The Viper

Written by Chris Klein

[Author's Note: Here we have an old, once funny campfire tale from my childhood, reimagined with a disturbing twist. Enjoy at your own (dis)comfort.]

NARRATOR/AIRPORT ATTENDANT - Moves the story along by providing context, helping set the scene(s), and setting the pace. Also providing subtle foreshadowing and sets an ominous mood with their voice.

JANE TYLER - A young, talented new winery sales rep who is eager to move up the company ladder by taking advantage of new client opportunities whenever she can.

THE 'VIPER' - A mysterious but oddly cheerful foreign man claiming to be a window wiper whose accent is hard to place, and whose motives are unclear but unsettling to think about.

ALAN - Jane's manager at work, trying to teach her everything he can in hopes she can step into his role someday at the company.

MALE HOTEL CLERK - Something seems off about this awkward but helpful man who checks Jane into the hotel; is he hiding something?

DEBRA - Hotel employee who is just as confused as Jane by what's been going on.

LOCATIONS: Modern Day

TRAVERSE CITY, MI - A relatively small city located near the tip of what would be the pinky finger in Michigan's mittenshaped state. It brings tourists all year for its natural beauty as well as its growing food & drink industry.

MIAMI, FL - One of the largest cities in the state, home to one of the country's largest party scenes. It is also right on the ocean and brings tourists year-round for its warm weather and large beaches.

Here we have the story of Jane Tyler, a young, talented sales rep who is eager to move up the company ladder at a new local winery in Michigan. It's one of the fastest growing in the region, taking on a record number of new corporate clients in big cities across the country.

Jane's boss, Alan, is an older gentleman who manages the sales team. He notices Jane's hard work and passion for building the winery's brand, and is proud of how she steps up to take on the work of meeting with new prospective clients. Usually, new clients are picked up first-come-first-serve from an updating database. And the team is always so good about covering the work together that Alan only pokes on them when he needs to.

(SFX: office noises & conversation in background)

ALAN

Hey Jane, would you mind taking on this new client that came in recently? It's been sitting too long, and we should get started with this one before too long. I know you haven't had much work while you're waiting for your other clients' feedback. I'll see who from the team we maybe can have help you so that we've got at least two heads on it.

JANE

Sure thing Alan. Can you send me the client file? I'll look at it right after lunch.

(pause: scene transition)

(SFX: muffled background TV noise)

NARRATOR

Jane was in another lull in workload as the Autumn season bloomed. The leaves on the trees had matured into a flavorful array of colors that blew through the chilly wind as they fell, bringing with it the smell of Lake Michigan.

Since she was able to get all her work done early this week, Alan had given Jane the option to take Friday off, or work from home if she wanted.

Late that Thursday evening, while Jane was on the couch watching TV, her phone went off with an email notification from the virtual sales board.

(SFX: notification tone)

JANE

(thinking out loud)

Hmm. That's late for a new client to pop up. I wonder who they are.

(SFX: tapping sounds, unlocking phone, opening email)

JANE (cont'd)

(surprised)

They want a meeting this Saturday!? That's in two days!

(contemplating)

Where are they even located ...

(brief pause)

(SFX: soft scrolling sounds)

JANE (cont'd)

(getting excited as she learns more, almost convincing herself to go)

Miami, Florida. Ooh sounds fun. I've always wanted to go there. It would certainly be nice to get out of this cold weather.

Let's see… First class tickets that fly out tomorrow… and the budget for food and drink expenses… whoa. It's like double the normal. You could really have a good time out on the town…, after finishing things up with the clients of course.

(brief pause)

Wow, this hotel that's booked is super fancy... way, waaaay fancier than usual. I wouldn't mind staying through Sunday, take Monday off instead. Alan would be fine with that.

(brief pause)

I've got nothing else going on this weekend. This could be a good opportunity to show Alan my work ethic.

Plus overtime... it's basically a paid minivacation. I don't really see any downsides here.

NARRATOR

Without hesitating further for fear of missing out, Jane submitted her response to the email.

(SFX: email send swoosh)

Within 30 seconds Jane's phone went off again ...

