LAUREN. Sssh! Jenny's got the conch.

A long beat as JENNY *decides how best to tell it.*

JENNY. While the builders were here, Phoebe was in with us. But last week, they finally left, so –

SAM. We decided to put her in her own / room.

JENNY. It wasn't ready.

SAM. Needs another lick / of paint.

JENNY. But Sam insisted.

SAM. She's eleven months! All the manuals say it's best for everyone to have their / own space.

JENNY. I had the monitor next to our bed, so if she cried, I could go and / feed her.

SAM. Her room's so close, you barely / need it.

JENNY. The first night, she seemed unsettled.

SAM. She always is.

JENNY. Since we moved here…

SAM. It's developmental…

JENNY. On Tuesday, Sam went on his trip…

SAM. Bad timing. I'd had it booked for months…

JENNY. That night. I woke up. I thought I'd heard my phone, but something was coming through the monitor, and it wasn't Phoebe…

Beat.

I heard footsteps. Someone walking on the floorboards in her room.

LAUREN. / Shit.

BEN. Blimey.

JENNY. I didn't know what to do. I grabbed my phone, thinking – do I call the police?

LAUREN. I would / have.

JENNY. I… I was bricking it. But, I thought – I have to do something. So, I went up to her door…

BEN. Blooming heck.

JENNY. I could still hear it. Loud. Like somebody was walking in a circle. With hard shoes. Round and round and round. Round the cot.

LAUREN. Jesus…

JENNY. So, I… Fuck… This still feels like the bravest fucking thing I've ever done. I pushed open the door and turned on the light, and…

Beat, they hang on her words.

There was no one there.

SAM. It's a well-known fact ghosts are scared of electricity. They're like the Amish.

BEN. Your daughter?

JENNY. Asleep. I could imagine Sam laughing, saying: 'You're knackered, you're hearing things.' And I thought he'd be right. Because I don't believe in ghosts.

BEN. I do.

SAM. Of course you do.

JENNY. I figured it was some stupid dream or… I don't know… my brain. But then… it happened again. The next night.

LAUREN. You're kidding / me?

BEN. The same thing?

JENNY. Yes. And this is the strangest bit. It was at the same time. Cos I'd looked at my phone the first night. And the second. It was 2:22.

SAM. Coincidence.

BEN. What did you do?

JENNY. Tried to call Sam. Again and a-fucking-gain.

LAUREN. Sammy! You let your wife stew in a haunted house?

SAM. This isn't The Exorcist! I'd lost my phone. The one pisser of a dark-sky island – drop something down a hill, there's no bloody hope of finding it.

(*To* JENNY, *genuine remorse*.) You know I feel like / shit…

JENNY. So, this is so stupid… I called the police.

SAM *gives an amused groan*.

BEN. What did they say?

JENNY. I have a reference number. 'Somebody will be in touch.' They thought I was loopy. I probably did too, except…

BEN. It happened again?

JENNY *nods*.

LAUREN. No!!

JENNY. On Thursday. I'd made my mum come over. There was no way I could sleep. I sat outside Phoebe's room. Mum was in our bed, but she was just lying awake too. And we both heard it. At 2:22!

LAUREN. Sam, this is weird!

SAM. You've met her mum…

JENNY. She doesn't believe in ghosts either!

SAM. Apart from the Holy One. And Jesus. Though, technically, he's a zombie.

JENNY (*fiercely*). Stop it! Stop making it seem / ridiculous…

SAM (*gentler, realising he's gone too far*). I'm sorry. Look… there are so many things in old houses that make strange noises… Heating pipes expanding and contracting. Creaky floorboards. Mice.

BEN. Mice that turn up the same time each night?

SAM (*ignoring him*). It could be electrical. It stopped when you flicked the light switch, right? So it's some dodgy circuit ticking behind a wall. Your imagination does the rest. Tick, clunk, tick… Footsteps.

JENNY. It isn't just footsteps…

Beat.

Last night… I put Phoebe in our bed and I… I decided to stay up again. I wanted to… prove to myself it was real. Before you came home.

SAM *shakes his head in wry bemusement.*

I painted in here and then, at 2:21, I went up to check Phoebe in our room. And then, I went into hers.

LAUREN. God, I can't bear this!

JENNY. A minute later, it came. Walking round and round.

SAM. Tick, clunk…

JENNY. But this / time…

SAM. Tick…

JENNY. I also heard a voice.

SAM (*suddenly thrown*). Sorry? Why didn't you tell me this?

JENNY. Because I knew what you'd say.

SAM. This is completely mental. What would I say?

JENNY. 'This is completely mental.' It was a man's voice.

BEN. Saying what?

JENNY. Nothing. It wasn't words. It was a sound. He… it… was crying.

(*Looks up at them.*) I know how mad this sounds. But I turned on the light, and the room was empty. Just me and Phoebe's empty cot.

There's a whimper from the baby monitor.

But I could feel it. Somebody had just left the room.

SAM. Sweetheart. This is nuts… It didn't…

JENNY. What?

SAM. It was a dream.

JENNY. I wasn't asleep.

BEN. It's not funny, Lauren. I had to have an exorcism.

(*Off their shock.*) Yeah, alright, I wasn't gonna tell you. I thought you might not take me seriously.

