

BOOK CLUB DISCUSSION GUIDE

Just Out of Sight

A horror short story by C.R. Lang

Read the story free at 100acrespotlight.com/stories/just-out-of-sight/

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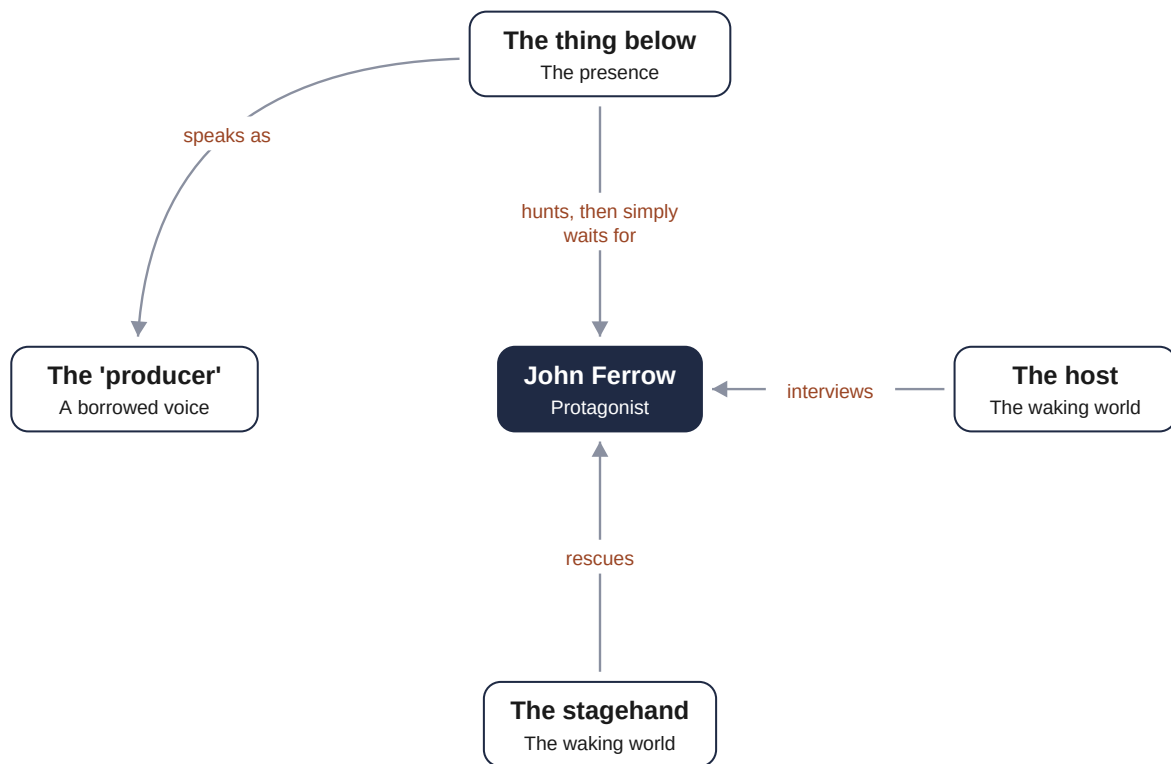
About the story

A struggling novelist steps away from a late-night TV taping for a breath of air and finds a corridor that keeps going down, beneath the stage, where something has been waiting a very long time and has learned to use his own voice.

This guide assumes everyone has finished the story, so it discusses the ending.

Character map

The main character is in the dark box. Arrows show who acts on whom.



Who's who

John Ferrow (Protagonist). A novelist after eleven years of books almost no one read, nervous before his first big TV appearance.

The thing below (The presence). Never fully seen. Clicks, breathes, mimics voices, and knows the answer John rehearsed alone.

The host (The waking world). Warm, smiling, and waiting for John to talk about his book.

The stagehand (The waking world). Pulls John back into the light and onto the stage.

The 'producer' (A borrowed voice). A friendly voice in the dark that repeats itself exactly, like a recording.

Themes to look for

The fear of being seen. John's dread of the cameras and the dread under the stage mirror each other. Both are about exposure.

Imitation. The creature learns by copying voices and words. What does it mean that it repeats John's own answer?

Above and below. Warm light and applause above, rot and darkness below, connected by a single door.

Patience. The monster never needs to catch John. Waiting is its whole strategy.

Discussion questions

- 1 John reads the invitation four times before he trusts it. How does his self-doubt set up everything that follows?
- 2 Why do you think none of the people in the old photographs are looking at the camera?
- 3 The 'producer' gives herself away by repeating her words exactly. What makes copied speech so unsettling?
- 4 What do the hundreds of tally marks on the pillar suggest about the thing below and about the people who came before John?
- 5 The creature whispers the answer John rehearsed in private. How did it learn it, and what does that say about how long it has been watching?
- 6 John escapes into the light, yet the story says the thing 'had only needed him to come back up.' What does it want from him?
- 7 How does the story use sound (clicking, dripping, distant applause) in place of showing the monster?
- 8 The novel John is promoting is 'about things that wait in the dark.' Is the story suggesting writers summon what they write about?
- 9 The last line has the creature speaking along with John. Who is really telling the story now?

Craft corner

For writers in the group: two ways to look at how the story is built.

Foreshadowing. Find the early details (the photographs, the slope of the floor) that warn us before John understands.

Show, don't tell. The monster is shown only through its effects. Pick one sentence and discuss what it makes you picture.

Try this together

Read the scene beneath the stage aloud with the lights dimmed. Then have each person write the one line the thing under the stage might say next, in the voice of someone else in the room.

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