

# That Face at the Window

By Maddy Searle

*Read by Paul Sims*

Content warnings:

- Vampires & vampirism
- Supernatural compulsion
- Physical violence
- Blood
- Mentions of: insomnia, food, social anxiety, knives, pain
- SFX: repeated low drone

[TAPE CLICK]

**LEITNER**

Right. Er, how does she do this... Case... something. What is this labelling system? Really. It's from Harriet Grange occurred sometime in 2010. Statement given 2013, and recorded March 18th 2014. Oh, and this is Jurgen Leitner speaking.

I always find it difficult to get to sleep. When people tell me that their heads hit the pillow and they just conk out, I really do envy them. It usually takes me an hour or more of reading a book or listening to podcasts before I let go of the day's mundane worries and eventually slip into unconsciousness. And for this reason, it isn't surprising that I was awake at 2am on a Thursday night.

As I gazed at my window, I could see the orange light of the streetlamps seeping through the thin white curtains. I could sense that sleep wasn't far off, so I set down my book, "The Dark Revival" by Josephine Knightley, and turned off my bedside lamp. I'd just finished re-reading the appendix which detailed the author's sudden disappearance after she finished writing her masterpiece. It really is a foundational classic of vampire fiction – but of course Stoker and Polidori usually get all the credit.

As soon as my eyes darted back to the window, I saw something. The silhouette of a woman wearing a long, flowing skirt. Someone was right outside my window.

Now, depending on where you live, this may be more or less likely. If you live on the ground floor in a busy inner-city neighbourhood, of course, someone may well be standing outside your window late at night. Entirely plausible. However, I lived on suburban street, far from the city centre. And my bedroom was on the second floor.

I still don't quite understand why I did what I did. I pulled back my duvet, slipped out of bed and walked slowly towards the window. My hand quivering, I grabbed the edge of the curtain and cautiously pulled it back a few inches. But as soon as my hand had touched the curtain, a flurry of shadow flickered across the curtain, and by the time I actually looked outside, there was nothing. Just the squat, semi-detached houses across the road, the streetlamps, the bins left out for collection the next morning.

I chastised myself for getting so worked up over nothing, but the adrenalin coursing through my system had already done its work. Too agitated to keep reading, I found the most banal podcast in my queue and pressed "play".

The next morning I was drowsy and irritable and stumbled into the kitchen for my first cup of tea. Checking my phone's calendar, I realised that the deadline for my next script was looming. I was making reasonable progress, I just had a few more pages to write, and then I could go back and make some edits in time for submission. After a perfunctory shower and a slice of toast, I packed up my laptop and set off for my favourite local café.

It was a resolutely grey day and I was certain the sun wouldn't break through the clouds any time soon. When I arrived, the café was bustling with students, freelancers and elderly ladies; the usual crowd. My favourite booth

was taken over by a pair of undergraduates laden with books and papers. The only seat available was at the dreaded communal table, which introverts like me tend to avoid at all costs. However, I was craving the signature latte, and had no desire to lug my hefty laptop elsewhere, so I sat down.

Diagonally opposite me, at that feared communal table, was a woman. I'm terrible at judging people's ages, but my guess would be that she was in her mid-thirties, perhaps about my age. She had gently curled auburn hair, swept up in a messy bun, and a striking, angular face, with full, red lips. She was wearing a high-necked blouse adorned with a cameo brooch. People with a fondness for vintage clothes were by no means a rarity in this café, but something about her particular style made me pause, and perhaps I stared a little longer than I should have. She had a leather-bound notebook in front of her, and was furiously scribbling in it with a fountain pen. Then, seeming to sense my presence, she looked up to meet my gaze.

"Good morning," she said.

"Hi," I replied, breaking eye contact and hurriedly setting up my laptop on the table.

"Are you a writer, too?" she asked, glancing at the laptop with a gentle smile.

"Um, yeah, actually. Scriptwriter." I really wasn't in the mood to chat, but I didn't want to be rude. She seemed nice enough. "You write as well?"

"Yes, I write novels, actually. I've been writing for such a long time now, it's hard to remember a time when I did anything else."

"Wow. Nice." Silence. Small talk isn't my strong suit.

Unsure how to proceed, I opened up my script-writing software and tried to ignore her. But I had the uncanny sense that she was still looking at me. I tried to concentrate on my work, but when I looked up, sure enough, she was staring right into my eyes. Her irises were dark blue, darker than any I'd ever seen before. I could have sworn that when my eyes met hers, her pupils expanded, like a cat's when they see their prey.

