

AUDIENCE WITH THE GHOST FINDER

M. J. STARLING

after William Hope Hodgson and H. P. Lovecraft

includes the play and the stories that inspired it

2nd edition

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Just to make things complicated, the original Carnacki short stories by William Hope Hodgson (in Volume Two of this ebook) are in the public domain — so those you can do with as you will.

Performing the play

If you'd like to put on a production of *Audience with the Ghost Finder*, you'll need my permission. It probably won't be hard to get. I'll probably be ecstatic that someone wants to pay me the compliment of performing my work. But I like to know when these things are happening, and if your production is commercial and aims to turn a profit, I'd appreciate the opportunity to negotiate my cut.

You can contact me by email (mj@mjstarling.com), on Twitter (@MJStarling), or find me in various other internet places, all catalogued at www.mjstarling.com.

¹ <http://creativecommons.org/licenses/by-nc-nd/3.0/>

Acknowledgements

Audience with the Ghost Finder probably wouldn't exist if Anna Schwind, Dave Thompson, Ann Leckie and the rest of the editorial staff at *PodCastle*², the fantasy fiction podcast, hadn't run *The Whistling Room* by William Hope Hodgson in October 2010. Their choice of Paul S. Jenkins as narrator was definitely a factor too; he is still the voice of the Carnacki in my head. I listen to *PodCastle* every week for entertainment and mind-expansion purposes, and so should you.

Thanks to the free e-texts provided by Project Gutenberg³ and Forgotten Futures⁴, the scientific romance role-playing game, I was able to devour the rest of the Carnacki stories within days of discovering *The Whistling Room*. If they'd been harder to get hold of, I might have prioritised another project, and *Audience with the Ghost Finder* would probably still be a half-formed idea in the back of a notebook somewhere.

Blackshaw Theatre's New Writing Nights⁵ gave me the supportive environment and constructive feedback I needed to develop the play. Blackshaw are such professionals and such irrepressible theatre-lovers that I had absolutely no qualms handing the full text over to them to produce when they asked. Ellie Pitkin, Managing and Artistic Director, and Vikki Weston, Strategy and Planning Manager, were also kind enough to contribute to this e-text.

I have photographer Nivine Keating⁶ and graphic designer Bruce Asher⁷ to thank for the cover of this e-text, which features Alexander Pankhurst as Carnacki and Ceridwen Smith as Dodgson.

And finally, I want to thank Rudy Rucker⁸, Nick Thacker⁹ and Chris Walters¹⁰, without whose free online guides to compiling ebooks, producing this one would have caused me a great deal more stress.

² <http://podcastle.org/2010/10/05/podcast-125-the-whistling-room/>

³ <http://www.gutenberg.org/ebooks/10832>

⁴ <http://www.forgottenfutures.com/game/ff4/index.htm>

⁵ <http://www.blackshawonline.com/newwriting>

⁶ <http://www.morrighanimages.co.uk/>

⁷ <http://www.bruceasher.co.uk/>

⁸ <http://www.rudyrucker.com/blog/2012/04/20/do-it-yourself-ebooks-1-getting-started/>

⁹ <http://www.livehacked.com/writing/scrivener-the-ultimate-guide-to-exporting-ebooks-kindle-epub-etc/>

¹⁰ <http://booksprung.com/how-to-format-a-screenplay-or-drama-for-the-kindle>

Volume One: The play

Foreword

I am lucky enough to have worked with plenty of talented, interesting and erudite individuals – none more so than Mr M. J. Starling. When an early draft of *Audience with the Ghost Finder* was submitted to a Blackshaw New Writing Night¹¹ in 2011, I knew he was on to something.

I'd never heard of Carnacki, but he felt immediately familiar – although that first draft was only the first scene of the play, there was already a clear drawing of Carnacki's intelligence, his curiosity; his madness. It was also full of more stage business than was humanly possible to perform. The combination of character, and staging challenges, piqued my interest. I bagsied the piece to direct myself, and am ever so terribly pleased that I did.

Blackshaw's New Writing Nights are all about offering writers constructive and specific feedback to help them develop and refine their work. This is exactly what M. J. Starling did, returning to a later New Writing Night in 2012 with a second draft. Again, I directed the scene, and loved it – Dodgson and Carnacki had excellent chemistry (not like that... or maybe like that?!) and the dialogue was engaging, funny, bursting with possibilities. I wanted to get my hands on the full script.

When we decided to take a theatrical double bill of new writing to the Wandsworth Arts Festival & Fringe¹² 2013, I thought of *Ghost Finder* immediately. How brilliant would it be to bring a piece that we've seen develop from the safe, nurturing New Writing Nights, to full production? Not only that, but the timing was perfect – with the booming success of *Doctor Who* and *Sherlock*, Carnacki was another madman waiting to take centre stage, and the general public, by storm. MJ was game, it was on.

The script was box-fresh, it needed a test run and final tweaks before being stage-ready. So, we held a super professional table read. In my kitchen. In Tooting. Theatre is very glamorous. I and other Blackshaw committee members/associates guffawed, snorted, gasped, and squealed our way through the script (and a couple of bottles of wine). It was a fringe theatre dream at 75 minutes and a bit of something for everyone.

Alexander Pankhurst had played Carnacki at both New Writing Night performances, but I still insisted on putting him through his paces, auditioning him alongside tens of other male actors. He won the role hands down. Ceridwen Smith is a fantastically gifted actress, and was a natural choice for the demanding multi-role part of Dodgson, Florence and Mrs Allenby.

I felt like the script gave me all the clues I needed in terms of 'artistic vision' – the characters jump off the page, it is written in such a way that all the props can be kept inside Carnacki's instrument trunk, and Dodgson/Florence/Mrs Allenby can triple up. The tripling of characters is really director's choice, but I felt quite strongly that if we could pull it off, it would be invaluable in creating the ab-natural world where

¹¹ <http://www.blackshawonline.com/newwriting>

¹² <http://wandsworthartsfestival.com/>

anything could happen. I also made the decision to perform the piece in the round. Bold? Foolish? Perhaps. For *Ghost Finder* it really worked – it was intimate, it felt a bit like a séance, and the audience could see each other – they really were living through Dodgson and Carnacki's night in the pentacle. The other advantage of course, was that this was an excellent set up for a room above a pub – this piece really is portable.

We decided from the off, that we needed to firmly establish the ab-natural rules of the piece – when the actors could step outside the pentacle's confines, when they could move objects in or out of the circle, how costume changes would be possible when the action bounces seamlessly back and forth across the story's chronology. Our excellent designer, Zahra Mansouri, was essential to marrying logistics (impossibly quick costume/set changes) and vision (a fluid, free-flowing switch from scene to scene and character to character).

Once the rules were in place, the actors and I had a great time playing – the script demands some serious tongue-twisting banter, and we used all manner of methods to hone the actors' very niche ability to perform fast-paced dialogue whilst chalking a floor pentacle, and lighting candles. No transferable skills here, I'm afraid.

This first run of *Audience with the Ghost Finder* was very well received. It is with eager anticipation that I look forward to this script getting more attention – so many possibilities! That New Writing Night in 2011 was the beginning of a beautiful friendship – *Audience with the Ghost Finder* and I are in it for the long haul, if it'll have me.

Ellie Pitkin

Managing and Artistic Director, Blackshaw Theatre Company

July 2013

Audience with the Ghost Finder

Story and script by M. J. Starling, with liberal borrowings from public domain works by William Hope Hodgson and H. P. Lovecraft

Dramatis personae.

Protagonists.

Thomas Carnacki, the ghost finder. Late 30s. Hale.

William Dodgson, a compatriot of Carnacki's. Mid-30s. Earnest.

Supporting characters.

Mrs Judith Allenby, philanthropist. Late 30s. Formidable.

Miss Florence Allenby, debutante. Late teens. Prickly.

Preset.

The year 1912. Thomas Carnacki's experimenting room, part of his apartments at 427, Cheyne Walk, Chelsea, London. Evening.

Carnacki sits cross-legged on his instrument trunk. His eyes are closed. He is deep in concentration. Throughout the preset he murmurs the following mantra:

Colpriziana, Offina, Alta, Nestera, Fuaro, Menuet.

