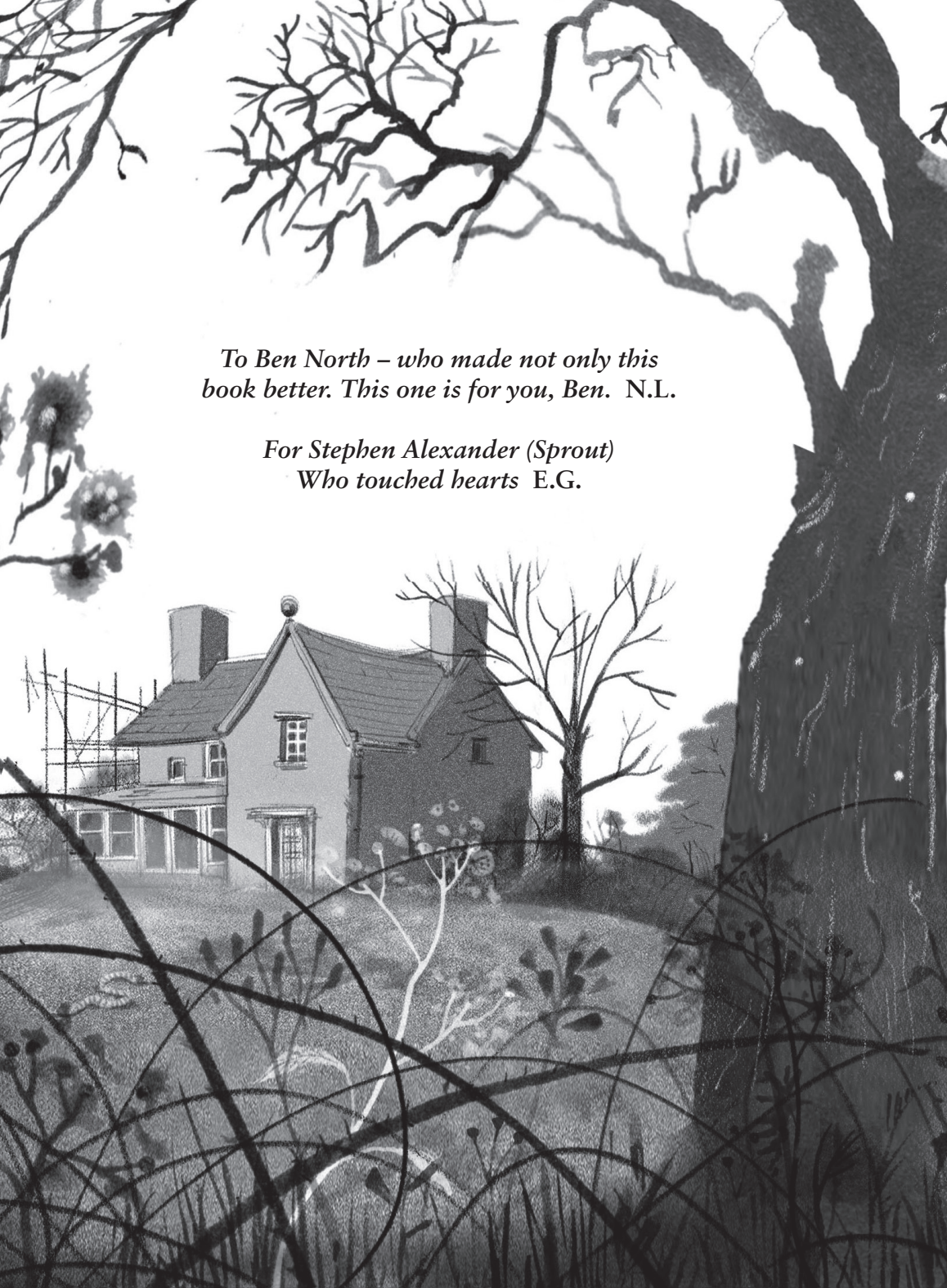
