Hello, I'm Evie Green, and I'm here to talk to you about my horror debut, *We Hear Voices*, which is going to be published by Berkley on October 6th this year.

*We Hear Voices* is a horror novel which is set in a post-pandemic world. I wrote it very, very much in a pre-pandemic world, without any idea of what was about to happen. But the pandemic, J5X, in *We Hear Voices* affects particularly young children. And Billy, the little boy at the center of it, is very, very sick when the novel opens. He gets better with the help of his imaginary friend, who he calls Delfy. Delfy is, at first, a wonderful, wonderful life-saving thing. And Rachel, Billy’s mother, loves her. However, things do take a turn for the sinister.

I’m going to read from the very beginning of *We Hear Voices*.

Rachel threw the medical mask on the floor, climbed out of the stupid quarantine suit, and took her son in her arms. He was so light and bony that it was like picking up a stray cat. She buried her face in his hair. He smelled like sickness and plague.

Billy had been sick for a month. For almost all of that time she had believed he would get better, but tonight she knew he wouldn’t. Rachel was living in a single moment: she felt it had lasted a thousand years, and she wanted to stretch it to infinity, because she couldn’t bear to step into the moment that would come next. She bargained with the universe. She would take any future it could throw at her as long as it involved Billy staying alive.

She was supposed to wear her full mask and quarantine suit, and she had done it until now. She had followed the rules to the letter, trusted the government, done everything she was supposed to do to take care of her boy, and none of it had worked.

She sat on his bed and shuffled back so she was leaning on the wall with Billy lying in her arms. Downstairs, she could hear Al talking to Beth, and Henry talking to Nina. She loosened her grip a little, because she didn’t want to hurt Billy, and she kissed him all over his face, but he didn’t respond. He was breathing, though. Those sickly breaths were still coming.

Billy’s bedroom was tiny, with a single bed, a bedside table, a chair, and a chest of drawers. The walls were a dirty white (the landlord wouldn’t let her paint them, and when she tried to clean them, the paint rubbed off), but she and Billy had covered them with drawings, posters, things he liked. All that was gone now. Rachel had taken it all down and put it into a box, then washed the walls with disinfectant, like the rules said.
Once, a million years ago, the room had been a giant mess, with Legos and dirty clothes and drawings and books all over the floor. Now it was sterile, pristine. The government guide to dealing with the pandemic was on the bedside table, along with a glass of the powdered drink that had come in sachets with the guidelines, with a metal straw and a pile of medication that was mainly placebo.

She had done everything by the book. She had sent Nina to live with her dad, even though that had almost killed her. This room was separated from the rest of the house with two sets of the plastic sheets the government had sent out, and the only person who ever walked through them was Rachel, and then (until now) only in her quarantine suit and mask. It had been logistically difficult, with baby Beth, but she had done it.

Tonight, though, they had taken turns using the suit. She had lent it to her ex-husband so that he could say good-bye to Billy, their son. She had sat downstairs with a cup of tea while Henry spent an hour with him. Then Al, and then Nina had gone in, one by one, and now there were only Rachel and Billy in the world. She was glad she had ditched the suit and the mask. She was just herself now, wearing her baggy sweater and pajama trousers, holding her child. Billy needed to see his mother as he died, rather than a figure in a space suit. She picked up his toy rabbit from the pillow and put it on his chest.


She would carry on living after this, because she had to. She had to do it for Beth and for Nina. She thought of the times she had shouted at Billy for being slow or had been cross with him for being cheeky or for his table manners. What, she wondered, had been the point? What had been the fucking point? If she could go back, she would let him spend all six years climbing trees or watching telly or eating cake. She would grant him six years of perfect happiness, even though she supposed that might have meant staying with Henry for longer than she would have liked.

Billy was so pale that his face was a bluish green color. His hair was slicked back with sweat. His temperature soared while he shivered. She waited for the next breath. When it didn’t come, she pulled him tighter against her chest, trying to use her heart to jump-start his.

“Billy,” she whispered into his hair. “Billy, it’s Mum. Stay. Stay with me.” She looked up, her child in her arms, “Universe,” she muttered. “God,” she added, hedging her bets. “Allah. Whoever you are. Give me Billy back. Give me my Billy, and I promise I will do anything. I’ll sell my soul to anyone. Let me keep him.”

Nothing changed.

Millions of people had died. Billy would add one to the numbers of casualties. Children under ten were particularly at risk. *Plus one* for the children-under-ten statistics.
“Please,” she said again. She kissed his head one more time. One more. One more. “I love you, Billy.” She pushed her face into his and rubbed her warm cheek on his cooling one and tried to imagine her life without him.

He wasn’t moving. He wasn’t breathing. He had . . .

“Let me keep him,” she said. “I don’t care what else. Let me have Billy.”

His body jerked in her arms, and he opened his eyes, just a fraction. She felt his lungs expand. She heard him exhale, felt the sour breath on her face. He inhaled again with a rattling noise, a vibration. He was breathing.

“Mumma,” he said, his eyes still closed. Downstairs, the baby started to cry.