Alim, Jehoh, Jehovah, Agla, On, Tetragrammaton.

Adon, Schadai, Eligon, Amanai, Elion, Pneumaton, Elii, Alnoal, Mess as, Ja, Heynaan, Tetragrammaton.

Adonai, Zeboth, Adon, Schadai, Elion, Tetragrammaton, Eloï, Elohim, Messias, Ja, Hagios, Ho Theos.

Around his neck: a belt of garlic.

Tied to his wrist: a curious talisman made of feathers.

In his pockets: a box of matches; a loaded revolver; and a piece of parchment, blank on one side and covered on the other with illegible, esoteric script in strange violet ink.

In the trunk: another belt of garlic; some chalk; a measuring-tape; a jar of water, sealed with wax and parchment over a rubber stopper; five church candles; half a bottle of good whisky; two tumblers; and the components of the Electric Pentacle (a battery, wires, five short and five long vacuum tubes).

Act One.

Carnacki. *Murmurs.* Colpriziana, Offina, Alta, Nestera, Fuaro, Menuet.

Alim, Jehoh, Jehovah, Agla, On, Tetragrammaton.

Adon, Schadai, Eligon, Amanai, Elion, Pneumaton, Elii, Alnoal, Mess as, Ja, Heynaan, Tetragrammaton.

Adonai, Zeboth, Adon, Schadai, Elion, Tetragrammaton, Eloï, Elohim, / Messias, Ja, Hagios, Ho Theos.

Dodgson. *Enters, carrying a lantern. In his pocket: a cigarette case and a box of matches. Dithers.*

Carnacki. Colpriziana, Offina, Alta, Nestera, Fuaro, Menuet.

Alim, / Jehovah—

Dodgson. *Clears his throat.*

Carnacki. *Starts. Opens his eyes.* Dodgson.

Dodgson. Carnacki, you old fraud. I hope I'm not interrupting / anything.

Carnacki. How did you get in?

Dodgson. Your front door wasn't latched.

Carnacki. And that lantern. Where did you get / that lantern?

Dodgson. Oh, I borrowed it from the porter next door. None of your lights seem to be working.

Carnacki. No. I disconnected them all.

Dodgson. Look, if you're in the middle of something, / I can come back—

Carnacki. No, no, for heaven's sake don't go anywhere. You're late enough as it is.
/ Hops off the trunk and opens it.

Dodgson. I came as soon as I got your card.

Carnacki. Which was when?

Dodgson. Must have been just gone five.

Carnacki. And what time is it now?

Dodgson. Not long after six. Are your clocks not working either?

Carnacki. Can't trust them. Can't trust myself to read them right, rather. Here, you'd better wear this. *Tosses Dodgson a belt of garlic from the trunk.*

Dodgson. Whatever for?

Carnacki. *Rummaging in the trunk for the chalk and measuring-tape.* Just a precaution. I doubt you're in any danger. Just put it on, there's a good chap, for my peace of mind.

Dodgson. *Hangs the garlic around his neck.* Have I got the wrong end of the stick here, Carnacki? Only when I / got your card, I—

Carnacki. Oh, you'd better stick some in your ears, too.

Dodgson. I beg your pardon?

Carnacki. Garlic. Just peel a bit and plug your ears with it. / *Mutters.* You oughtn't to be able to hear it, but best to be safe.

Dodgson. *Picking at one of the garlic bulbs.* I'm not sure about all this, Carnacki. When I got your card I expected the usual thing, you know, dinner, whisky, and a yarn round the fire.

Carnacki. You'll have whisky and a yarn before the night's out. Come here, quick, help, before we lose the light.

Dodgson. *Approaches.* Help with what?

Carnacki. *Hands Dodgson one end of the measuring-tape and positions him in the centre of the room.* And douse that lantern.

Dodgson. But it's getting dark.

Carnacki. *Steps away, unrolling his end of the measuring-tape.* Stand on your end, would you?

Dodgson. *Obeys. / Puts down the lantern, still lit, liberates a clove of garlic, splits it, and plugs his ears with it.*

Carnacki. *Using the measuring-tape, begins to chalk out a circle on the floor around himself, Dodgson, and the trunk. The circle takes up most of the space. He is careful never to step outside the line he is drawing.*

Dodgson. Are you...? You are, aren't you?

Carnacki. What?

Dodgson. Constructing a barrier. A—a defence against the supernatural.

Carnacki. Ab-natural. But yes. Perceptive of you. Shift the trunk for me, would you?

Dodgson. *Lifts the trunk over the measuring-tape so Carnacki can complete the circle.* What exactly are you expecting to happen here tonight?

Carnacki. If the barrier holds, nothing.

Dodgson. But it's possible it won't? What / kind of apparition—

Carnacki. Listen, Dodgson, you'll have the whole tale before long, but I can't be easy until we're both properly protected. / *Completes the chalk circle. Plucks a bulb of garlic from the belt around his neck and crushes it between his palms. Begins smudging a broad smear of garlic around the circle, just outside the chalk line.*

Dodgson. *Rolling up the measuring-tape.* Oh, no, of course. I'm sorry. It's just unexpected, that's all.

Carnacki. Not to worry. Just sit tight. I'll not be much longer.

Dodgson. Perhaps I can help.

Carnacki. There's really no need.

Dodgson. We'll be protected that much sooner. It's a Water Circle you're constructing, isn't it?

Carnacki. *Pauses smudging.* You've been studying the Sigsand manuscript?

Dodgson. Arkright got his hands on a copy at auction while you were busy with that Woeful Dagger case.

Carnacki. *Resumes smudging.* Did he now? And what has old Sigsand taught you about the Water Circle?

Dodgson. Not much that we hadn't already picked up from one or other of your yarns. There was a passage about the different ways you can arrange the candles to produce different effects.

Carnacki. Do you recall a passage that begins, "There must be no light come from within the barrier"?

Dodgson. That does sound—oh! I see! *Extinguishes the lantern.*

Carnacki. Thank you.

Dodgson. Sorry.

Carnacki. Better give me your cigarettes as well.

Dodgson. All right. *Hands them over.*

Beat.

Dodgson. If I'm not mistaken, Carnacki...

Carnacki. Yes?

Dodgson. The Sigsand also says the barrier must be made around the ones to be protected.

Carnacki. That's right. So don't step outside the circle, or I shall have to start all over again.

Dodgson. But what about the others?

Carnacki. The others? Where? I / don't—

Dodgson. Aren't they coming?

Carnacki. Oh. I see. No, we're a reduced party tonight, old chap. Ugh. Ghastly stuff. *Tosses the garlic out of the circle / and dusts the debris from his hands.*

Dodgson. You mean to say I'm the only one you sent for?

Carnacki. This circle's a little cosy for five, wouldn't you say?

Dodgson. But if you'd only room for one—and if there's some ab-natural danger abroad—then why—

Carnacki. Yes?

Dodgson. Well, why not Arkright? Or Jessop. He's well salted in these affairs after that business aboard the *Mortzestus*.

Carnacki. I think Arkright and Jessop are occupied with that conundrum of the ambassador's, / besides which—

Dodgson. And what about Taylor?

Carnacki. Taylor? Taylor, I fancy, hasn't the stomach for this sort of thing.

Dodgson. And you fancy I do?

Carnacki. I know full well you've loads of pluck.

Dodgson. Really?

Carnacki. *Rummages in the trunk for the jar of water.* We're losing the light. Can you construct the Inner Star while I finish the circle?

Dodgson. You trust me to get it right?

Carnacki. Well, you'll be in as much trouble as me if you don't, so do you trust yourself to?

Dodgson. I think so.

Carnacki. Then so do I. *Hands Dodgson the chalk. / Breaks the jar's seal and removes the stopper.*

Dodgson. You'll look over it when I'm finished, though?

Carnacki. Can't promise anything. *Dips his left forefinger in the water / and goes around the circle again, daubing the Eight Signs of the Saaamaaa Ritual on the floor, just within the chalk line, at the eight major compass points.*

Dodgson. Oh. Well then. All right. *Pauses to recollect and calculate. Rummages in the trunk for the five candles. Using the measuring-tape, begins positioning them at equal distances around the circle, just outside the chalk line.* It'd be hard to credit if you hadn't proven it so often, wouldn't it? I mean, that this works. That wax and chalk and water need only the application of geometry to form such an impediment to such immense powers.

