travelling companion of the post. Friend to all letters. Nose red with cold, satchel slung over their shoulder, hands gnawing at the strap like a rat gnawing its tail. Seeing those papery white flags surrender off to wherever they should go. Butcher, baker, candle. Esther once had to deliver a letter to a candle. John Candle, the paedophile at the end of the lane.

Esther was born in Spooktown and so, as was common, had a gaunt, drawn face, a nervous disposition, and historically, IBS. Esther hated working as a post mate. Every morning the sun would make alarm clocks out of Esther's windows, [alarm beeping] pouring liquid light onto the wooden floors, Esther dutifully mopping it up with her feet. [yawning]

Once up, Esther donned the post mate's uniform, poured a cup of bean juice, [pouring] what they called coffee, and headed out. [Door shuts] This was long before the idea of brushing one's teeth was the norm. This was barely a few centuries after teeth were the norm, so let's lay off.

Esther would crunch through the thawing dew-laden fields [footsteps in snow] to the edge of Spooktown. Until the cornucopia was in view. The cornucopia was a horn-shaped hill, in the same way any hill is shaped like anything. Barely. But still it was called the cornucopia because every day there would be a sack at the top of it, brimming with post.

Nobody knew how it got there. Nobody knew why the parcels and letters were addressed to the inhabitants of Spooktown. And nobody in Spooktown could understand the messages written in the letters. Sometimes in blood, sometimes in thick oil.

Occasionally it was written in ink, but most of the time it was written in a thick mucus that left a sense of horror or malaise that did not leave the recipient for months on end.

One spring morning, when the fingers of the sun had moved its pawns into position, placing the moon in check for 12 hours, Esther reached the top of the cornucopia [breathes heavily] to find an especially full sack.

Esther dutifully transferred everything to the satchel that the post mate always carried, including a small wooden box with a lowercase 'T' carved into it, and fixed eyes upon Spooktown. It was to be a very very long day today. 'We must've been especially bad last night,' Esther thought.

And off they went. Esther and the satchel. And the box. The first home Esther knocked upon [knocking] was answered by a sharp young woman. [woman says, 'what?'] A single white letter for her, handed over by the post mate, covered in thick ropes of mucus. [squishing sound] Before Esther could ask for payment, the door was slammed shut. [door closes] And a deep, mournful wailing began streaming out of the house.

Esther shifted the satchel, which while normally a comfort, bearing the blunt of whatever foul emotions emitted from the letters, now dug into Esther's flank uncomfortably. [music gets faster] Every door the satchel took Esther to was opened by a sorrowful soul, wracked with a deep emotional scar, cut upon anew by the satchel's contents. And at every door, Esther's discomfort with the satchel grew. But it was a post mate's job to deliver the post no matter what. And in those first years of Spooktown, no one rose up against their jobs without punishment. [music intensifies] No one.

By the second to last house, Esther was dripping with red hot tears. Now, tears of sorrow drip into your mouth so it's easier to talk about your sadness. But tears of pain run down the side of your face, reaching for your muscles, desperate to aid in whatever escape plan the body has. Through those hot tears, Esther managed to deliver the second to last letter, written in whatever that grey snow is at the bottom of the ocean. The recipient howled like a wounded deer. [moaning] Deep, unintelligent, and inarticulate. And slumped into a heap in their doorway. Even, great sobs shovelling out of him like coal.

Finally Esther was to deliver the last letter. A small, wooden box with a lowercase 'T' on the top. But the box had no address. Worse still, the box was open. Esther rummaged around in the post mate's satchel, [items clinking] only to find the bottom of it had been gnawed through. A sharp pain ran through Esther's back, [gasp] a gasp escaping dry lips. Time to go home and sleep. Another sack will be growing on the cornucopia and the thought of it being left to grow for two days did not bear thinking about. So Esther picked up the satchel and the empty box and headed home. The sun had completed a dance with sorrow across Esther's face by the time Esther's four eyelids finished their embrace.

Noon. The sack of letters like a swollen gland, humming on the hill called cornucopia will be furious. Esther moved to get up, but the lower back pain stopped Esther's movement. [gasps] A quivering hand moved to the portion of long pick the satchel was digging into the day before. It's soft. It gives way slightly more than the rest of Esther's flesh, as though there were space back there.

