

# The Legend of the Faceless Ghost [B2]

Una storia piena di suspense sullo sfondo del fascino enigmatico del Giappone che confonde i confini tra la realtà e il soprannaturale.



As the train **departed** Tokyo Station for Niigata, Brian relaxed into his first-class **carriage** seat. He'd been in Japan for two weeks on business, and sometimes he missed his life in London. However, he appreciated the etiquette that was an essential quality of Japanese culture, the gentle nature and the reservedness of the people there. So he was surprised when, at the next station, an **elderly** man sat beside him and initiated a conversation with him. "Konbanwa," said the man, which Brian knew meant "good evening". He returned the **greeting** and was about to explain that he didn't speak much Japanese when the man spoke again, but in English. "You look like a film star," he said. "Hugh Grint?" "Hugh Grant," said Brian, and laughed. "I hear that often." The man **nodded**, appearing satisfied. "You here on business?" he asked. "Yes," replied Brian. "Well, I was, but I'm going to a festival in Niigata before returning to England." "Ah," said the man, "you want to experience Japanese culture. Well, I have some culture for you." The man looked around, as if worried about being **overheard**, before continuing in a lower voice. "You are on the Jōetsu Shinkansen line, and people say it's

**haunted** by a noppera-bō." "A what?" asked Brian. He knew Japan had a rich mythology and he was interested in hearing more. The man produced some paper and a pen and wrote down the word. "Noppera-bō," he repeated. "When we first see them, they appear as normal humans. Sometimes they impersonate someone familiar to us. But then their **features** disappear. They become faceless." "A faceless ghost!" said Brian, and **shuddered**. "That sounds terrifying." "Terrifying, yes," said the man, with a **grave** expression. "People who see them are terrified, sometimes to the point that they **collapse** and die." Brian forced a laugh, in an attempt **to lighten the mood**. "Well, that's one cultural experience I think I can live without," he said. The man **nodded** again, then got up and walked away, even though the train was still between stations. Brian waited for him to return to his seat, but he didn't. And when the train arrived at the next station, he didn't see him get off the train onto the platform. Where had he gone? To satisfy his curiosity, Brian walked through the first-class section of the train, and then through all sixteen **carriages**, searching for the man. He even waited at the doors of occupied restrooms to see if he would emerge, but he didn't. It was as if he had **disappeared into thin air**. Brian returned to his seat, telling himself the man must have got off at the previous station; he simply hadn't seen him. But as the train traversed the dark countryside, he couldn't stop thinking about him, and, more precisely, about the story he'd **recounted**, about the noppera-bō. He told himself it was just a story, but as other passengers got on and off the train or passed by him in the **carriage**, he couldn't stop himself looking at them, examining their faces, searching for a face that he recognised, a face that was familiar to him. "Sometimes they impersonate someone familiar to us," the man had said, "but then their **features** disappear. They become faceless." Brian **shuddered** again, then **reprimanded** himself for being so stupid. He didn't normally believe in the paranormal. Of course he didn't, he was a serious businessman. He rationalised that it was the exceptional circumstances that he was in that were making him susceptible to such fantasy: being alone on a train at night, far from home, in a country that he still found very mysterious. And yet, he couldn't stop feeling **relieved** when the train approached the final station, Niigata. He returned his book, which he'd been too distracted to read, to his bag, and then got up to use the restroom. By now, his mood was lighter and

he laughed at himself for being so worried about a ghost, a faceless ghost. How ridiculous! He washed his hands, staring down into the perfectly round metal sink. As he finished, he glanced up in the mirror — and froze in horror. The reflection showed not his face, the face that was so often compared to that of Hugh Grant, but a flat, featureless, flesh-coloured surface. He tried to scream with a mouth that wasn't there, but the only scream, as he collapsed in terror, was inside his faceless head.

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# Glossary

- **to lighten the mood** = alleggerire la tensione
- **reprimanded** = rimproverare
- **staring** = fissare
- **flat** = glance
- **nodded** = annuire
- **haunted** = stregata
- **grave** = seria, preoccupata
- **glanced up** = alzare lo sguardo
- **carriage** = vagone
- **elderly** = anziano
- **greeting** = saluto
- **features** = lineamenti
- **shuddered** = rabbrivire
- **disappeared into thin air** = svanire nell'aria
- **sink** = lavandino
- **departed** = partire
- **overheard** = origliare
- **collapse** = crollare, collassare
- **recounted** = raccontare
- **relieved** = sollevato