Carnacki. I'm sure it seems like superstitious mumming to you, Dodgson, but do allow me to concentrate while I'm about it.

Dodgson. Come, there's no need to be like that. I don't think it's silly. I think it's a marvel.

Carnacki. Please, shush, just for a minute.

Dodgson. *Draws chalk lines on the floor from candle to candle to form a pentacle, its points touching the chalk circle.*

Carnacki. *Finishes the Eighth Sign.* Look. The light. Quickly, now. *Strikes a match. Lights candles.*

Dodgson. *Strikes a match. Lights candles.*

Night falls.

Carnacki. *Slumps, relieved.* I think it's about time for that whisky, don't you?

Dodgson. Let me. *Rummages in the trunk for the whisky and tumblers.*

Carnacki. Sorry I had to be short with you.

Dodgson. Not at all.

Carnacki. I've been in a towering funk since last night.

Dodgson. *Pours.* I'm sure it's not without reason.

Carnacki. Ordinarily I'd agree with you. You remember in that Grey Dog case, what saved my life was what most men would simply call nerves.

Dodgson. Yes. You told us it's as well never to neglect that sort of feeling.

Carnacki. So I did.

Dodgson. Sometimes it's more than just cowardice, you said. Sometimes it's something warning you, and fighting for you.

Carnacki. Yes. I may have to rethink that little pearl of wisdom before we all sit down to dinner again. If we ever all sit down to dinner again, / I should say.

Dodgson. Come now, it's gloomy enough in here without that sort of talk. *Hands Carnacki a tumbler.*

Carnacki. Gloomy, you say?

Dodgson. Yes. Best keep our spirits up.

Carnacki. Of course. The sun's gone down, hasn't it?

Dodgson. Making it high time for a drink. Cheers.

Carnacki. Cheers. *Clinks. / Drains his tumbler and puts it down.*

Dodgson. *Drains his tumbler and puts it down. Splutters.* Ugh. Can I take this garlic out of my ears now? *Starts to winkle it out.*

Carnacki. No! *Claps his hands over Dodgson's hands and ears.*

Beat.

Carnacki. *Releases Dodgson.* I am to be Odysseus tonight, Dodgson. I have to endure the Siren's song. You must be my helmsman. Deaf to the seducer's voice, keeping us to the right course, eh? Do you understand?

Dodgson. To a degree.

Carnacki. You're sure?

Dodgson. It's like that Luck Ring case—you expect our judgement to be affected by something?

Carnacki. Yours, no, but mine already is being. My senses are not my allies tonight. Do you see this? *Meaning the talisman.* No matter how I try to justify the act, you must not let me take it off. And I will try. I may reason with you, or simply slip it off while your back's turned, or I may try to leave the circle. If I succeed, I shall be as good as dead. Or rather, perhaps I'll wish I were dead. Do you begin to grasp the gravity of your duty?

Dodgson. I suspect not. But I'll discharge it all the same.

Carnacki. Well, I suppose the outcome's the important thing. Now, how about a yarn?

Dodgson. Is this really the time?

Carnacki. Both of us must stay quite alert until dawn, and neither of us may smoke.

Dodgson. Well, when you put it like that.

Carnacki. I fancy I might see the thing clearer, after I've told it all out straight. Pour us both another drink, won't you?

Dodgson. *Obliges.*

Carnacki. *Gazes beyond the circle at things unseen. Knuckles his eyes, slaps his cheeks, &c. Composes himself.*

Dodgson. *Hands Carnacki a tumbler of whisky.*

Pause.

Carnacki. The tale that's led us both here began many generations hence, and to recount it all would counter my purpose of keeping us both awake, so I'll start from yesterday morning, the beginning of my own part in the affair. I'd not been long awake when I heard something trying to batter in my front door. I admitted my besieger and discovered her to be a gentlewoman in late middle-age, whom I knew by association as one Mrs Allenby.

Dodgson. Not by any chance a Mrs Judith Allenby?

Carnacki. The same. You're acquainted?

Dodgson. I've been shooting with her husband, the Major. Two or three times last season. A stern woman—straight-backed—lifts her chin, like this, in low company?

Carnacki. Stern? Perhaps, though yesterday morning she was rather discomposed. / She'd crossed town at great speed, having left home in some hurry.

Mrs Allenby. You'll forgive my appearance, Mr Carnacki. I left home in some hurry.

Morning.

Carnacki. You must have a seat, Mrs Allenby. Some tea? Or a brandy?

Mrs Allenby. No, thank you.

Carnacki. Well, how can I be of service?

Mrs Allenby. You're the Thomas Carnacki that Captain Hisgins speaks so highly of?

Carnacki. I am a Thomas Carnacki, and I did help out Captain Hisgins with a small matter last year.

Mrs Allenby. The small matter of a family curse.

Carnacki. Actually I believe it was a case of what I might term induced haunting.

Mrs Allenby. Regardless, some unnatural / creature threatened—

Carnacki. Ab-natural.

Beat.

Mrs Allenby. Some unnatural creature threatened poor Mary Hisgins and her fiancé, until banished by your intervention.

Carnacki. That's about the size of it. Mary Hisgins became Mrs Beaumont not long after.

Mrs Allenby. And the couple have had no trouble of the sort since?

Carnacki. If they have, they've not seen fit to involve me in it.

Mrs Allenby. Proof enough for me. You must come with me at once, Mr Carnacki. My cab is outside.

Carnacki. Why such a hurry?

Mrs Allenby. My Florence heard the herald's cry last night.

Carnacki. I'm afraid I'm not familiar with the term.

Mrs Allenby. You'll have the journey to learn, and 'til sunset to save her. Are you coming or not?

Carnacki. I'll come, of course, and I'll do everything I can to help. But you understand, I'm sure, that I cannot guarantee success—can't even guarantee an explanation, let alone a solution?

Mrs Allenby. Cavil in the cab if you must do it at all, Mr Carnacki.

Carnacki. Yes, of course. We'd better have the cabbie load my instrument trunk.

Mrs Allenby. Very well.

They seat themselves in the cab.

Mrs Allenby. I'm surprised a man in your line of business has never heard about our family. Did Captain Hisgins never mention us?

Carnacki. The Captain and I aren't well acquainted. We talked about how best to safeguard his daughter, little else.

Mrs Allenby. Good. Forge a similar relationship with me and we'll get on famously.

Carnacki. Let's start with this herald's cry.

Mrs Allenby. The herald's cry comes to the eldest Allenby in each generation, usually not long after they come of age. It sounds like some monstrous bird, my Florence says, and deafening. It woke her around two o'clock this morning, but her sister sleeps in the same room and she didn't hear a thing.

Carnacki. And it's supposed to herald what?

Mrs Allenby. Madness, Mr Carnacki.

Beat.

Mrs Allenby. I wasn't born an Allenby, of course. But our families have always been close, and we were overwintering in Sussex together when Robert Allenby heard the cry. It was the night after his sixteenth birthday. I was ten, my sister Louisa twelve or thirteen, and we argued at his party which of us would marry him. But the next day at breakfast he told us all the dining-room walls were turning to fog and he could see bright lights beyond. By dinner he couldn't see the house at all, nor any of the people in it. It was like we'd all become ghosts, or he had. He kept whispering to himself about impossible peaks and drifting specks as bright as stars. He wept constantly, but sometimes it didn't seem like sorrow. The next morning Robert was a rag doll. He resides in Bethlem even now.

Carnacki. But he lives? It wasn't fatal?

Mrs Allenby. No. Nothing so merciful.

Carnacki. And before Robert?

Mrs Allenby. The same story, the first born of every generation, as far back as anyone can recall.

Carnacki. Then if you were aware of all this, why did you still marry into the Allenby family?

Mrs Allenby. Hector and I were a good match.

Carnacki. But the two of you suspected what might be in store for any children.

Mrs Allenby. Are you married, Mr Carnacki? Do you have children of your own?

Carnacki. I'm afraid not.