(SFX: same notification tone)

...with an email notifying her that the meeting and her bookings were taken care of.

NARRATOR (cont'd)

Since it was an evening flight, Jane slept in the following morning, went for a run, packed up, and made some changes to her new client presentation template so it was better tailored to the Miami venue before heading to the airport.

JANE

That's enough for now.

(SFX: laptop closes)

JANE (cont'd)

I'll have plenty of time to double check it when I get to the hotel.

NARRATOR

After landing at the Miami airport, Jane found her hotel's shuttle. She showed her reservation from her email to the driver and off they went.

(SFX: tires slowing to a stop)

By the time that Jane approached the beautifully extravagant hotel, the sun had long gone down. She could only see the front of the building by the greeting of a stunning light display. The entrance to the hotel looked spectacular. Its radiance shown in stark contrast to the seemingly empty, ink colored room windows above the shining ground floor.

(SFX: truck slowly pulling away)

As Jane walked inside, she was surprised to find the lobby to be completely empty. It was an emptiness that felt so cold compared to the warmth of the weather she enjoyed since stepping off the plane.

As she approached the check in desk, she noticed that an awkward, disheveled looking man had appeared as if out of nowhere. Jane was sure he hadn't been standing there when she first looked.

NARRATOR (cont'd)

When she finally reached the desk, the man was saying something under his breath, but Jane couldn't seem to understand what it was.

JANE

Uhm... sorry ... what ... what did you just say?

HOTEL CLERK

(skittish)

I said hello miss. How may I help you? Are you checking in?

NARRATOR

Jane noticed that his uniform looked like it was put on in a hurry, and his name tag appeared to be upside down. It was labeled... Debra?

JANE

Good evening, and yes, I am. Checking in for Jane Tyler. Thank you...Debra

HOTEL CLERK

(oddly defensive / inquisitive)

Excuse me ...?

JANE

(trying to lighten the mood) Your name tag... it says 'Debra' ...?

HOTEL CLERK

(lightening up, but evasive tone)

Hmmm, guess it does. Nobody's mentioned it to me yet.

JANE

I won't tell if you don't.

NARRATOR

Jane winked at the guy.

HOTEL CLERK

(*an almost unsettling chuckle*)

Thanks, that would probably be a good idea... (trails off)

(brief pause)

(SFX: keyboard typing)

HOTEL CLERK (cont'd)

Miss? Or is that Mrs.? How would you like it if I was to upgrade your room to a penthouse suite? Free of charge of course

JANE

(mix of light-hearted and cautious)

That would be amazing, thank you so much! And it's *Miss* Tyler, definitely not Mrs. haha.

HOTEL CLERK

Not a problem Miss, it would be my pleasure. I assume that you'll only need one room key then?

JANE

(cautiously)

Oh ... yes ... just one will be fine ... thanks.

NARRATOR

They finished everything at the counter and the guy handed Jane a card key. As she turned to head for the elevators, Jane could have sworn she heard the man say something again under his breath.

(SFX: suspenseful music/tones begin)

As Jane turned around to ask what he had said ...

JANE

(mostly confused and a little unsettled) Excuse me, what did you... (going quiet)

NARRATOR

...she lost her words.

The lobby was completely empty again, and colder than ever. As mysteriously as he had appeared, the figure was gone, leaving Jane standing there alone, feeling confused and unnerved.

(SFX: Noise-cancelling tones)

Soon, the silence in the lobby became almost deafening in Jane's ears as a shiver went down her spine.

(SFX: background music/noises begin changing subtly)

NARRATOR (cont'd)

Breaking out of her trance, she quickly headed upstairs and found her room on the 13th floor.

It was a beautiful suite with a king-sized bed, 70-inch smart TV, a spa bathroom, mini kitchen, designer patterns on the walls, and a large window - from which Jane was sure she would be able to see the ocean in the morning sun.

After soaking in the lit-up shoreline, she closed the curtains, threw on the TV for background noise, and pulled out her laptop to give her client presentation one last check over.

(SFX: faint/muffled movie background noise)

JANE

Nothing like these old classic movies on the channels only hotels pay for as white noise.