Esther had no time to think. The cornucopia must be seen too. Feet kissed the floor and clothes covered skin, and in less than one minute, Esther was sprinting out of the village towards the sack. But when Esther arrived, there was no sack. It had not been dropped off by anyone. It had not grown from the ground. What was Esther to do? Wait? Rest? Create more – a sharp pain stops the thought in Esther’s head. It was time to go home and rest. Rest is best.

Esther awoke. [gasps] 2am. Something had breached the uneasy half-sleep all Spooktown residents need at least four hours of. But what? And then it comes again. A muted scratching noise. [scratching] seems to come from under the covers. So Esther moves the covers. Nothing.

The scratching comes again, this time from behind Esther. [scratching] The quivering hand is back, moving towards Esther’s flank. The fingering hole’s just too small to get a finger in. Tiny eggs buried within. Hiding away. Tens of holes where the satchel had been digging. Where the wooden box had been digging. Where the creature within the box had been digging and burying its eggs inside Esther’s flesh.

Creating a honeycomb of pouches within the soft nest of Esther’s back. Esther kept fingering the holes, trying to dig the eggs out. [squishing] But they had created a spongy nest within which to keep safe. Safe within the flesh womb. Esther let out a cry, not of pain, but of terror. [scream] The letters. The letters must’ve contained the same spawn.

Esther ran before the post mate’s clothes could be donned. [footsteps in grass] Before the satchel could be hung, Esther ran. Ran to every house they had delivered a letter to the day before

but no one would answer the post mate's knock. Through the windows Esther could see bodies on the floor. Backs split open. Eggs shattered next to them. Wet, hairy creatures hopping and devouring bodies. [knocking] Every journey Esther took from one house to another, [knocking on metal] eggs slid out from the wounds in Esther's back.

Shiny eggs, glittering in the moonlight. Landing in the safe hands of the people until Esther found their way back to the cornucopia. One huge, thin membraned egg bloating at the top of the horn. [creaking] A weak, giant hairy creature hopping weakly against the thin membrane of the shell, trying to break free to deliver more eggs. Eggs that were slipping out of the tiny holes in the creature's back. [scream] Esther let out a scream that curdled as the eggs hatched from within the wounds the post mate's bag had made. And then all was pain. Then death. Then food.

The next day Spooktown residents awoke to a massacre. The sheriff split everyone into groups to begin the first ever 'Esther Egg Hunt', [carnival music] smashing any egg they could find hidden in the bushes or paths of Spooktown. Crushing, splitting, ending. Stopping the infestation in its tracks for that first year. The end.

KATH: Horrific. That's turned me sick.

[Spooky music]

ED: Yeah, so that's that.

KATH: Huh.

ED: Quite short.

KATH: Yeah. So –

ED: Yeah.

KATH: So what's with these eggs that we're smashing now? Are they still from Esther?

ED: Yeah. Um, well, no. The – these come from –

KATH: Because they'd be long gone, surely.

ED: Yeah, these come from the cornucopia.

KATH: Right.

ED: Up on the hill. Well, the cornucopia hill. Which looks nothing – I don't know why it's called the cornucopia.

KATH: Yeah, that's weird, that. Really weird.

ED: Yeah.

KATH: I smell bullshit there.

ED: That's the stupidest thing about any of this, I think, is the name 'cornucopia'.

KATH: Yeah. Full disclosure, I don't know what a cornucopia is.

ED: I think it's like a – a horn overflowing with like food or wine. Like it's an overflowing horn.

KATH: Well that hill, I can't see a horn shaped thing filled with stuff up there. It's – it's a hill.

ED: Yeah. Obviously these eggs turn up every year.

KATH: Mhm.

ED: And we have to give them a good old stamp.

KATH: Yeah.

ED: But like, ooh, it's come from – you know they lay in your back. It's not that – it's minging, aren't they?

KATH: Yeah, just grim. Just get rid.

ED: Bit of fun to stamp on them. [grunts]

KATH: Yeah.

ED: There's another one.

KATH: Bit of exercise as well. Gets everyone out of the house.

ED: Yeah.

KATH: Which I think is nice.

ED: I think it's like that 'five fruit and veg a day' thing.

KATH: Yeah. Yeah.

ED: 'Oh, everyone go out and stamp on – stamp on 200 eggs each. Otherwise the infestation will come back and we'll all die.'

KATH: Yeah.

ED: Yeah, sure mate.

KATH: Yeah yeah yeah.

ED: Eat a carrot.

KATH: Yeah. So I mean if we went up to the cornucopia, would we just see this thing there? Like why does it only rock up once a year as well? This is –

ED: I suppose it's, um, sort of like spring, you know? When spring comes, every – all the – everything sort of awakens again. And that's –

KATH: Well climate change.