Mrs Allenby. Then I can't expect you to understand.

Carnacki. But you do credit this story of the herald's cry? You believe there's some truth in it?

Mrs Allenby. I told you, I saw what it did to Robert.

Carnacki. What I mean is, do you believe the phenomenon is ab-natural in origin?

Mrs Allenby. Of course it's the work of devils, if that's what you mean. I thought this was your area of expertise, Mr Carnacki.

Carnacki. It is, and I've witnessed too many true manifestations to doubt that they can and do occur. But I make it a point of principle to view all reported hauntings as unproven until I've made examinations, and I must tell you that ninety-nine cases in a hundred prove to have nothing abnormal in them.

Mrs Allenby. There is nothing normal about what's in store for my daughter, Mr Carnacki.

Carnacki. I will of course bear your theory in mind, but you must allow me to investigate and form my own.

Mrs Allenby. I shall allow you whatever's in my Florence's best interests, not an inch more.

They dismount.

Mrs Allenby. I must try to get word to my husband. I'm putting my life in your hands, Mr Carnacki.

Carnacki. *To Dodgson.* With that she abandoned me to the ministrations of the butler, Tilbury, who fairly frogmarched me to the library and presented me, finally, to Miss Florence Allenby. Did you ever meet the young lady?

Dodgson. No, but the Major spoke of her constantly. He said she takes after her mother.

Carnacki. Yes, that was my assessment too, at first. Youth, and beauty, and good prospects, and a mother like Judith Allenby. Hardly surprising that she reacted as she did to the whole business.

Florence. Did Mother send for you? Are you a doctor?

Carnacki. No.

Florence. A psychiatrist, then.

Carnacki. No.

Florence. What, then? A priest?

Carnacki. I'd style myself an investigator of sorts.

Florence. An investigator of sorts? I'm losing my mind, and the best Mother can come up with is an investigator of sorts? No, this won't do. Tilbury? / Where on Earth have you gone?

Carnacki. I am, I should say, an investigator of what I might term inexplicable things. Like / this cry you heard last night—

Florence. Oh, a charlatan. I'd have preferred a priest. Where did Mother even find you?

Carnacki. A mutual friend. And I've been called worse than a charlatan in my time. Still, I'd rather you called me Carnacki.

Florence. What's a Carnacki?

Carnacki. I am. Thomas Carnacki, at your service.

Florence. A pleasure to make your acquaintance, I'm sure, Mr Carnacki, but my mother's wasted your time.

Carnacki. I don't think so. In fact, yours seems a rather interesting case.

Florence. I'm glad I intrigue you, but I need a doctor, not an investigator of inexplicable things.

Carnacki. Surely it would do you no harm to see both.

Florence. But it wouldn't help me any more than seeing a doctor alone.

Carnacki. And if he were to find himself stumped? Then might you concede that you're in the realm of the inexplicable?

Florence. I think then I might lose hope.

Carnacki. As long as there's one avenue left unexplored, there's hope.

Florence. Vain hope.

Carnacki. But hope nonetheless. Come now. Shake off this funk. Let me try a little experiment or two, nothing drastic, just to see how the land lies, and whatever I find, I give you my word I'll march straight to your mother and tell her to send for a medical man without delay.

Florence. I'd be the one to decide whose advice to take on board, yours or the doctor's?

Carnacki. I'd rather expect our conclusions to complement one another, than to conflict.

Florence. You can't believe in devils and in medicine, Mr Carnacki.

Carnacki. I'll thank you not to dictate what I may and may not believe, Miss Allenby.

Florence. You're quite unfathomable.

Carnacki. Then it's just as well you are the one we must try to fathom, not I. If I may?

Florence. As long as you keep your word.

Carnacki. Good. We'll start with questions and answers. This all started last night. You heard a sound. Correct?

Florence. Yes. A cry like a crow's. It woke me up. I couldn't move. I felt like a field-mouse, frozen looking up at something horrible swooping down on me.

Carnacki. Where did the cry come from? / *Examines Florence's ears.*

Florence. I don't know. From everywhere. Or maybe from inside my head. I thought straight away, this is it. I'm going mad, just like Uncle Robert. And I was right. Not long afterwards I started seeing things.

Carnacki. What manner of things?

Florence. Nothing very distinct. Little sort of specks of bright coloured light, drifting about in the distance. They were quite pale to begin with, like I'd just been looking into a flame. Now they're brighter than the daylight.

Carnacki. Drifting in the distance, you say? Beyond these walls? / *Examines Florence's eyes.*

Florence. Yes. Everything's... Well, you seem solid enough, but any farther away than that... It's like the world's disappearing around me and this other place is filling the gap. Do let's be brisk about this, Mr Carnacki.

Carnacki. I can't see anything wrong with your physical eyes.

Florence. I'll trust my physical eyes to a physician, if you don't mind.

Carnacki. By all means. In the meantime, let's concentrate on your mental eye. / *Retrieves the jar of water.*

Florence. My what?

Carnacki. Could I ask you to close your eyes? Your physical ones. / *Dips one finger in the water.*

Florence. I... I don't want to.

Carnacki. It's only water.

Florence. It's not that.

Carnacki. I know. The things you can see beyond the walls. You can still see them when you close your eyes. Brighter and clearer.

Florence. How did / you know?

Carnacki. It's only when the physical eyes are closed that the mental eye can fully open. Closing your eyes won't hasten their advance. It'll just let you get a better look at them. Besides which it's broad daylight.

Florence. What does that signify?

Carnacki. There's no power in the Unseen World that can manifest itself with any potency while the sun shines. And if anything's fool enough to try, this should ward it off without much trouble.

Florence. You said it was only water.

Carnacki. It is. Chemically speaking.

Florence. And speaking otherwise?

Carnacki. What should that signify to a sceptic such as yourself?

Florence. You intend to daub me with it.

Carnacki. That I do. The short answer is, this is water from Bath Spa, which I'm sure you know is credited with certain healing properties. Now, I've found no evidence of that, but I have studied the particular mixture of minerals and things suspended in it, and found that the whole mixture reacts rather curiously when exposed to certain frequencies of electromagnetic vibration.

Florence. That cannot be the short answer.

Carnacki. The upshot is that you needn't be afraid of anything your mental eye can see. None of it can harm you.

Florence. I never said I was afraid.

Carnacki. Oh, fear and I are old acquaintances. I recognise him in every one of his thousand and one guises. He'll be your ally, if you let him.

Florence. I'd rather have certainty on my side. But if you insist. *Closes her eyes.*

Carnacki. Thank you. This will feel a little cool. *Anoints her eyelids with water.*

Florence. That tingles.

Carnacki. Does it? How very illuminating. But take a good look around you. Remember there's nothing to be afraid of. Do you see anything?

Florence. Not the house.

Carnacki. That's to be expected.

Florence. But I can see...

Carnacki. As much detail as you can muster, now.

The sound of slow, titanic wingbeats, distant and barely perceptible, but drawing gradually closer.

Florence. A void. No. A... A chasm. It's dark. I mean, no, there is light. Just a little. Or perhaps it's bright after all, only... I can't tell. It's an odd colour. I can't describe it. It's not a colour that really exists. It goes on and on.

Carnacki. And do you see anything else in this chasm? How far down can you see?

Florence. Down? No. I'm at the bottom. But there's nothing under me. I'm deep down. Floating. I can see the stars but it's so far up. No, I can't look. I could never climb that high, not even in a hundred years. But stuck down here wrapped in that colour... I feel so small. And the things... Those bright specks, they're more than that now. They're the centres of... Shapes? Creatures? Why couldn't I see them before?

Carnacki. Your physical sight was interfering. It's to be expected. Describe these creatures.

Florence. I can't.

Carnacki. Nonsense. You've been quite eloquent so far. What do they remind you of?

Florence. Remind me? Nothing I've ever seen. Though... There's one that looks like a feeling I had. Another with the shape of a sound I remember. I don't know

from when. Some of them remind me of... What was it? But not the same. It's all spoiled. All the corners are inside out. I don't want to remember now. They're moving. Are you sure they can't see me?

Carnacki. It's just possible they are aware of you. But you're quite safe.

Florence. I don't feel it.

