

THE STREETS OF DARKNESS

“Look upon me and weep, little boy. See me as I really am.”

Meet Joe Druitt, your average fourteen-year-old: moody and grumpy, with a vocabulary of words of two syllables or fewer, and a loathing for school. It doesn't help that he can't read and has no friends.

He also lives in London, the world's greatest and most exciting city, not that Joe cares about that, living in the East End with his mum and nan in a run-down flat. He ignores the bustling metropolis that embraces people from all walks of life. But London is a place where the past, present, and legends meet to determine the future. Joe will learn that some legends just won't die, won't stay buried, and want to rule our future, especially when one of those legends is Jack the Ripper...

Joe cursed loudly as he scraped his hands over rough stone, feeling hot tears spring from his eyes as the blood ran down his wrist. He stumbled and fell to the floor under a spluttering gas lamp. Joe looked down at his hand and saw that the cut was deep, the skin pulled back almost like a smile. Pulling his hankie from his pocket, he bound the wound as tightly as he could, wincing as he did so.

And then he felt it.

Pressure hit him like a weight that pushed him to the ground. He struggled to move as he felt something pass over him. The Angel of Death? Hadn't he heard the story from the Bible when he was little? That the Angel of Death had killed all the first-born Egyptian boys? He wasn't an Egyptian and this wasn't the Bible, but this was surely death.

The darkness and coldness were intense, and Joe could hardly breathe. He felt the pressure increase around his neck and then he was thrown over, so he was facing upwards towards the black sky.

Some form was sitting on him! A form made of smoke, dirt, and filth. A shadowy form, much like before, but this time it was more distinct. It was human-shaped; wearing what appeared to be late Victorian evening wear, complete with a tall top hat. There were still no features; it was still like a thick mist.

“Well, told you I'd be seeing you again, boy.” Joe couldn't even scream, so heavy was the feeling on him. The voice was the same as before but stronger somehow.

“What do you think of my shape, eh? Good? I’ve been hearin’ all the news about me with interest. I seem to have caused quite a stir around here, much like I did centuries before. It’s a shame you cannot see my true form, but then it would drive you mad! They are calling me the ‘Ripper,’ the descendent of Spring-Heeled Jack, the mad son of Royalty. The pictures of me are wonderfully descriptive, which is why I rather like this shape. Noble, don’t you think? Or not?”

The shape paused, as if waiting for the stricken boy to answer. “Or can’t you talk?”

Joe struggled hard, but it was no use. He was going to die here, out of his time, and no one would know about it. Joe could feel the saliva in his mouth choking him and his eyes rolled helplessly in his head and the sound of thunder pounded in his ears.

“You can stop struggling,” the voice hissed in his ear. “I’m not going to kill you...yet. I’ve even let your friends live. I’ve got other things to play out in this Game and I need you alive. For now.”

Joe was flung through the air and landed with a thump against the wall. He felt his body crack as he slid down it and into merciful oblivion.