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The Dream House

Laura Dockrill

illustrated by Gwen Millward

Piccadilly PRESS

For Krissy Wardie – thank you for the dreams x

For Max love GM (mum) x



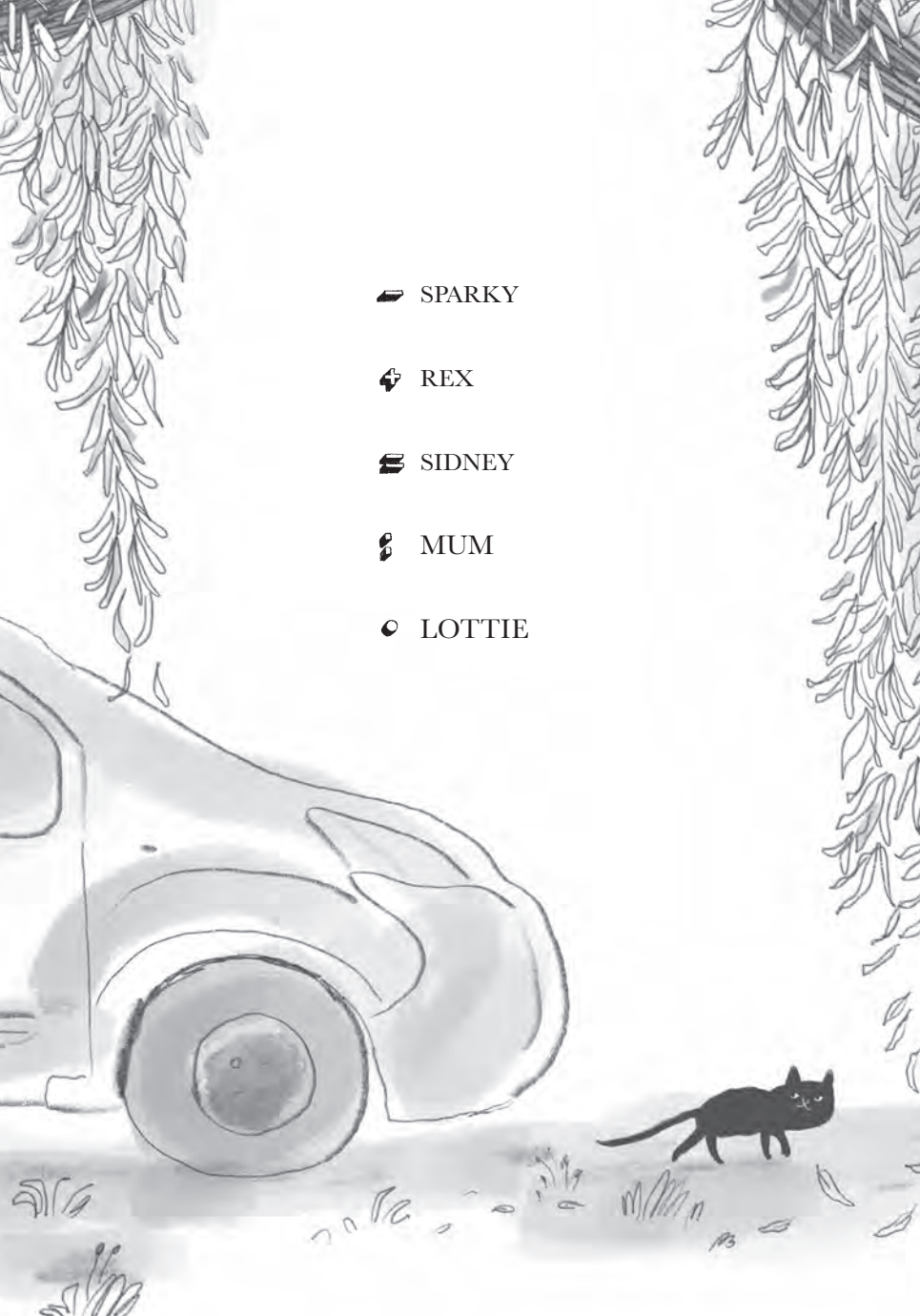
SPARKY

REX

SIDNEY

MUM

LOTTIE





1.

The scrampled ground is thick with stones. I meet a stag beetle on the way in, alone on the ground in a makeshift graveyard of pebbles, and say *hello* but it's dead.

It's dead.

my godfather says. Which is weird in itself as we don't really believe in God.

2.

I like the sound of the wheels of my suitcase on the tiles. Rattling. Chalky and wobbling and loose under each step. The pieces all slipping out like pieces in a jigsaw.

Typical.

Just like the ground beneath me. Always falling through these days.

I know the smell well. The smell of antique shops. Damp. Like old postcards or museums. Like books from the past with cracked browning spines and not much room between the lines, with pages that make your eyes turn blind if you look too long.

Sometimes I look too long and I won't even know I'm doing it.



3.