Carnacki. I know it's unsettling.

Florence. Do you?

Carnacki. I've had my own experiences with esoteric sight.

Florence. I know they're not real. But my stupid heart... My mouth is dry. I'm... They don't even seem evil. Just all wrong. Fear of figments. It's not seemly.

Carnacki. You said the things were moving. With purpose, or / at random?

Florence. They move like motes on the wind. But they know where it's taking them. It's where they wanted to go all along. They're deceitful. How close they are, how small or vast, I can't tell. I feel like any moment one might swallow me that I thought was leagues away.

Carnacki. Then the stars you mentioned up above—they might not be as far away as you thought, isn't that so?

Florence. I suppose that's right.

Carnacki. Would you look for me?

Florence. I don't think I want to.

Carnacki. Miss Allenby, if we can tempt your psychic body out of that abyss we'll be well on the way to ridding you of this affliction. It's quite natural to be afraid, but I assure you nothing you see can harm you.

Florence. That's right. There's nothing to be afraid of.

Carnacki. That's not / quite what I said.

Florence. They are closer. The stars. A great glittering crack in the ceiling. They're sinking into the dark, or...

Carnacki. Miss Allenby?

The sound of wingbeats is suddenly close at hand.

Florence. Hide me. *Crouches, arms above her head, defending herself from the unseen thing above.* Hide me! Before it sees!

Carnacki. *Dips a hand in the jar and flicks water in Florence's face.*

Silence.

Florence. *Opens her eyes.*

Carnacki. What is it? / What did you see?

Florence. What did you do to me? / You made it worse.

Carnacki. How do you feel? / Any queer sensations?

Florence. It was just specks. Now it's shapes and stars and shadows. They're not going away. Carnacki, / they're not going away. What did you do?

Carnacki. *Catching Florence's left wrist. On it is a curious talisman made of feathers.* Hello. What's this?

Florence. Are you listening? / Let go of me.

Carnacki. The instant you felt threatened, you put this between yourself and the threat.

Florence. It's just some lucky charm Mother insists I wear.

Carnacki. No. You trust it. Instinctively.

Florence. It was Uncle Robert's. Everyone gets given it. Everyone who's meant to be cursed. It's supposed to protect me from whatever's coming to get me.

Carnacki. And what is coming to get you?

Florence. Nothing's coming to get me. I'm not cursed. I'm either / hallucinating or mad.

Carnacki. I mean what is it you saw?

Florence. I don't know. It was too big. I suppose it looked like a bird. It wasn't real. What does it matter?

Carnacki. Nothing conclusive. But / perhaps with a little—

Florence. No buts. You've made me worse. Doctor. Now.

Carnacki. If I could just / take a look at that—

Florence. You gave me your word.

Carnacki. And I intend to keep it. But would you mind if I had a closer look at that charm in the / meantime?

Florence. No!

Beat.

Florence. Mother would never allow it.

Carnacki. I understand.

Florence. Wait. There's a note that goes with it. Sort of explaining how it's meant to work. It's superstitious nonsense, of course. *Hands it over.*

Carnacki. Thank you all the same. *Turns to leave.*

Florence. Carnacki?

Carnacki. Miss Allenby?

Florence. Are you leaving?

Carnacki. Shall I ring for someone?

Florence. Leaving the house, I meant.

Carnacki. Well, I don't feel my business is quite done, but it all rather depends on your mother.

Florence. I think perhaps you ought to stay at least a little longer. To confer with the doctor and things.

Carnacki. I'll be sure to pass on your recommendations.

Florence. Yes. Yes, I would like for you to ring for someone, please. I shouldn't like to be alone in this condition. I might fall over something or walk into a wall. It's still up there, Carnacki. I can't look but I know. It's just waiting for me to float up to the top and then it's going to swoop and make me like Uncle Robert.

Carnacki. Nonsense. You've got far more on your side than he did. You've nothing to fret about.

Florence. You are the most awful liar.

Carnacki. Am I?

Night.

Dodgson. Yes, as a matter of fact you are. God blessed you with an honest face, Carnacki.

Carnacki. A blessing, is it?

Dodgson. If not I'd find it hard to credit anything you said.

Carnacki. I should hope you don't judge truth based purely upon physiognomy.

Dodgson. Well, no. I do have a mind of my own.

Carnacki. Good.

Dodgson. Well, what about this note? Did that shed any light on things?

Carnacki. Only enough to reveal the full depths of the obscurity, I fear. But see what you make of it: "Whomsoever of my kin doth find himself in need of more than Earthly protection: herewith I enclose that talisman I gained of the eastern sorceror, who, being wise, did imbue its rude and humble aspect with magicks of exceptional magnitude. Imbued afresh with the faith of the bearer, it is proof against that most evil of things. This I have myself proven. The cry harries my sleep no more. Hold fast to faith, kin of mine, and endure as I endured." And it is signed only with a letter G. *Refolds and stows the note.*

Dodgson. I confess it sounds like so much hokum to me.

Carnacki. I thought so too.

Dodgson. And yet something changed your mind.

Carnacki. What gives you that impression?

Dodgson. You're wearing the thing now.

Carnacki. So I am. Queer old thing, isn't it? / Quite...

Dodgson. Don't touch it.

Carnacki. Dodgson?

Dodgson. Sorry. I thought you might be trying to take it off, you know.

Carnacki. Ah, yes. Good man. That's right. I studied the note for some time while Doctor Witton was examining Miss Allenby. I had little else to go on, you understand, besides some rather vague and unsettling notions planted by the images the young lady described, the chasm and so forth. At any rate, I began to make out some sense among all the flimflam and hocus pocus, which led me in turn to further questions, such as—but they'll have occurred to you by now.

Dodgson. Well, I suppose the question is, if this charm or talisman is such a potent protection against the curse, then why didn't it protect Robert Allenby?

Carnacki. And let's not forget all the victims before him. As far back as anyone can remember, Mrs Allenby said. And that question raises another.

Dodgson. I'm afraid I'm not quite—I mean, I can see that things don't quite / fit, but—

Carnacki. If no one alive remembers the charm actually saving anybody, / then—

Dodgson. Oh. Of course. Why do they keep passing it down? Why does Mrs Allenby set such store by it?

Carnacki. I asked her the same question. She was in the sitting-room, sealing a letter to her husband the Major, who I gather is abroad on manoeuvres. I asked her: "Do you expect that feather bracelet to protect your daughter, Mrs Allenby?"

Late afternoon.

Mrs Allenby. Expect? No. I can but hope.

Carnacki. You can, and I see that you do. But it did nothing for your brother-in-law. I take it he did wear it?

Mrs Allenby. He did. But the Lord can't help those that won't help themselves.

Carnacki. Its protection is conditional, then? "Imbued afresh with the faith of the bearer..."

Mrs Allenby. No devil could touch Robert while he wore that charm. But they whispered in his ear, and they showed him wonders, and they bargained, and they made promises, and before the sun had been down an hour he'd slipped it off and thrown it nearly into the fireplace. His father saved the charm, but no one could save Robert then, not once he had it off.

Carnacki. And so—what? No Allenby in living memory has successfully resisted the temptation to remove the charm?

Mrs Allenby. It's no reflection on Robert or any of his line, you understand? The curse showed them things no mortal man was ever meant to see.

Carnacki. I didn't mean that. I only meant, why trust your family, your children, to a power no one's ever seen to work?

Mrs Allenby. We had to put our faith in something before you came along, Mr Carnacki.

Carnacki. I prefer a solution that doesn't depend on faith at all.

Mrs Allenby. And have you found one?

Carnacki. Well, Miss Allenby herself clearly trusts the charm, albeit unconsciously.

Mrs Allenby. The charm won't save her. She's too much of your stripe. A latter-day Pandora. Why do you think you're here?

Carnacki. I see.

Mrs Allenby. So?

Carnacki. I've nothing definite just yet. I'm working on a few theories.

Mrs Allenby. And just how long will these theories take to prove?

Carnacki. I shall be able to narrow down the possibilities considerably once Doctor Witton finishes his examination.

Mrs Allenby. I can tell you now he'll find nothing of note.