I kinda wish it was an old western though. What's this called... Dead of Night... hmmm... never seen it. But I guess it'll do.

NARRATOR

About 5 minutes later, the hotel room phone rang with a heavy sound that felt almost out of another time.

(SFX: old telephone ringtone)

Jane put the receiver to her ear. What little noise she could hear, sounded broken and as if it was coming from far away.

JANE

Uuumm...hello?

Nobody answered.

(pause)

Thinking the signal must be bad or that there was maybe something wrong with the old phone system, Jane was about to put the phone back down, but she heard something that made her stop.

(SFX: glitching-static noise)

VIPER

(voice is glitching too)

This is the Viper. I'm on the 2nd floor. I'm coming up

NARRATOR

As Jane put down the phone, a little annoyed and confused, she noticed how much older it looked than the rest of the technology in the suite.

JANE

That probably was meant for the front desk or a service team or something...

Geez, this is a really old phone. I bet hardly anybody uses it but still... why haven't they upgraded it yet?

NARRATOR

About 20 minutes later, when Jane was checking her pie charts on slide 15, the phone rang again.

(SFX: same old telephone ringtone)

She hesitated for a moment but decided to pick it up.

JANE

(wavering confidence)

Hello?

(SFX: longer pause of same glitching-static noise)

VIPER

(voice is slightly more discernible)

This is the Viper. I'm on the $5^{\rm th}$ floor. I'm coming up

NARRATOR

Disturbed, Jane quickly hung up the phone.

(SFX: phone clicking sound)

JANE

(to herself)

What the hell is going on? I'm going to call the lobby and figure out what's up. This is fucking weird.

NARRATOR

Jane tried for over 10 minutes to reach the front desk. But every time she hit the lobby button and held the receiver to her ear, all she heard was the busy signal.

(SFX: telephone busy signal - fade in and out)

Figuring that other guests were already clogging the phone lines to complain as well, Jane decided to get back to her presentation. She wanted to finish so she could go to bed and get a good night of sleep.

(pause)

(SFX: light typing and mouse scrolling + muffled movie background)

NARRATOR (cont'd)

Jane had put the calls out of her mind and was close to finishing her touchups when the phone rang again.

(SFX: old telephone ringtone)

JANE

(questioning)

Hello? Is this the front desk? I tried calling earlier for like 5 minutes, but the lines were all busy. Do you know what is going on with the phones?

(SFX: longest pause of same glitchy-static noise)

VIPER

(voice is glitching less, but still offputting)

This is the Viper. I'm on the $11^{\rm th}$ floor. I'm coming up

NARRATOR

Getting even more freaked out and now a little upset, Jane started to yell back at the voice...

JANE

(freaked out, but demanding of answers) Hey! What the hell is going on!? Who the hell are you!?

(SFX: interrupted by audible click)

But the voice had hung up. Jane decided that she had had enough, she was going to call the front desk again. But same as before...all she got was busy signals.

(SFX: old telephone busy signal - fade in and out)

JANE

(unsettled, but trying to rationalize)

Okay, okay. I bet everyone is getting the same call and people are still complaining like earlier. That's why the line must be so busy... right?

But just in case ...

(SFX: eerie tones/rhythm/music begins)

NARRATOR

Jane got out from under the covers and immediately double locked the door, turned off the TV, and checked that the blinds were completely closed. Then she grabbed her laptop and took it into the bathroom with her to finish up her review, turning off the room light as she closed the bathroom door.

JANE

(nervously debating herself)

Fuck, I'm being so paranoid! Am I crazy!?

I can't stay in here forever. I should go down to the lobby or something. Maybe there will be a different clerk who knows what's going on.

No no no, wait. I don't know where this weirdo is, I don't want to meet him on my way down. I think I should just wait it out...at least for a little bit.

Shit! I left my phone on the charger!

The next 15 minutes felt like hours as Jane sat, crouched in the bathtub with the curtain drawn, not daring to leave, with only the icy light of her computer screen to illuminate the space. Forgetting the report, she tried surfing the internet, adrenaline spiked and in a mad panic, for anything weird related to 'the Viper' in Miami.