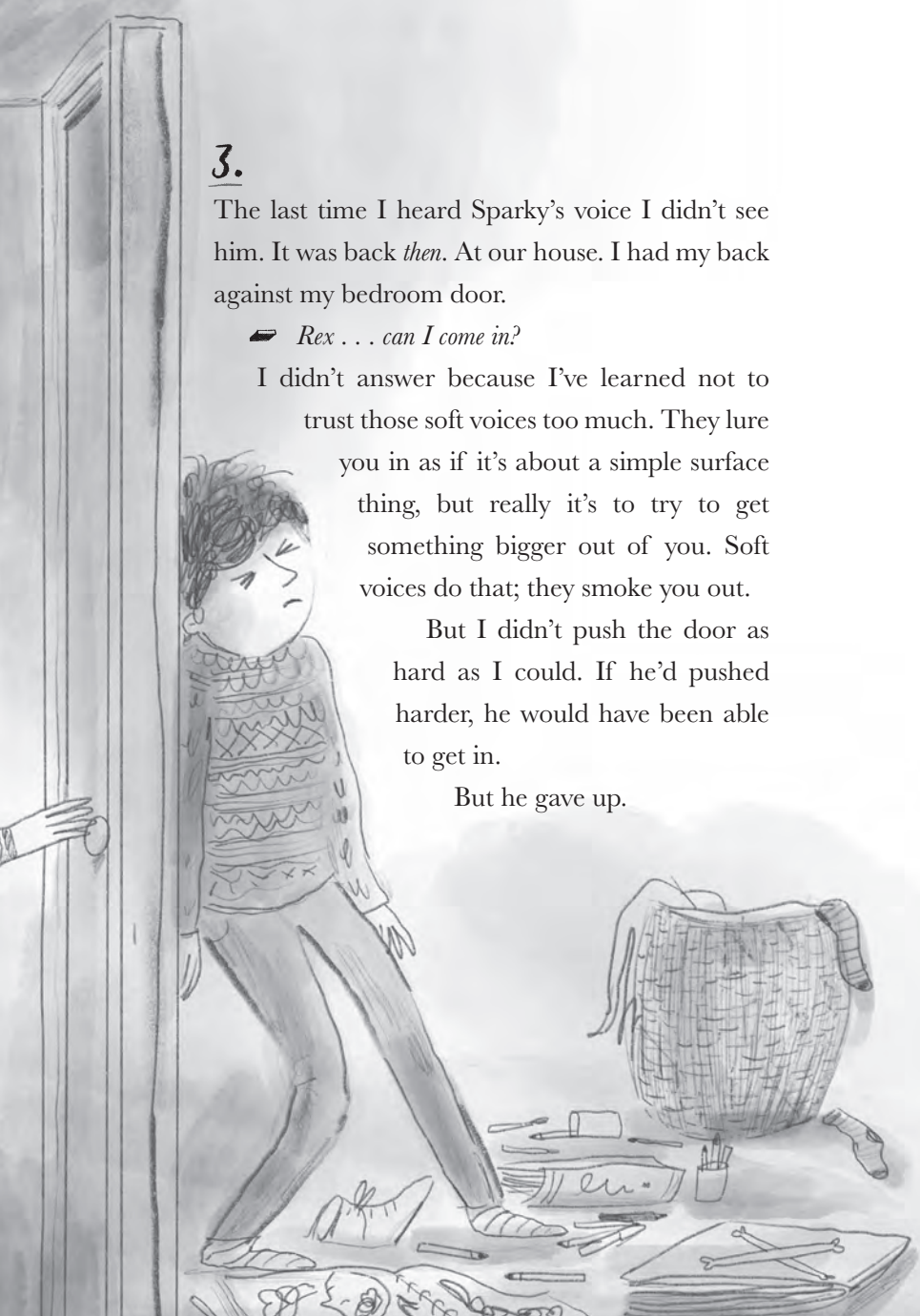
The last time I heard Sparky's voice I didn't see him. It was back *then*. At our house. I had my back against my bedroom door.

✒ *Rex . . . can I come in?*

I didn't answer because I've learned not to trust those soft voices too much. They lure you in as if it's about a simple surface thing, but really it's to try to get something bigger out of you. Soft voices do that; they smoke you out.

But I didn't push the door as hard as I could. If he'd pushed harder, he would have been able to get in.

But he gave up.



4.

There were too many people downstairs in the house that day. Lottie was behaving like it was a birthday party, wanting to show everybody her bedroom and her toys. She'd been given so many toys since everything; it had made her a bit 'expecting'. She kind of thought that's what people did all the time to everybody, even when it wasn't even a present-giving time. That's because people didn't know how to help, how to be, how to say sorry, so they'd overcompensate with gifts. But they weren't helping. They were just transforming Lottie into a greedy spoilt monster.

And Lottie didn't know him like I did. I just wanted everybody to leave.

Mum changed her outfit five times that day and kept wiping her eyes the whole time. That's crying without letting yourself cry. It's worse than actual crying because everybody knows that's what it is but nobody can say, 'Are you all right?'

At one point she sang that song 'Don't You (Forget About Me)' into a French baguette. People didn't know whether to clap and laugh or cry.

Eventually they went home after they'd eaten all the good crisps and used up all the toilet roll.

Good riddance.

5.

The van journey was silent except for Sparky's humming. Which was OK.

But now we are here, with the yellow door with the cracked paint. The spy hole. The ghost of me as a child.

✒ *That's all you in there . . .*

Sparky says, pointing at the drawers. He keeps a camera, my godfather. He takes pictures of everything



and the hallway is an antique filing cabinet stuffed with our faces: too much chocolate cake and rollercoaster rides and piggybacks on the beach.



There'll be lots of *him* in there too but I don't want to look at those today.

Or maybe even ever.