Carnacki. If that's the case, the most likely explanation seems to be that this cry, which is presumably some sort of psychic vibration, of whatever origin, perhaps conducted by some property inherent in Allenby family physiology—I'll need to investigate further to confirm a lot of this, but in any case, the cry seems to have shaken your daughter's psychic body free of her physical one, and with enough force to propel it across the line of retraction into some far-flung backwater of the Outer Circle.

Mrs Allenby. You mean her spirit is...

Carnacki. Dissociated from her body, yes. But still connected. Left to its own devices, it ought simply to reel back in. Remember, though, that all this is still only theory, and Doctor Witton / may yet disprove it.

Mrs Allenby. Yes, yes. But if you're right, then why did Robert / not simply—?

Carnacki. If I'm right, the likelihood is that Miss Allenby's psychic body will not be left to its own devices. The Outer Circle is home to all manner of things that might do harm to a disorientated young interloper. And then there's the matter of the cry's origin. It may be some natural phenomenon, but if it is a creature, if it has consciousness, even only that of a beast, then the effects of its cry may be part of some design, and it may not wish that design to be foiled by the reunion of Miss Allenby's scattered constituents.

Mrs Allenby. The Lord save us.

Carnacki. Funny you should say that. It actually isn't unheard of for certain powerful entities to intervene when a human spirit is threatened by the Outer Monstrosities. Not the Lord Himself, you understand, but forces in His employ—who knows? I've been wondering why no Allenby was ever spared that way. At least, that's one avenue I've been exploring.

Mrs Allenby. I shall be praying to a higher power, Mr Carnacki, as will Florence's brother and sister, and Tilbury and the household. I was rather hoping that you might have a more specialist solution. Tell me you have more between your ears than theories.

Carnacki. I really can't say any more until Doctor Witton's made his diagnosis.

Mrs Allenby. Go, then, and chivvy him along. The sun's already sinking.

Carnacki. *To Dodgson.* This I did. You know Witton, I think.

Dodgson. Yes. Hardly the right man to call up for a case of this sort, I'd have thought.

Carnacki. On the contrary. His was exactly the sort of mind the case demanded.

Dodgson. Hard-headed, I think you called him. Unimaginative.

Carnacki. Unimaginative. Precisely. Witton stands no kind of nonsense, as he sees it. He can be counted on for an absolutely unvarnished medical opinion, which was what both I and Miss Allenby wanted. When he'd finished his examination I

enlisted his help in a few more of my own, and he observed that the girl's eyes reacted unusually when I asked her to focus on the shapes or creatures she saw around her, and especially when I had her inspect her surroundings through my jar of treated spa-water. That was enough to convince me that the things she described were genuine signals being received by her mental eye, and not spectres conjured up by an addled brain. Witton suggested no useful remedy, so I sent him away, and a little before dusk I had the library furniture cleared away and set-to constructing a barrier about Miss Allenby. *Begins unpacking the Electric Pentacle.*

Evening.

Florence. *Starts wandering toward something only she can see.*

Carnacki. Miss Allenby!

Florence. *Halts. Squints.* Carnacki?

Carnacki. I'm here.

Florence. I can't see you when you stay still.

Carnacki. *Takes her hand.*

Florence. *Flinches.*

Carnacki. Here. Hold on to the trunk, like this. That's solid, isn't it? That's real. / *Begins assembling the Electric Pentacle (see Appendix 2).*

Florence. Where are you going?

Carnacki. Not more than a few feet away.

Florence. Keep talking, won't you?

Carnacki. Of course.

Beat.

Florence. Carnacki?

Carnacki. Yes, still here. Sorry. *Beat.* What, ah, what explanation did Doctor Witton give for your symptoms?

Florence. He didn't tell you?

Carnacki. He told me you seemed medically sound, but under great stress.

Florence. He told me I was hysterical. Recommended I sleep it off. The nerve! And he called you a snake-oil peddler behind your back.

Carnacki. Did he, now?

Florence. I mean, I'm not saying I agree with you all of a sudden about Unseen Worlds and Outer Monstrosities and such, but at least you don't think I'm making it all up. Do you?

Carnacki. No, of course not. I'm quite convinced now that what you're seeing is a genuine image of a genuine place.

Florence. I don't much like that idea either.

Carnacki. No? I'd have thought it would be comforting.

Florence. Not remotely. Sorry.

Carnacki. It means you're not poisoned, diseased, mad, or a fantasist.

Florence. But it means this horrible, dark place exists. And these horrible, twisted things exist.

Carnacki. We share the cosmos with plenty of unpleasant creatures. At least these ones are a long way away.

Florence. Not from me.

Carnacki. We'll have you out of there before long.

Florence. They'll still be there. I'll still know.

Carnacki. Yes, you're privy to something few mortals ever get to glimpse. It's quite a privilege.

Florence. I'd rather never have seen it.

Carnacki. Now you are beginning to sound hysterical.

Florence. For goodness' sake, that's just a word men use for behaviour they don't understand.

Carnacki. Wishing ignorance upon oneself? No, you're quite right. I can't understand that.

Florence. You would if you could see.

Carnacki. Can you still see the physical plane at all? Can you see me?

Florence. You're like a ghost. I think if I woke up now, newborn, seeing this, I'd think you and the library were the figments. It's all happening too quickly.

Carnacki. It's because the sun's going down. You're seeing more clearly with your mental eye now.

Florence. Does that mean it's going to get worse?

Carnacki. I'm afraid so.

Florence. You've been in these sorts of situations before, haven't you?

Carnacki. Many a time.

Florence. Does it make you feel safer, knowing?

Carnacki. Knowing what?

Florence. I don't know. Everything. All those theories and explanations.

Carnacki. Well, knowing the cause of a thing is the first step toward being able to combat it, so yes, I suppose it does make me safer.

Florence. And what if there is no way of combating it?

Carnacki. I think I'd still rather know what manner of thing did me in.

Florence. I'm not sure I would.

Carnacki. Well, in any case, you won't need to worry yourself about any of that tonight. This bit of apparatus has saved my neck more times than I can recount. In a few moments you'll be perfectly safe. That is—you are still wearing the charm, are you?

Florence. *Shows Carnacki the charm.*

Carnacki. Not feeling like taking it off?

Florence. *Indicates no.*

Carnacki. Good. *Connects up the Electric Pentacle to the battery and activates it. The Electric Pentacle lights up with a weak blue glow.*

Florence. Ah. What is that? It's bright.

Carnacki. Is it? How queer. To me it seems quite dim. I've spent a good few long nights alone in haunted rooms wishing it were brighter, I can tell you. Nothing like a monster you can only half-see to give you a bad case of the creep.

Florence. That isn't very reassuring.

Carnacki. I'm still alive, aren't I? And in the morning so will you be.

Florence. But what is it?

Carnacki. This, my dear, is my Electric Pentacle.

Florence. And what is it supposed to do?

Carnacki. Well, usually I use it as a defensive barrier against certain manifestations—what you might term hauntings or ghostly apparitions. Tonight, however, we're making use of its spirit-insulating properties. Did you know that when a medium or psychic is surrounded with a current, of a certain number of vibrations, in a vacuum, he loses his power to interact with spirits? It seems the current cuts off the medium's connection to the Immaterial. Insulates him, as it were, from any potential spiritual threat. Do you understand just what I mean?

Florence. You're saying it's keeping me hidden.

Carnacki. Not only hidden. I first came across the spirit-insulating effect in a paper by one Professor Garder, entitled 'Experiments with a Medium'. It seems Garder used a circular conductor, but after a few experiments of my own, I chose this defensive star or Pentacle shape instead, because I have, personally, no doubt at all that there is some extraordinary virtue in this old, supposedly magic figure. Curious thing for a Twentieth Century man to believe, don't you agree? But I've proved the power of the thing time and again. The current insulates, and the Pentacle protects. So as long as you stay within the barrier, you've nothing to fear from the creatures of the chasm. Even the one you saw hovering up above. It is still there, I take it?

Florence. I daren't look.

Carnacki. It can neither see nor harm you.

Florence. You're sure?

Carnacki. This morning you weren't even convinced it was real.

Florence. A thing doesn't have to be real to be frightening.

Carnacki. Do you see it?

