

HUNGRY JANE

A Play of Supernatural Horror

by David Skeele

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SETTING: A child's nursery, with a tiny rocking chair somewhere prominent in the set.

AT RISE: Shirley, a woman in her late twenties, and Kyle, a man of about the same age, enter the room. They stand there for a moment.

SHIRLEY

So...this is it. This is the room.

KYLE

It's a nursery.

SHIRLEY

Yes.

KYLE

Why do you have a nursery?

SHIRLEY

It...came this way. I'm renting it furnished, and the last people, I guess...

KYLE

And you just...*left* it like this?

SHIRLEY

It's a big house. I don't need the room, and...I don't like to come in here.

(Slight pause)

KYLE

Look, I don't understand why you called *me*. There are other ghosthunters in this county. There are five other guys in my office.

SHIRLEY

I thought it would be better. Since we know each other.

KYLE

You don't know me, Shirley.

SHIRLEY

It was a long time ago, but...you can't say we don't know each other. We were boyfriend and girlfriend for...

KYLE

For two and a half weeks. Ten years ago. And it was a mistake. We agreed it was a mistake...

SHIRLEY

You agreed. I never really agreed...

KYLE

Look, I'm out of here. If I'd known who you were when you called...

SHIRLEY

Please. Please, Kyle. It took everything I had to pick up that phone and call you—I mean, *ghosthunters?*—and the only reason I could do it was 'cause I know you. 'Cause I know you won't laugh at me.

KYLE

No ghosthunter would laugh at you. This is what we *do*.

SHIRLEY

Kyle, I'm in trouble here. I'm really in trouble.

KYLE

You have a ghost.

SHIRLEY

Yes. I do. Or, if it's not a ghost, it's even worse. It means I'm losing my mind. Totally losing my fucking mind.

(He stares at her for a moment, then makes a decision, taking out a notebook and pen. It's clearly not a decision he's happy with, however.)

KYLE

When did it start?

SHIRLEY

So you'll do it? You'll help me?

KYLE

When, please?

SHIRLEY

February, I think. I remember it was cold.

KYLE

What happened in February?

SHIRLEY

I started hearing noises. At night...

KYLE

What kind of noises?

SHIRLEY

The first ones were the footsteps. Little ones. Like...pattering. I thought it was squirrels. You know, in the walls?

KYLE

But then...

SHIRLEY

But then I could tell they weren't...in the walls. They were outside my door. In the hall. They'd come out of here—this room—and stop in front of my door. Sometimes the floor would creak, too. Oh, and I always leave the bathroom light on, and once I could see shadows under the door, like someone's feet blocking the light, you know? I forgot about the feet. Little feet—like little, tiny...blocks of shadow. They'd stand there—forever—and then she'd run back in here.

(She starts to cry)

KYLE

Why do you say "she?"

SHIRLEY

It's a she. I know it's a she.

KYLE

You know, I've got to tell you that in over ninety percent of the cases, the problem ends up not being a ghost at all—there's some perfectly ordinary, natural explanation...

SHIRLEY

A natural explanation? For fucking *feet* outside my door!?

(Slight pause. She tries to get herself together)

And what about the rocking?

KYLE

Rocking?

SHIRLEY

In here. All the time. I walk by the door and the rocking starts. Like she's mocking me. Like she knows I'm too scared to open the door.

(He realizes he's standing right next to the rocker, and takes a nervous step away before he can stop himself)

KYLE

This rocker?

SHIRLEY

Yes.

(Slight pause)

Are you nervous?

KYLE

What?

SHIRLEY

Nothing.

KYLE

Nervous?

SHIRLEY

I'm sorry! Okay? I told you, my mind isn't right. The stress...

KYLE

Is that all? Footsteps and rocking noises...

SHIRLEY

Oh, no. There's the teethmarks.

KYLE

Did you say *teeth* marks?

SHIRLEY

Yes. In the food. If I leave stuff out on the counter, like a cake, or bread. Even stuff in the refrigerator. The butter. In the morning I take the butter out and there are little teeth marks in it. At first, I tried to pretend it was a rat or something, but the teeth are human. Perfect little child teeth.

(Pause.)

KYLE

Do...you still have any of these marks? Did you save any of the food?

SHIRLEY

No. I throw it out. I can't stand to look at it. I'm sorry—I should have thought of...

KYLE

Yes, you should have. I'm going to want to see these "toothmarks."

SHIRLEY

You don't believe me.

KYLE

Skepticism is the default mode for a ghosthunter. It's nothing personal. You could have been right when you were thinking animals. Maybe you just want them to look human.