ED: But climate change, Kath.

KATH: Things are changing.

ED: You said it. You said it. Obviously the eggs exist and – and, you know, they come from – they roll down from the cornucopia. We know all of that.

KATH: Hm.

ED: Do I believe that there was a post mate knocking about who stuck to their job?

KATH: Yeah, what's wild as well is that they insisted on carrying on delivering letters when it was upsetting everyone and themselves.

ED: Yeah.

KATH: Like who carries on after the first wailing from a house after you've just given someone a letter?

ED: Uh, the government.

[Both laugh]

ED: Should we go up and have a look at the – whether – at the top of the cornucopia?

KATH: Where the, uh, the beast – the beast egg-layer –

ED: It's a fucking trek, isn't it?

KATH: It is. It is, yeah. It's uphill. It's called a hill.

ED: Yeah. That's another thing. Why would you go all the way up here to get sad letters for everybody?

KATH: Who found them as well? Who was like the first person to go, 'oh, there's letters here'? Was that Esther?

ED: Good question. Nah, I don't – it doesn't seem like it. It seems like –

KATH: No, it seems like that was happening previously.

ED: Yeah, it seems like Esther has just fallen into the role.

KATH: Yeah.

ED: Of post mate. It's full of fucking holes, mate.

KATH: Huh, like their backs.

ED: [laughs] Gross!

KATH: Oh, grim.

ED: I really hated that bit.

KATH: Yeah, I hated that too.

ED: I really hated that bit.

KATH: Well say we wander up then, see what's what.

ED: I probably don't have time before the play, innit?

KATH: Oh yeah. What time – what time is that?

ED: Uh, the play is weirdly –

KATH: 4:30 in the afternoon.

ED: Yeah, 4:30 is pretty weird for a play. Is it weird for a kids' play? It's weird to hold the kids back and also weird not to have it at night, yeah.

KATH: 11:30 pm is a weird time for a kids' play.

ED: We're going to the matinee though.

KATH: Oh, so we're going to the – the 4:30.

ED: Yeah, we're not going to the 11:00. They do – they do a morning one for babies, uh, then they do a matinee one –

KATH: Yeah.

ED: Uh, for dossers.

KATH: Mhm.

ED: And they do a sort of late-night one for dads. [laughs]

KATH: Yeah yeah yeah.

ED: All performed by primary school kids, by the way. So don't – I'm not sure whether –

KATH: We're going to the dads' one?

ED: Not sure about the – yeah. Well I'm going to the dads' one. I was going to be like, 'oh, that's my kid over there, dressed as an egg or whatever.' I'll be going to the dads' one because it's a bit more my speed. But we'll go to the matinee one.

KATH: Okay. [laughs] Well, I might see how I feel and then go to the dads' one as well if I want to see it twice.

ED: Okay.

KATH: Do they mix it up for the dads' one?

ED: Oh they mix it up, Kath.

KATH: I might come along to the dads' one then as well. So –

ED: Let's just say there's a little bit of effin' and jeffin' in there.

KATH: Oh. Oh.

ED: Yeah.

KATH: Hello. Hello post 9 pm.

ED: Basically the teacher just says, 'welcome to the fucking show' and then the rest's the same.

KATH: Oh. Oh I'll be – I'll watch it for that.

ED: [laughs] There's – and also the giant egg at the end has a very realistic looking pair of tits.

KATH: [laughs]

ED: But that's all papier maché, so –

KATH: For the straight dads.

ED: It can be done. Yeah. For the straight dads.

KATH: Nice little treat at the end.

ED: Although I think everyone likes a pair of tits.

KATH: I don't know.

ED: For – for a laugh. Like –

KATH: For a laugh maybe, yeah.

ED: No one's – no one's wanking over the egg's tits, Kath. But they are going, 'oh!' [laughs]

KATH: Thank you – thank you for clarifying that.

ED: You're welcome.

KATH: Um –

ED: That's the – that's the 2 am showing.

KATH: Okay, yeah yeah yeah.

ED: Is where you get to wank over the –

[Both laugh]

ED: That one, it's just – it's just the egg and its tits, there's no kids. They've all gone to bed.

KATH: Okay, thank god. Because that's a long day for them, isn't it?

ED: Open door policy. Open door policy if you want to go in and have a wank over the egg's tits. 2 – 2 am's your time.