Florence. It's so much bigger than before.

Carnacki. Bigger? Or closer?

Florence. Closer. But still so big.

Carnacki. As I hoped. You're rising toward the mouth of the abyss. Your body is calling your spirit home. Without the Pentacle, you see, that creature might have impeded or intercepted it.

Florence. Is that what you think happened to the others?

Carnacki. I'm afraid it's likely.

Florence. So it's that thing that makes the cry.

Carnacki. Not necessarily, though I agree it's the most likely conclusion. A creature whose cry can jolt the spirit free of the body, and which then lies in wait to snare the spirit as it journeys home. / It's quite monstrous.

Florence. That's just awful.

Carnacki. Yes. But that won't happen to you. You'll slip right past it. Trust me.

Night falls.

The sound of wingbeats close overhead.

Florence. What's happening?

Carnacki. I...

Florence. Carnacki?

Carnacki. I don't know.

The candles around the circle begin to go out, one by one.

Carnacki. Something's attacking the barrier.

Florence. This is real, isn't it?

Carnacki. Yes, that is, something's, I mean, the phenomenon is starting to affect the physical / realm, which shouldn't be—

Florence. It's that thing. The bird. It's after me.

Carnacki. But it shouldn't be able to sense you.

Florence. Then it's angry that it's lost me all of a sudden.

The Electric Pentacle begins to flicker in time with the wingbeats.

Carnacki. Miss Allenby. Listen to me. Florence. Listen. If the barrier breaks, / you must concentrate all your willpower—

Florence. If it breaks? You said it was safe. You said it always saved your neck.

Carnacki. I never said always. There's no certainty in any defence and it looks like we're about to discover the limits of this one. If that happens you must not remove the charm, do you understand?

Florence. Yes.

Carnacki. I'm sorry. I didn't want to leave you solely responsible for saving yourself. There might be something else I can... I'll try to do something, but you must act as if it's all up to you, / do you understand?

Florence. It's diving. It's diving! Hide me! / Hide me!

Carnacki. I don't know how.

Florence. Do something!

Silence. The Electric Pentacle keeps flickering.

Carnacki. Just let me think. The body inside the barrier. The spirit outside. / The connection between them. A passageway into the defence. *Draws his revolver.*

Florence. I can't see. I can't breathe. I can't breathe. God save me. I can't breathe!

Carnacki. Tell me what's happening.

Florence. It's got me.

Carnacki. But you're still cogent. / That's good. That's good.

Florence. I'm wrapped in its wings. It's too dark. Too huge. The feathers. / I can't breathe.

Carnacki. It's all right. You'll be all right. The defence is holding. / You can still escape.

Florence. It's searching. The beak. The claws. Carnacki, where are you? What does it want? What do I do? Carnacki!

Carnacki. I don't know. I don't know. / I don't know.

Florence. Then what good are you? *Flees the Pentacle.*

Carnacki. Stop! Don't! *Pursues Florence, but stops short at the edge of the circle.*

Total darkness. The sound of frantic wingbeats.

Florence. It sees me! / It sees me!

Carnacki. The charm! Hold fast! Just don't take off the charm! That's— That's—
The wingbeats withdraw. Silence.

Carnacki. Miss Allenby? Florence?

The Electric Pentacle flickers back to life.

Florence. *Is revealed lying crumpled just outside the circle. The charm lies a little way from her.*

The cry of a monstrous carrion bird.

Carnacki. *Reacts to the sound.*

End of Act One.

Act Two.

Morning. The candles are relit and the Electric Pentacle is glowing.

Carnacki. She was within my reach, yes. Physically. But I couldn't know what might still be abroad in that room. She'd been taken so swiftly. I crouched there at the edge of the circle, with a perfectly horrible pringling sensation racing up and down my arms and across my scalp, trying desperately to screw up some courage to move forward, to brave the danger and go to her aid. But I was stiff, simply rigid with terror. I couldn't coax myself to venture even one small finger outside the defence. I wonder, have you ever felt anything like it? Could you even imagine the feeling? A dread that manacles your very bones, your very thoughts. And the longer it holds you, the stronger its hold becomes. I saw that she was breathing, and the need for action seemed immediately less urgent, and as it were, the shackles cinched tighter still. I couldn't reach the bell and I reasoned that to shout for help would be to expose others to the same horror, perhaps to seal another's fate as I seem to have sealed hers. And so I simply watched over her 'til daylight, fooling myself that I was doing a worthy duty.

Pause.

Mrs Allenby. She turned every head when she made her début, you know. Her independence. And now Tilbury is sitting by her bedside sponging drool off her chin. My daughter, Carnacki. My Florence. When I left the room she was giggling to herself. Giggling, Carnacki. Like a madwoman in some novel.

Carnacki. It was my fault.

Mrs Allenby. I know.

Carnacki. It all went so wrong so fast. I could hardly think. It never even occurred to me that she might leave the circle.

Mrs Allenby. Robert's father bound him to a chair to stop him removing the charm. He broke four of his fingers freeing himself. Robert's aunt Elspeth, the first born of her generation, eluded her parents, her grandfather the colonel, and her nanny the night she succumbed. They didn't find her 'til morning, slumped in a cellar they hadn't even known they had. I told you Florence would be tempted and I told you she couldn't resist it herself. You told me your rituals and silly contraptions were the solution we'd been missing. I put my faith in you.

Carnacki. I said I couldn't guarantee success.

Mrs Allenby. You didn't say you would hasten failure. You did a good job sounding like you knew what you were doing, Mr Carnacki, but I see now that was nothing but hot air.

Carnacki. Actually...

Mrs Allenby. What is it?

Carnacki. I don't think history's quite repeating itself line for line this time. My involvement does seem to have changed one thing.

Mrs Allenby. My daughter has lost her mind, Mr Carnacki. Whatever you think you've achieved is immaterial.

Carnacki. I've heard the cry.

Mrs Allenby. You can't have.

Carnacki. So there's no precedent for / an outsider—

Mrs Allenby. None. The herald's cry is a family curse. You are not family.

Carnacki. Nevertheless.

Mrs Allenby. Nevertheless what? If you're looking for sympathy, / you've got some nerve.

Carnacki. No, it's not that, of course. No, I don't know yet what it means. But it must mean something. If this has changed, then... Maybe not Miss Allenby's, but I don't know, perhaps the next victim's fate might be changed as well.

Mrs Allenby. If you really have heard the cry, the next victim will be you.

Carnacki. That had occurred to me. I wonder if I might borrow the charm, just until tomorrow morning?

Mrs Allenby. Do as you like with it. You've made sure my Florence no longer needs it. Though I can't imagine it'll do you much good. You've less faith even than she had.

Carnacki. I believe in powers beyond the physical realm. I believe in ab-natural dangers / and protections.

Mrs Allenby. You believe nothing. With you everything must be proven or disproven. You do not allow for things to simply be so. I hope your philosophy brings you solace when your mind flees your body. I shall be with what's left of my daughter. Good day to you, Mr Carnacki.

Night. The sound of patient wingbeats in the background, innocuous as a heartbeat.

Carnacki. To Dodgson. And so here we are.

Dodgson. What do you mean?

Carnacki. That's the whole tale up 'til now.

Dodgson. But you left the Allenbys' first thing this morning. You must have done something since.

Carnacki. Nothing of consequence. *Indicates the charm.* I ran a few experiments on this, but only really so I wouldn't have to sit still and think about what happened.

Dodgson. What sort of experiments? / Did you discover anything?

Carnacki. Oh, everything I could think of that wouldn't destroy it. I made a spiritual focus about it with my spectrum circles, I subjected it to various sonic and electromagnetic vibrations, I put it under the microscope, X-rayed it, heated it, cooled it.

Dodgson. And?

Carnacki. It's a good deal more than just feathers and twine. Further than that, I couldn't tell you. Remember, I heard the cry. It's hard to take accurate readings when things keep drifting in front of the instruments.

Dodgson. You seem to be coping remarkably well.

Carnacki. Don't lie to me, Dodgson. I know when I'm in a funk.

Dodgson. All right. But there's no need to talk yourself further into it.