“If you don’t mind me asking, what kind of scripts do you write? Any particular genre?” she inquired.

“Well, at the moment I’m writing a bit of a gothic romance kind of thing, inspired by “The Dark Revival”. Nothing as good as the original, of course, but I’m enjoying it.”

“Don’t put yourself down like that,” the woman said, a stern edge underneath her politeness. “I’m sure it’s utterly delightful. And it almost goes without saying that Josephine Knightley was severely underappreciated in her time, and still to this day, in fact. It’s wonderful that you’re keeping her legacy alive.” The woman had conviction in her voice that was hard to deny.

“Thank you. That’s kind of you to say. Um, I’m Harriet, by the way. Harriet Grange.”

“Oh, I’m Jo. Lovely to meet you, Harriet.” She held out a hand, adorned with rings.

“You too,” I said, shaking her hand. It was cool to the touch, but her grip was strong, and I could feel her rings digging into my palm.

“I hope you don’t think me too forward,” Jo said, “but I was wondering if I might ask you for your telephone number? I have to rush off now, but I’d love to talk to you some more about your work. Would that be alright?”

I blushed, half-delighted, half-terrified, because I definitely wanted to see her again, but was afraid of appearing too eager.

“That... would be lovely,” I said. She handed me her notebook and her fountain pen, and gestured to a page where I could write down my number. Before I even registered that I had done so, I’d written my phone number, my name, and a kiss. Before I could change my mind and scribble out the kiss, she took the notebook from me, a serene smile on her face.

“Thank you, my dear. As I say, I really must be off, but I shall call you as soon as I can. I hope you enjoy the rest of your day.” Jo stood up, packing her notebook and pen into a small satchel.

“Thank you, you too,” I said. I couldn’t help but smile.

Jo swept out of the café and onto the street, clutching her long, black skirt. Before I settled down to work on my script, I noticed that she had left behind a full cup of coffee, completely untouched.

Late that night, around 2am, I had trouble sleeping again. But this time, my thoughts were occupied by less mundane matters: The way Jo's hair fell in soft curls on her forehead; the way she held my hand, so strong and decisive; the way her lips pressed together in that beatific smile. Even though I was clutching "The Dark Revival", and my eyes were scanning its printed pages, I wasn't reading a single word.

I was jolted out of my reverie by a message alert on my phone. I dropped the book off the side of the bed, grabbed the phone from my bedside table and glanced at the notification. It was from an unknown number. The message read: "Go to the window."

A million questions sprung up in my mind. Was this Jo? Or some stranger? If it was a stranger, how did they get my number? Why did they want me to look out the window? Should I ignore it? What harm would it do to check?

Finally, I looked up from my phone at the window. And again, there it was. The silhouette of a woman, wearing a long, flowing skirt.

Mesmerised, I felt myself getting out of bed, and walking towards the window. Part of me was screaming, telling myself to stop. But all I did was walk silently towards the window, and grab the corner of the curtain, ready to pull it back. I paused for a moment, transfixed by the silhouette.

As I began to pull back the curtain, I saw a familiar face staring back at me, but before I could react there was an ear-shattering smash of glass. I closed my eyes in shock, and felt shards of windowpane pierce my skin, as something crashed through the window, landing on top of me. I fell to the floor, surrounded by broken glass. When I finally dared to open my eyes, I saw her face. Jo's face. Her pupils were so large, her irises were barely visible. Her smile was no longer serene, it was full of hunger. As her red lips parted, I could see long, sharp, canine teeth protruding from her mouth, glinting in the dull orange light of the streetlamps. She was terrible and beautiful.

She leant down, so that her lips were right by my ear. She whispered, “You. You shall keep my legacy alive.” My eyes widened and my heart raced as realisation crashed over me like a tidal wave.

I felt a sharp, all-consuming pain between my neck and my shoulder, as Josephine Knightley sank her teeth into my flesh. Waves of agony crashed through me as she drank her fill. At last, she pulled away. She took a knife out of her satchel and drew it gently across her palm.

“Drink,” she said. Her voice was so soft, but I knew it was a command I could not refuse.

I drank as if I had been parched for days and was finally able to quench my thirst. When Josephine withdrew her hand, I felt sick and elated in equal measure. As I collapsed on the floor, I saw her stand up, walk over to my desk, and turn on my laptop. In moments, she had found my script. For a few minutes she read in silence, a small smile slowly creeping across her face.

“You and I have a lot to learn from each other, it seems,” she said, turning back to face me.

Before I finally passed out, I managed to whisper one last word:

“Yes.”

*[TAPE CLICK]*

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