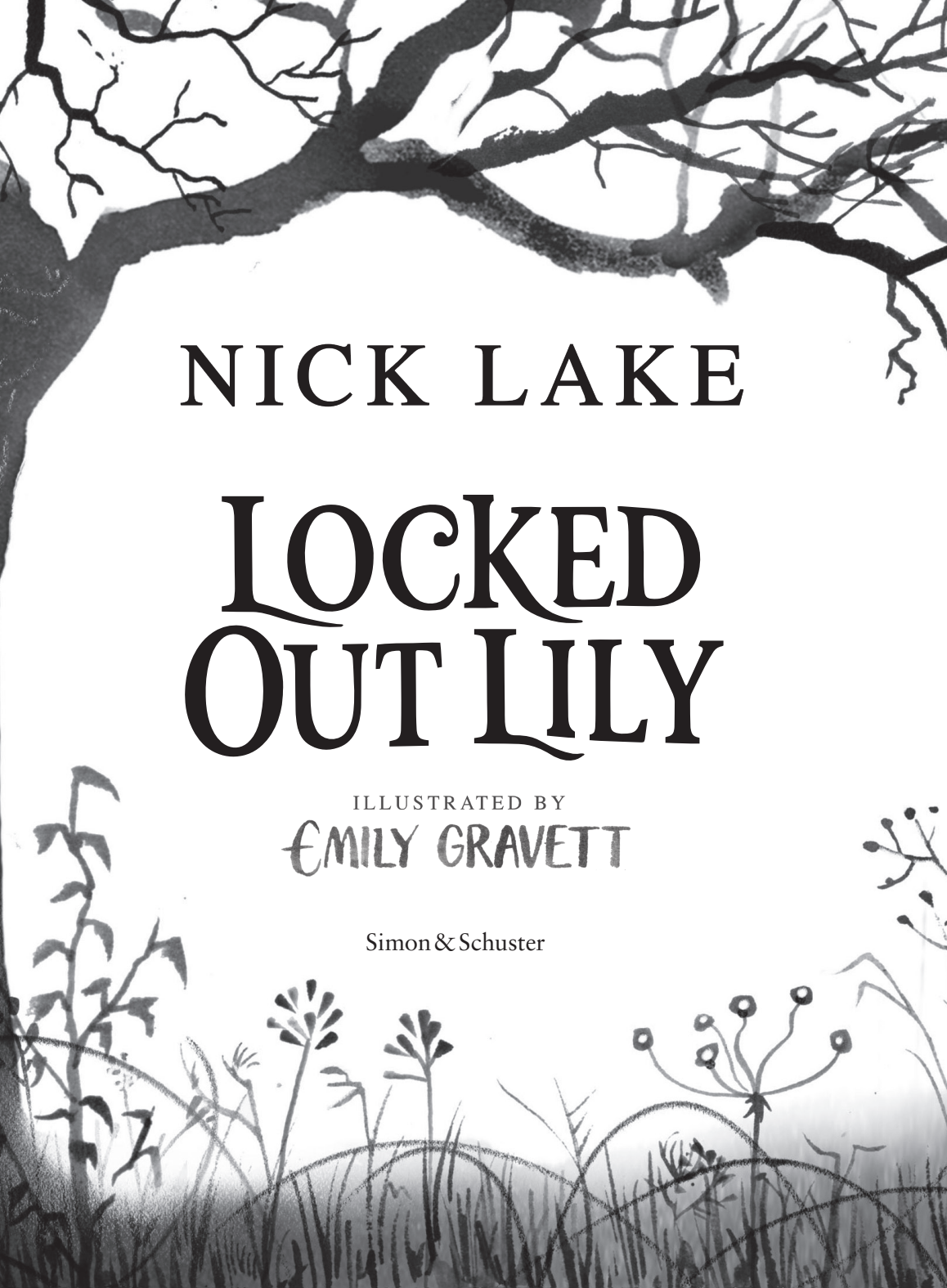