SAM *raises his eyebrows to imply it's a bit late for that…*

(*To* JENNY.) This is why I believe you.

JENNY. What happened?

BEN. If I say, is he going to give it 'all that'? Piss on my chips?

JENNY *shoots* SAM *a look.*

SAM. Your pomme frites shall remain un-urinated upon. For now.

He sits, relinquishing the floor.

BEN. Alright.

Beat, BEN *making sure he has their attention…*

I told you I grew up round here. One of the houses we rented was on Milton Road, down by the waterworks, you know? Near the marshes.

SAM. Nice area.

BEN. Now. It was rough back then. Mid-seventies. And there'd been a murder in one of the houses. Not the Krays, but someone who knew them. They'd stabbed this bloke and he'd bled out over the floor. Dripped through the ceiling, into the living room, like it was raining indoors, big red drops. And however many times they cleaned it, the bloodstain would always come back.

JENNY. This was your house?

BEN. No, another one. But, you know, it was that kind of street. Always dark. Even during the day.

SAM. I think this is what's called 'atmosphere'.

BEN. We lived at Number 27. We moved there when I was three and my sister was two. We were Irish twins. Eleven months apart. That's her now – Beverley.

He shows them a picture on his phone.

SAM. Nice tattoos.

LAUREN (*she's had enough of* SAM). Will you shut the fuck up?

SAM. I was / just…

LAUREN. Being a condescending prick.

A shocked beat. SAM *is genuinely chastened –*

SAM. Loz, as ever, has the correct diagnosis.

(*To* BEN.) Sorry. Go on.

BEN. We'd been there a month when it started. My sister was saying strange things. Stuff she couldn't possibly have known. About Hitler. The Blitz… One time, Bev told Mum we should go down the Underground, hide from the bombs. How the hell would she know that? A two-year-old?

Beat.

And then, one morning, Mum saw something. She went in the kitchen, and there was this little old lady, standing by the window. And the lady said 'Hello', and my mum said hello back, and then she heard one of us call or fall over, and when she turned back, the old lady was gone.

JENNY. Was she scared?

BEN. No. Mum was a member of the spiritualist church down the road. Did seances, so she understood spirits and that. She said the woman seemed friendly. I think if it'd stopped there, it would've been okay. But my sister started saying about how a lady came to visit us in our room after lights out. And I was saying it too – I had to do what the old woman told me – mind my manners…

JENNY. That's / horrible.

BEN. A few days later, Mum was doing the vacuuming and she stuck her head round our door and me and Bev were sitting on my bed, singing a song.

BEN *sings the first four lines of 'In an Old Dutch Garden (By an Old Dutch Mill)'.*

(*Then.*) Know it?

They shake their heads.

What about you, Alexa?

ALEXA. I don't understand the question.

BEN. No? Neither had Mum. But later, she asked my gran, who said it's from the 1940s.

Beat.

Mum said what got her was the way we were singing – little gaps between each line, like we were learning it. And – this sent a shiver right down her spine – without turning round, Bev says, 'Come in, Mummy. The lady doesn't mind.'

Beat, as they take this in.

And Mum thought maybe it wasn't so good, the ghost being alone with us, even if it was friendly.

JENNY. Oh my / God…

BEN. So that's when she called the priest.

LAUREN. I need more wine!

She pours herself another glass.

BEN. My dad was dead against it. Didn't want 'mumbo-jumbo' near us kids. But Mum knew, you've got to act. Cleanse the house.

JENNY. Did it work, getting the priest in?

BEN. I think so. He sprinkled holy water and asked the old lady to leave us alone. But we moved soon after, anyway. Mum and Dad got divorced.

SAM (*interest piqued*). Really?

BEN (*defensive*). Not cos of the ghost! It was just… these things happen, don't they?

JENNY. / Course.

BEN. He was a lorry driver. Met some bird in Scotland.

(*Getting back on track.*) Anyway, the thing that sticks in my head most… Mum said it was like the old lady didn't realise she wasn't living there any more. She thought it was still her home.

JENNY. You were the intruders?

BEN. Yeah. Like Mum'd wandered into her kitchen and she was being polite.

(*Then.*) Doing those vigils in the stately homes – you start to think ghosts are all headless posh people or pregnant medieval nuns. But this was an ordinary old lady – a nobody – wanting to stay in her shitty little house.

Beat as they think about this. JENNY *finds herself staring at the wallpaper.*

JENNY. Layers.

LAUREN. That's the saddest idea of all. To be a ghost and not even realise it.

JENNY. Perhaps there are thousands of them. We talked about refugees, but maybe they're actually like the homeless. All around us, everywhere, and we just ignore them. People sell it as this great comfort – life after death – but what if it's just a horrible realisation you're irrelevant? That would make me want to throw things. Or scare the people living in my house.

SAM *whispers something in* LAUREN*'s ear. She starts to google on her phone.*

BEN. So? You going to pick it apart?

SAM. I can't, can I?

BEN. / Huh?

SAM. It's not your story.

BEN. I / told you…

SAM. You were three. It's second hand from your mum. We'd need to talk to her.

BEN (*sharply*). My mum's dead.

JENNY. I think I'll make some tea.

She crosses to put the kettle on.

BEN (*tetchily*). I'm going to have another fag.