JANE

(nervous & agitated)

Why are the only articles I can find about exotic pet store accidents!?

NARRATOR

Jane was just about to search for some self-defense techniques when she heard it ...

(SFX- muffled glass tapping, slightly louder)

Jane slowly edged out of the bathtub, quietly set her laptop down, and gently put her ear to the gap under the bathroom door.

When she heard it again, she became paralyzed with fear.

(SFX- muffled glass tapping, slightly louder)

JANE

(internally) (scared)

I can hear it... But it's not coming from the door. It sounds further away.

NARRATOR

This time she could tell which direction the sound was coming from. The sound that froze Jane down to her core wasn't coming from the door. It was coming from...

(SFX- muffled glass tapping, slightly louder) (right-side directional audio)

JANE

(internally) (scared)

The window!

(SFX: dramatic eerie music flare)

(pause)

JANE

(terrified, internally thinking, panicking more)

This isn't happening! This can't be happening! This is the top floor... the...13th floor... No no nooo, you've got to be fucking kidding me!

(terrified, internally thinking, panicking more)

This isn't happening! This can't be happening! This is the top floor... the...13th floor... No no nooo, you've got to be fucking kidding me!

(pause)

Thank god I closed the blinds before I came in here.

(SFX- muffled glass tapping, slightly louder)

NARRATOR

Feeling possessed, Jane decided to go try and peak through the curtains. Maybe it was courage, maybe it wasn't. Part of it almost felt like desperation. Whatever it was, Jane had to know what was causing the sound.

She quietly opened the bathroom door and started carefully making her way to the window by silently sliding on her hands and knees, making sure to not bang into anything along the way. By the time she got to the window, Jane's compulsion had turned into dread. She felt as though something sinister was just inches away, on the other side of the glass, waiting for her.

NARRATOR (cont'd)

When she heard it next ...

(SFX- muffled glass tapping, slightly louder)

...she felt that same, unnatural & unexplainable compulsion pulling her up onto her feet and puppeteering her hands to the curtains, opening them in one fluid movement.

(pause)

(SFX- dramatic eerie music flare)

NARRATOR

At first, all Jane could see were two bright white eyes and a wide, toothy smile staring back at her. As her eyes quickly adjusted, she noticed that they were attached to the face of a disturbing looking man with an overly large smile, standing on something that was hard to make out, a platform maybe. He had a squeegee in his hand and his mouth slowly opened to say something.

VIPER

(muffled through glass, no longer static-y) (cheerful, but creepy)

Hello there! I am the Vindow Viper! I am finally here!

NARRATOR

Petrified, Jane almost tripped backwards onto the bed before catching herself. Even though his voice was muffled by the glass, his voice had a strange cheer to it. There seemed something off about him, but Jane couldn't place her finger on it.

She sat down on the bed and grabbed a couple of mini bottles of bourbon from the fridge to calm her nerves. The first bottle went down in one gulp and her heart slowed as she was swathed in a warm alcohol blanket.

(SFX- squeegee wiping window)

NARRATOR (cont'd)

Deciding the ridiculous price was worth it, Jane savored the second bottle and started to think to herself about everything she just went through. How could a luxury hotel like this allow such a terrifying experience to happen to one of their guests? And who in the world has the windows cleaned at night?

She got up suddenly from the bed, not looking at the man in the window and put herself together to go yell at that guy from the lobby.

(SFX - elevator ding + doors opening)

(SFX - soft lobby music growing in volume)

Jane got down to the lobby, wearing the hotel slippers, about ready to tear that guy from earlier a new one. But she noticed someone else was standing behind the front desk.

(SFX - soft lobby music blurred in background)

DEBRA

Good evening miss, is there something I can help you with?

JANE

(reigning in her temper)

Hi. Yes. Can you please explain why the hell you have a window washer scheduled for this late at night?

DEBRA

(confused)

I... uhh... I'm sorry miss, but what are you talking about?

JANE

(still angry)

The guy, the window wiper guy who is cleaning my room window right now! He repeatedly called my room. Then he kept knocking on my window and scared the shit out of me when I opened the curtains!