SHIRLEY

(Gasping)

Why would I want that? It's...horrible.

KYLE

People want to see ghosts.

SHIRLEY

Why?

KYLE

(Shrugging)

Life after death. Who wouldn't want proof of that? Look, I won't deny you have...an interesting variety of phenomena, but I'm not convinced there isn't an innocent explanation for...

SHIRLEY

I hear her eating.

KYLE

What?

SHIRLEY

In my ear, at night. I'm sleeping, and then I'll hear...this...chewing. Chewing right in my ear. It's the worst thing I've ever heard. Last night, I tried to run. Tried to run out of the house.

KYLE

You...*tried*?

SHIRLEY

I screamed and kicked my blankets off and I tried to run out the door, but it wouldn't move. Not even the doorknob. Wouldn't turn an inch, door wouldn't move an inch, like the whole thing was made out of concrete, and the chewing just kept getting louder...

KYLE

(Growing ever so slightly uncomfortable)

What did you do?

SHIRLEY

Screamed. For hours, I think. I woke up with my face against the door. Light coming in the window. It opened right up, then. Like nothing.

(Pause. After a moment, Kyle turns and begins to snap some pictures)

You taking pictures?

KYLE

Yes.

SHIRLEY

And then are you going to like...start recording stuff?

KYLE

Digital video—infrared. Audio tapes, sound activated. Still cameras with a trip-wire, maybe, though in my experience you don't get much with them. Electro-magnetic field, thermal measurements. I'll start in here, the bedroom, the kitchen, and probably the hallway.

SHIRLEY

Wow. So you're really good at this.

KYLE

Yep.

(He takes more pictures)

SHIRLEY

Kyle? Can I ask you a question? A ghost question?

(He stops and looks at her. Perhaps he is irritated at the interruption.)

Can they grow up?

KYLE

What?

SHIRLEY

Ghosts. Can they get older? Like, if I died and I was...on the other side, would I always be the same age or would I get older?

(Pause)

KYLE

That is the weirdest fucking question I've ever heard. And the answer is almost definitely no. The anecdotal record is full of sightings of apparitions from very long ago, so it stands to reason that they can't get older or else most of them would be dead—for a second time—from old age by now, right?

SHIRLEY

(Laughs a little, relieved.)

Yes, that makes sense. Thank you.

(He turns back to his pictures. Slight pause.)

KYLE

Why are you asking me this?

SHIRLEY

I don't know. Just...curious.

KYLE

Bullshit, Shirley. This is bullshit. You ask me here to help you, you better tell me everything I need to know.

SHIRLEY

No, really. I'm sorry for interrupting...

(Shaking his head, he goes back to taking pictures)

Kyle?

KYLE

What?!

SHIRLEY

If you get something, a picture? That means...I'm not going crazy, right? That she's really there? I'm sorry. I mean, obviously...

KYLE

No.

SHIRLEY

No?

KYLE

It doesn't necessarily mean that at all. You could be projecting something. Or *I* could be projecting...

SHIRLEY

Projecting?

KYLE

Absolutely. It's called psychokinesis, which literally means people moving things with their minds, but people with psychokinetic power can also cause knocking, rapping, all the usual sounds associated with haunting. They can cause apparitions to manifest themselves to others; they can even cause things to appear on film. There's a guy in Texas who can put a roll of film next to his forehead, think about something, and boom, the image shows up on the film. There's a woman in...

SHIRLEY

Wait! What...? I don't understand. You're saying...you can't tell me anything?! You can't tell me if there's a ghost, can't tell me if I'm crazy. Maybe you can tell me this: what the fuck is the point of you? Huh? What is the point of calling a fucking ghosthunter if you can't tell anybody anything?

KYLE

(Heading for the door)

I knew this was a bad idea.

SHIRLEY

That's right. Walk out. You're good at that.

KYLE

Oh, grow up, you pathetic bitch...

(He is reaching for the door, when suddenly the rocker begins to move. They both freeze. Shirley whimpers and flattens herself against the wall. Kyle is rattled, too, but he forces himself to lift the camera and start taking pictures.)

SHIRLEY

Go away. Please go away. Please please please please please please please. I'm sorry. I'm so sorry. Please forgive me. Please go away. Please. Forgive me. Forgive me. I'm so sorry, Jane...

(The rocker stops. Pause, then Kyle begins checking his pictures on the display screen of his camera. He stops, amazed.)