To Ben North – who made not only this book better. This one is for you, Ben. **N.L.**

For Stephen Alexander (Sprout)
Who touched hearts **E.G.**



NICK LAKE

LOCKED OUT LILY

ILLUSTRATED BY
EMILY GRAVETT

Simon & Schuster

First published in Great Britain in 2021 by Simon & Schuster UK Ltd

Text copyright © 2021 Nick Lake
Illustrations copyright © 2021 Emily Gravett
Quotation from '20th Century Ghost'; *20th Century Ghosts* © 2005 Joe Hill, reproduced by kind permission of the author

This book is copyright under the Berne Convention.
No reproduction without permission.
All rights reserved.

The rights of Nick Lake and Emily Gravett to be identified as the author and illustrator of this work respectively has been asserted by them in accordance with sections 77 and 78 of the Copyright, Design and Patents Act, 1988.

1 3 5 7 9 10 8 6 4 2

Simon & Schuster UK Ltd
1st Floor, 222 Gray's Inn Road
London
WC1X 8HB

www.simonandschuster.co.uk
www.simonandschuster.com.au
www.simonandschuster.co.in

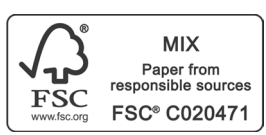
Simon & Schuster Australia, Sydney
Simon & Schuster India, New Delhi

A CIP catalogue record for this book is available from the British Library.

HB ISBN 978-1-4711-9483-2
PB ISBN 978-1-4711-9484-9
eBook ISBN 978-1-4711-9485-6
eAudio ISBN 978-1-3985-0018-1

This book is a work of fiction. Names, characters, places and incidents are either the product of the author's imagination or are used fictitiously. Any resemblance to actual people living or dead, events or locales is entirely coincidental.

Printed and bound by CPI Group (UK) Ltd, Croydon, CR0 4YY



'The Wizard of Oz *is ending. We know this because*
we can hear Judy Garland, reciting the same five words
over and over in a soft, yearning voice, saying – well,
you know what she is saying. They are only
the loveliest five words ever said in all of film.'

From '20th Century Ghost', Joe Hill





BEFORE THE BEGINNING



In the garden of the house a mole was talking to a crow. The sun was setting – that was the reason the animals were visible at all. In the daytime, they could not be seen, unless they wanted to be.

'Do you think she will be here soon?' said the mole. 'The girl?'

'I don't know,' said the crow, hopping from one foot to the other. 'Why should I?'

'I tunnel in darkness,' said the mole. 'You're clever. You soar. In the air.'

'I'm clever, too!' said a mouse. He was leaning against the severed trunk of a tree.

'No, you're not,' said the mole.

'True,' said the mouse, not very sadly. 'But I'm willing.'

'We'll all have to be willing, if the girl is going to win,' said the crow.

There was a long pause. The house was a looming presence in front of them, its edges becoming less definite as the light faded from the sky. The mole sniffed the air. She smelled . . . something that could not be put into words. A certain slackness in the evening, but a dangerous one. Something laid out as if loose, on the framework of the world, that might at any moment be pulled taut.

'Goodness, we're all very serious, aren't we?' said the mouse. 'Shall I sing a song?'

'Only if you want me to eat you,' said a snake, who had slithered up to join them. 'Don't think I won't.'

'Fine,' said the mouse, with a *humph*.

They watched the house.

'She won't win if she doesn't come,' said the mouse eventually. 'She will come, won't she?'

'She'll come,' said the mole. 'I can smell it.'

'Well, there we have it,' said the crow. 'Mole's nose has spoken.'

'It was my mouth actual— Oh.'

The crow had given Mole a withering glance. 'Now, hush,' it said, folding its wings. 'We don't want them to hear us.'

The animals fell silent, and watched the house. It was empty, but it was quick – in the old sense of the word: quivering with life – and it was those old senses the animals cared about most.

A shadow moved past a window, though there was no light to explain it.

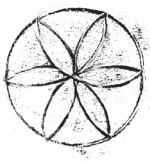
The animals shivered – even the snake, who was cold-blooded, and the mole, who couldn't see.

They waited.





1

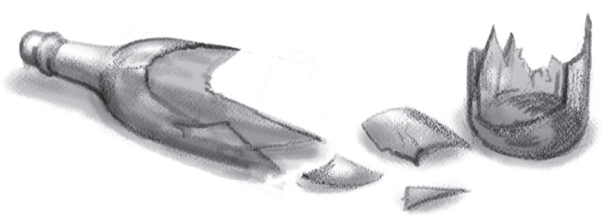


The house didn't want her; Lily could see that right away.

It was her house but it was dark, no lights on, the windows square black holes in the wall. Like someone had put out its eyes. Even the street light just down the road had blown. The nearest light came from the pub down the lane, the Sherborne Arms, and that wasn't close. Sometimes at night drunk people rolled bottles out into the road, to burst car tyres. The council had been round.

Lily was stubborn, though. She wasn't going to let the house scare her.

'I just need to go in for a minute,' Granny Squeak said, from the driver's seat of the car. Lily called her Granny Squeak because, when Lily had been little, her granny would always squeak with excitement when she saw her. Now she was more liable to sigh, or get wet around the eyes.