DEBRA

Miss... I'm sorry but are you sure you're not confused? Maybe you were having a weird dream We only have washers come once a month, and they were already here on Monday.

And we would never schedule them at night! That would be awfully rude to the guests, and hard for the workers to see... are you sure you're not mistaken?

JANE

(slightly confused but still angry)

I'm not, I swear! My room's phone rang with weird calls from this wiper guy, several times. I thought they were some kind of service call. And every time I tried to call the lobby; I just got a busy tone. I assumed that everyone else was getting the calls too and were already calling down here to complain.

I mean... the guy who checked me in tonight... He was acting weird... he was said something. But I couldn't really hear him, and he was gone before

DEBRA

(nervously confused)

What man? We're an all-women staff. We have been for a while. I'm sorry miss, but no men work the front desk.

JANE

(confused and worried, trying to recall anything important)

The guy... uhm... the kind of awkward one... He was the only person in the lobby when I got here, and he checked me in.

He uhhh... He upgraded me to the penthouse for free, and I thought he was kind of nice... His uniform didn't look very nice but...

(remembering)

Oh! And his name tag... it was upside down... and it said Debra... we both... laughed about it ...

DEBRA

Miss… <u>my</u> name is Debra…

NARRATOR

Jane looked down to see the letters D-E-B-R-A engraved in the tag upon the woman's lapel. It looked identical to what she had seen earlier, but this time it was the right way up.

DEBRA

I couldn't find my badge when I came in so I'm wearing the spare one I keep in my car.

I've been down here for the last hour without leaving, and the phones have been silent all night. None of the phones in any of the penthouse suites were used in that time either.

(brief pause)

DEBRA (cont'd)

I can call my manager and see if she knows anything more if you'd like?

Jane gave one look at the woman's nervous face and decided that she needed to get the hell out of there as fast as possible. Determining to focus, she addressed the clerk.

JANE

(dropping it, scared but focused)

No thanks, I'm fine. But I'd like to change the duration of my stay.

I'd like to checkout now. Like right now. I'm getting the hell out of here. And can you have the airport shuttle out front in 5 minutes?

NARRATOR

Jane started resolutely walking back to the elevators.

DEBRA

(volume trailing off at end - Jane is walking away) Uhm, sure thing Miss, but could you please tell me...?

NARRATOR

But Jane didn't hear her as she was already getting in the elevator. She was now laser focused, running on a renewed supply of fear and adrenaline. She wasn't going to waste any more time getting out of there.

When she got back to her suite, the man in the window was gone. She immediately closed the curtains and began packing. In record time Jane was standing by the door handle, trying to decide on making one last check-over.

Opening the door, still not looking back, Jane's body tingled with the same sense that something sinister was outside her window, watching her. Not looking back, she flung the door open and bolted downstairs. When she got back to the lobby, Debra stopped her with a piece of paper in hand.

DEBRA

I know you want to get out of here, and rightfully so, but I think you should have this. I don't know... maybe you'll need it... hopefully not.

JANE

What is it?

DEBRA

I don't want to scare you anymore, but I pulled up all of today's check-ins on the computer... and it doesn't show your information at all. It doesn't even show the room was being used by anyone. But...

JANE

But what?

DEBRA

It does show that \underline{two} room keys were coded to the door. Did you have...

JANE

(cutting her off, scared)

I only had one room key

NARRATOR

Debra gave Jane a worried look, wanting to figure out what was going on. But she could tell from Jane's face that there was no stopping her until she was far away. So she said nothing as Jane climbed into the shuttle and took off for the airport. (SFX: sound of bus pulling away)

(pause)

NARRATOR (cont'd)

When Jane arrived at the airport, she headed straight for the check-in desk.

(SFX: airport background noises)

AIRPORT CLERK

How may I help you this evening?

JANE

(same scared but focused tone as back in hotel)

I need the first ticket to Michigan. Anywhere in Michigan. Whatever is the soonest flight out of here.

AIRPORT CLERK

Sure thing. Let me just take a look at the flight schedule here.