KYLE

I got something. I got... It looks like...hair. Yes. Like a little girl's...hair. It's...

(Suddenly he stops, realizing something.)

Jane. You called it Jane.

SHIRLEY

What? No.

KYLE

Yes. "I'm sorry, Jane." Why did you call it Jane? And what are you sorry about?

SHIRLEY

I don't know. I was...confused. I don't...

KYLE

Shirley! I have *had* it with your fucking lies! These crazy comments; these whack-job questions. You tell me. You tell me, god damn it, or I'm walking out that door! Why did you call it Jane?

SHIRLEY

Please. I don't know. I don't know.

KYLE

Fuck. This.

(He tries to open the door. It won't budge. Shirley makes an animal sound of fear. He breathes through his nose, tries the door again, perhaps, then turns to her.)

KYLE

Talk to me. Talk. To. Me.

(Pause. Shirley just stares at him in mute horror. He takes out his camera.)

Want to see her?

SHIRLEY

No. I don't. No.

(He grabs her hair and forces her face to the camera.)

KYLE

Look at her. Look at her, Shirley.

SHIRLEY

Please...no! No-o-o-o!!

KYLE

Who is it, Shirley? Who is Jane? WHO IS JANE?

SHIRLEY

No-o-o-o-o!

KYLE

WHO THE FUCK IS JANE?!

SHIRLEY

OUR BABY!!

KYLE

What?

SHIRLEY

Our baby. We have a baby.

KYLE

What? What are you...

SHIRLEY

A little baby. But she's gone now. I let her go.

KYLE

What the *fuck* are you talking about?

SHIRLEY

I was so young. So stupid. I didn't even know what was happening to me. I mean, I think I knew, but...my parents. My parents would have...killed me. Would have killed you. I just...tried to hide it. Pretended I was just...putting on weight. Wore big sweaters. But then...I was in my room, on Easter break. Nobody else in the dorm, and it...she...came out of me. So much pain. So much blood. I passed out. I woke up and I thought it was a horrible dream, but...there she was. She was crying next to me. And I said "No!" It was a dream. It had to be a dream... I...wrapped her in sheets and left her in the bathroom. I went out and went to dinner, saying "It was a dream," and I came back to my room: "It was a dream, it was a dream." But she was still crying under the sheets. I kept leaving, and coming back, and leaving and coming back, and she was still crying.

But softer and softer, and then I came back and...she wasn't. It was just a pile of sheets. A silent pile of sheets. So I took them outside and threw them away. Just a dream.

(Kyle sinks to his knees, horrified.)

KYLE

Oh...God.

SHIRLEY

And now she's found me. She grew up, and now she's found me.

KYLE

Shirley, listen to me. She doesn't exist. They don't grow up, and she doesn't exist. You're doing all this. The door, the rocker, the noises, the picture, everything.

SHIRLEY

No.

KYLE

Think about it. The guilt. You've been carrying it for so long, it's been...building up. Can't you see how powerful it is?

(The rocker begins to move.)

Shirley! Listen, you've got to stop this. Only you can stop this, don't you see?

SHIRLEY

No. It's not me.

KYLE

(With rising panic)

Shirley, please! I want...to leave this room. I want to get out of here. Now let me out. Stop that fucking thing and open this door. Now.

SHIRLEY

It's not...it's not... I'm sorry, Jane. I'm sorry...

(She rises and makes a tentative move toward the rocker.)

KYLE

SHIRLEY! You're going to open that door. Do you hear me?

SHIRLEY

Jane. It's him. It's his fault. I was so young...so young, and I knew he wouldn't help you. Please leave me. Take him. Take him. Go to him...

KYLE

All right. Stop this.

SHIRLEY

To him. Please, Jane. Go to him. Go to...

KYLE

Shut up!

SHIRLEY

Go to him. Go to *him*...

KYLE

SHUT UP!!!

(He strikes her, savagely, in the face. She crumples to the floor. The rocker stops. He breathes heavily, looks at her in horror.)

Oh, Christ. Oh, no. Shirley. Shirley, all you all right? Please.

(He kneels by her and makes some ineffectual attempt to revive her. She doesn't stir.)

Oh, God. Okay. Shirley, I'm going to get help. I'm going to go get help. You see? I can open the door now and get help.

(He tries the door. It still won't budge. He turns, wildly, to stare at the rocker.)

No.

(A sound begins. Very soft at first, it grows until it is distinctly audible: the moist sound of chewing. He slaps his hands over his ears, making inarticulate noises of fear. The rocker begins again, slowly, as the lights fade.)