KATH: So they just present the egg with the tits.

ED: Yeah.

KATH: Like it's a statue in the middle of the school hall.

ED: It's sort of like a –

KATH: And you can go in and wank on it if you want.

ED: Listen. We're leaving – we're leaving that there. Our backs are turned.

KATH: 2 am onwards.

ED: Fill your boots, then.

KATH: That's – that's there for everyone to enjoy if they want to.

ED: Yeah.

KATH: Do they not have an allocated time though? Do you have to be like, log it in like, 'I'm going at 2:15?'

ED: It's –

KATH: I'll be 10 minutes. [laughs]

ED: It's a free for all. It's a free for all. If you lock eyes with another dad, that's on you.

KATH: Okay. But the rules are don't look, right?

ED: You're all – you're all, pardon the pun, cracking – cracking one out. That's what it's called the 'Easter Egg Crack'.

[Both laugh]

ED: The 'Easter Egg Crack'. 'Easter Egg Crack Show'. But yeah, as I say, we're going to the matinee, which, as you say, 4:30.

KATH: Great, okay. Okay, well we might not have time to trek up to the cornucopia then.

ED: Especially not after all of that.

KATH: No, no. We've –

ED: We could've – if we'd have been walking and talking, fine.

KATH: Yeah.

ED: But –

KATH: That's fair. I just think we carry on smashing the eggs, enjoying the day, getting our steps in, go watch a play.

ED: Yeah, great. I'd love to get a snooze in before the 2 am show.

KATH: [laughs] Okay. How long's the play?

ED: Well the play is 4 – 4:30 until 11. But there's a half an hour turnaround for the dad's show.

KATH: Okay. Yeah yeah. Oh, and the dad's show is shorter, obviously.

ED: That's –

KATH: Yeah, okay.

ED: Yeah, that's 11:30 – because you can – you can be a lot more of a boast when you can swear. Like you can cut through a lot of the exposition if you just drop a 'fuck' in.

KATH: Yeah yeah, exactly. Yeah.

ED: Uh, so that's a lot shorter. And then basically the kids leave, the teachers turn their backs, open season.

KATH: Well then I think we should leave now and you get a snooze in.

ED: Okay, yeah. Thanks.

KATH: Just smash this one last egg. [grunts] Nice.

ED: How big is the cast? It's got to be the whole school, right?

KATH: I think it's the entire school, yeah. When we did it, it was the entire school.

ED: Because everyone plays an egg.

KATH: Yeah. It's the whole –

ED: Yeah.

KATH: The – there's like 100 eggs and then the post mate, which is – that's why it's such a big deal that we both played the post mate.

ED: There's 101, yeah.

KATH: Um, and then – who played – uh, who played the cornucopia when you were there? It was like three kids sort of stacked on top of each other.

ED: For you that's – that's great. For us it was the drama teacher. You know when the drama teacher sort of wants to –

KATH: Oh god.

ED: Be involved.

KATH: Yeah. Yeah, can't –

ED: 'I suppose I'll be the cornucopia, ugh.'

KATH: 'I'm an actor.' Yeah.

ED: Yeah.

KATH: 'I still act.' Put that in the CV.

ED: Yeah.

KATH: Put that on IMDB.

ED: 'I still act. 1997 – present: I still act.'

KATH: 'I still act.'

[Both laugh]

KATH: Right, so you're going to go get a snooze, Ed.

ED: Yeah. Aw, [sighs] I can't get a snooze in.

KATH: How come?

ED: I can't get a snooze in. I've got to go meet, um, John Major at the Thorntons.

KATH: Oh.

ED: Uh, because he said every time he puts his glasses on, it turns into a Clinton Cards.

KATH: Oh god.

ED: Yeah, but I think he just needs a new prescription.

KATH: Yeah.

ED: It's best to go check every – every avenue for a different spook.

KATH: Yeah, yeah.

ED: [sighs] Um...

KATH: Well, that's good of you. Yeah. Go, uh, go check in on him. Uh, I'll meet you at the play, I guess.

ED: That's going to really put the kibosh on the 2 am showing.
Um, yeah. Yeah.

KATH: Get an early slot.

ED: Okay.

KATH: Get an early slot for the 2 am.

ED: Ugh, yeah, that's a good idea. Thanks, Kath.

KATH: You're welcome.

ED: You do – you do look out for me.

[Both laugh]

ED: I'll see you at the play.

KATH: Yeah, smash some eggs on the way. Enjoy!

[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.