'Okay,' said Lily, unclicking her seat belt. She wanted to be at home, in her kitchen, in her room: it was what had got her through the day. She wanted Willo, even though she was too old for him, really.

'Oh, no, sweetie,' said Granny. 'You stay here and rest. I'll only be a minute. Your mum's left instructions.'

'Okay,' said Lily again. 'Could you get me Willo?'

It was the kind of thing she would never have admitted to Scarlett and Summer, back when they were still friends. That she still slept with a soft toy. Of course, they weren't her friends any more, anyway. People tended to draw away from her now, like what she had might be catching.

But Granny was already out of the car, shutting it with a heavy clunk. She left the engine running. It was spring but still chilly.

Leaning back into her seat, Lily closed her eyes. She had just left hospital and her mum had left home, with her dad. To have the Baby. Lily didn't actually know if that would happen at the same hospital; she didn't know anything apart from what her grandmother had told her when she picked her up from home this morning. That the Baby was coming. That Lily was going to stay with her for a few days. That

Granny Squeak would be looking after her, and they could even stay up to watch *EastEnders*.

Big whoop, Lily wanted to say to that.

Her arm was still sore, from the drip. When she went there, to the hospital, they took the liquid out of her veins and cleaned it and did other things to it that Lily didn't understand, then they put it back in. Like they were sucking her out, and filling her with a new person, and only the outline of her stayed the same. She didn't like that idea.

And it took all day, with Granny Squeak sitting there, reading her *People's Friend* magazine, and Lily listening to music and scrolling through her phone. Usually, it was her parents who took her, and it should have been nice getting to spend the day with Granny Squeak instead, but Lily was too distracted by everything.

At the end of today's session, the doctor, who had a moustache like a walrus, came up to her with another needle. Lily hated needles. Especially injections, which she knew perfectly well didn't make sense, because she'd already sort of had a needle in her hand all day, under a bandage, with a tube coming out of it. But that was different. That wasn't a sharp, thin thing going into your muscle.

'Iron,' he'd explained. 'Your levels get low otherwise; you don't make enough of it.'

'I'm fine with that,' she'd said. 'Can't I just eat some nails or something?'

'Haha,' he said. Actually said. Not laughter. 'You won't be fine if you eat nails, trust me.'

So she'd closed her eyes, and cried a bit, which she was embarrassed about, and he'd given her the injection.

She'd made her mum cry the other day, and that was worse.

'We thought we'd talk about names, for the baby,' her mum had said. Dad was holding Mum's hand, smiling.

'I don't want to,' said Lily.

'That's okay. We don't have to decide now.'

'I don't want to, ever. I don't want the stupid Baby. I don't want you to be big and fat and round, and I don't want this.'

She'd pushed her pills and water away from her, across the oak table in the new kitchen that was traced all over with thin lines and swirls of colour, from her pens when she was younger.

'I want to go back. To how everything used to be.'

That was when her mum had cried.

The door of the car swung open with a rush of cool air, scented with a bonfire somewhere. Granny Squeak climbed in and hefted a big duffle bag into the passenger seat next to her, along with a couple of Sainsbury's bags.

'Your mum left a note on the kitchen table,' she said. 'Phone number of the hospital, that sort of thing. Just in case. And a list of everything you needed, in case they had to stay in for a few days. Clothes, freezer meals. Your meds. But you might have to help with all that!' she added, in what was clearly supposed to be a cheerful tone. 'I'm no good with timings.'

She started the engine and pulled away.

'Sure,' said Lily, without really meaning it. 'Did you get Willo?'

'Oh!' said Granny Squeak. 'Was he on the list? Sorry. I just grabbed whatever I could, to be honest. Oh, well, too late now.' She shifted into fourth gear.

'No,' said Lily. 'I asked as you were . . .'

She stopped. There was no point. Willo was her whale: Lily had slept with him most nights of her life and wasn't sure she could sleep without him. He was from IKEA, which wasn't important, but she'd got him when she was

two, the very first toy she'd ever chosen herself, and that *was* important.

Lily *needed* Willo, and Willo wasn't there.

But that was okay. Because Lily had no intention of being shunted aside, of being sent away from home, anyway. Everyone else thought they knew best – but it was her home, too. Her home *first*.