(SFX: keyboard typing pause)

Airport Clerk

Ahh, looks like the soonest one is the "midnighter" to Detroit that takes off in about an hour. Does that work for you?

JANE

Sure, whatever seat is available, I don't care. Just get me the hell out of here

(SFX: Airport terminal background noise)

As Jane waited for her flight to board, she called her boss Alan at his cell number. When he answered it, it sounded like he had been woken up.

ALAN

(sleepy)

Huh...hello? Jane? Jane, what the hell is going on? What time is it?

NARRATOR

Jane began retelling the entire series of events to Alan, everything from the awkward guy who checked her in to the penthouse, to the weird calls. Jane was in hysterics from sheer nerves as she got to the part where she came out of the bathroom and saw the window wiper behind the curtain. The spine-tingling dread she felt, she could not put into words.

She was crying by the time she got through the experience with the other clerk at the front desk named Debra. It seemed like nobody could help her.

JANE

(panic crying)

I'm sorry about the clients Alan, but I can't go back, and I can't stay here. I have to come home, I'm freaking out. I'm sorry, we'll have to reschedule them for later with someone else.

ALAN

(less sleepy & more confused, but trying to comfort)

Don't worry about anything Jane, you've been working your ass off lately. I thought you were meant to take a break this weekend.

I'm not sure I entirely understand everything of what you said, but I believe you know what you're doing. Come in later on Monday and we'll get to the bottom of things. You can take the rest of the week off after that to relax and take care of yourself.

NARRATOR

Jane flew home and arrived very early in the morning Saturday before the sun had come up. There was a heaviness in the air that was more than just the morning fog. When she got home, Jane collapsed on the bed, exhausted from all the nerves and adrenaline.

It was late in the day she woke up in a panic. As if the whole series of events was only an unfortunate nightmare. She began to question everything and spent the whole weekend peeking out the windows to see if someone... or some...thing... was coming for her.

(pause)

But nothing out of the ordinary happened, and Jane began to calm down and think that it was all ... really... just a nightmare.

(pause)

(SFX: office background noise)

She arrived at work at her usual time Monday morning, feeling like everything was back to normal as the sales team were going about their typical business. That feeling was soon extinguished by the look in Alan's eyes when he saw her. As she approached him, Alan looked even more nervous and worried from up-close.

ALAN

Jane, I uhh... I thought you were coming in later.

(pause)

Are we still going to talk about ... about ...

JANE

(exhausted panic returning)

About what happened? So it wasn't just a nightmare... was it?

ALAN

Well it didn't sound that way when you called me in the middle of the night. I'm sorry.

Let's go to my office so we can talk about this in private.

(pause)

(SFX: office door closes, muffling background noise)

NARRATOR

Jane started telling Alan about how she was going to take Friday off as planned, but she got the email for the potential new clients in Miami. She explained how all of the premium services and trip details made her want to take it, and that she thought she would take the following Friday off instead.

But Alan knew nothing about these new clients.

ALAN

I'm sorry Jane, but I... I'm not sure which clients you're talking about. We don't have any down in Florida.

JANE

But...

ALAN

I even checked the whole client board twice on Friday while I was here. I do it every week.

JANE

Shit! I left my laptop at home today, but I've got all the emails with everything on my phone still. Let me pull them up and show you.

(SFX: smartphone sounds - unlocking, opening mail, scrolling, tapping)

NARRATOR

As Jane scrolled through her company email inbox on her phone, she couldn't find anything related to the clients or the trip. She tried searching keywords like 'Miami' and 'boarding pass', but nothing came up, not even her hotel reservation. It's as if any trace of the trip ever happening was wiped from her phone.

Suddenly remembering, Jane fumbled through her purse to give Alan the check-in list Debra had printed out and started to search for the number of the hotel.

Just before she hit the dial button her phone, it rang - with an unknown caller ID.

(SFX: cellphone ringtone)

JANE

(nervous)

H...H...Hell...Hello...?

(SFX: same glitching-static noise as at hotel)

VIPER

(Voice is glitching too, but clearest it's ever been)

This is the Viper. I'm in the lobby. I'm coming up