Carnacki. At any rate, by evening I still wasn't getting anywhere with my only clue, so I realised I'd simply have to brazen it out in the Electric Pentacle, just like Miss Allenby.

Dodgson. You ought to have rung me up earlier.

Carnacki. Yes, most likely.

Dodgson. You can see it now, I suppose? That place?

Carnacki. Vividly.

Dodgson. And the / creature?

Carnacki. Yes, the scavenger is circling. It scents weakness. Doesn't seem as impatient as last night, but then it must be used to going years between meals.

Dodgson. Perhaps if it's not hungry it'll let you drift on by.

Carnacki. Unlikely. I can only think of one plausible reason for the thing to suddenly change its Allenby-only diet. I enraged it by trying to deny it Miss Allenby, and perhaps consciously, or perhaps on some vicious impulse, it's decided that I shall suffer for it.

Dodgson. Horrible.

Carnacki. For me, if it succeeds, undoubtedly. But in the scheme of things it's no more horrible than the dog who bites the man who taunts it by taking away its dinner, if I may put it like that.

Dodgson. An angry dog would just nip you and have done with it. There'd be none of this awful waiting, thinking about what's coming. It doesn't seem like animal instinct to me, Carnacki. It feels like malevolence.

Carnacki. Oh, the wait isn't so bad. How many men ever get to observe such a remote realm as I'm now seeing? And thanks to you I can study it almost at my leisure. No need to worry about my physical body misbehaving in the meantime. I've enough observations to found a whole monograph on.

Dodgson. If you make it through the night with your wits intact.

Carnacki. Dodgson. You aren't helping.

Dodgson. Good grief, I'm sorry. I didn't— But I can't help getting indignant on your behalf. It's all so damned arbitrary. Why the Allenbys? Why you? Animal instinct? Some silly quirk of personal electric tensions? Such nonsense cannot have such real, such horrible effects on people. I quite refuse to credit it.

Beat.

Dodgson. *Mutters.* Perhaps all that's left is to finish that whisky. / What did I do with it?

Carnacki. Dodgson, what was that you just said?

Dodgson. Oh, I was just going to fix us something more to drink, that's all.

Carnacki. No, before that. What was it you said? Say it again, will you?

Dodgson. Say what again? When?

Carnacki. “Such nonsense cannot really affect people,” or somesuch. And “I quite refuse to credit it”.

Dodgson. I know, defeatist of me, sorry. Forget I said it.

Carnacki. Forget indeed! Dodgson, you are a marvel. I do believe you have it in you to save my skin tonight.

Dodgson. Surely not. I mean, if I can, of course—but how so?

Carnacki. Arkright, Jessop, Taylor, and Dodgson. My friends. My echo chamber. My council of war. Why you, do you think, Dodgson? Why you tonight, and not any of the others?

Dodgson. I’m sure I don’t know.

Carnacki. I took a gamble on your unique insight, a gamble that appears to have paid off.

Dodgson. Carnacki, what on Earth are you getting at?

Carnacki. Dodgson, my friend, you are unique among our little cabal in that you’ve never quite shaken the suspicion that I’m a complete fraud.

Dodgson. What? Now hang on. / That just isn’t true.

Carnacki. No, listen. This is important.

Dodgson. I don’t mean it when I call you that. It’s just a joke.

Carnacki. Then you’re a fool.

Dodgson. I beg your pardon?

Carnacki. Arkright heard the Unknown Last Line of the Saaamaaa Ritual uttered by the Ab-human Priests in the Incantation of Raaeee. Jessop survived that ordeal aboard the *Mortzestus*. Even young Taylor has a measure of innate psychic sight. When we all sit ‘round the fire and I spin you chaps some yarn about some unusual occurrence, they simply listen, because their own experience tells them such things are not impossible. But you, Dodgson. Your senses, your experiences... Your existence has been entirely mundane.

Dodgson. As if Arkright didn’t remind me enough of that.

Carnacki. I’m not trying to slight you, you dunderhead! I’m saying your judgement is unsullied. There’s a solution to this horrid business and I can’t see it because I’m too used to accepting impossible things as fact. But you can. You can see the way out. What have I missed, Dodgson? What / doesn’t add up?

Dodgson. I don’t know. I don’t know, all right? / I don’t know.

Carnacki. Think. You do know. Just think.

Dodgson. Whatever happened to keeping a perfectly open mind?

Carnacki. What’s that to do with anything?

Dodgson. You told us all a thousand and one times never to dismiss a thing out of hand just for seeming impossible. Are you saying you expected me to ignore that?

Carnacki. I'm saying it's likely more things seem impossible to you than seem impossible to me, or Arkright, or the others. I'm saying that you must steel yourself consciously not to scoff at things that we simply accept. I'm saying you notice more.

Dodgson. But / I've always—

Carnacki. Did you want them to be true?

Dodgson. What?

Carnacki. All those yarns I spun you all by the fire. Hauntings and monsters and curses and possession and death. Did you want to believe they were true?

Dodgson. I always believed you were honest. Didn't I say so?

Carnacki. That's not what I asked.

Dodgson. Did I want such ghastly things to be real, you mean? Did I, personally, wish for young Aster to be devoured by the Black Veil, or poor Bains to be dragged to Hell by the Hog? What kind of man do you think I am?

Carnacki. A loyal one. But a sceptic at heart.

Dodgson. Perhaps you're right.

Carnacki. I'd stake my life on it.

The Electric Pentacle flickers.

Dodgson. What was that?

Carnacki. Never mind that. Concentrate. What doesn't add up?

Dodgson. I don't know.

Carnacki. The slightest thing. Anything that gave you pause.

Dodgson. Well...

Carnacki. Yes?

Dodgson. How do you explain the creature, the bird, I mean, still being able to detect Miss Allenby despite the Electric Pentacle? That shouldn't have been possible.

Carnacki. Quite right. Quite right. Perhaps... Perhaps it's like hiding under a sheet in an empty room? One is concealed, but the hiding place is obvious?

The Electric Pentacle flickers.

Dodgson. Are you quite sure / nothing's—

Carnacki. Let me worry about the apparatus. Keep going.

Dodgson. Well, I still don't understand how this so-called family curse comes to affect you at all.

Carnacki. Yes. Good. That's the part that seems strangest to me, too. I suspect if we can discover why the behaviour of the phenomenon has changed now, after generations of consistency, we shall find the key to the whole business.

Dodgson. Then there's the matter of the charm.

Carnacki. No, Dodgson, I think we've found the right line of enquiry, if we can just focus.

Dodgson. It's not like you, that's all.

Carnacki. What's not?

Dodgson. Do you trust it to protect you? I suppose you must. We've established that the Pentacle can't hide you.

Carnacki. Hang on. Slow down. Why wouldn't I trust the charm?

Dodgson. Let's see. Provenance unknown. Hasn't worked in living memory. Testing inconclusive. Why would you trust it?

The Electric Pentacle begins a constant flickering. The sound of wings begins to draw closer.

Carnacki. It would have saved Miss Allenby if she'd kept her head and kept it on.

Dodgson. Funny how everyone seems to believe that. You, Miss Allenby, sceptics both, supposedly. If keeping it on's going to save you, why are we even having this conversation? Why didn't you simply ask me to, I don't know, tie you up and sit on you until morning?

Carnacki. I...

Dodgson. May I see the note?

Carnacki. Pardon me?

Dodgson. The note that came with the charm. It's in your pocket, there. May I see it?

Carnacki. Whatever for?

Dodgson. Indulge me.

Carnacki. If you insist. *Hands it over.*

Dodgson. What language is this supposed to be?

Carnacki. English.

Dodgson. Don't be absurd.

Carnacki. "Whomsoever of my kin doth find himself in need of more than / Earthly protection..."

Dodgson. That's not what it says, Carnacki.

Carnacki. Of course it is. Read it.

Dodgson. I can't. What is this script? Arabic? Hieroglyphs?

Carnacki. Are you quite in control of your senses?

Dodgson. Are you?

One candle goes out.

Dodgson. Give me the charm.

Carnacki. What?

Dodgson. The charm and the note are handed down together, you said.

Carnacki. What of it?

The second candle goes out.

Dodgson. Hiding under a sheet, in an empty room, and—and holding up a lantern.

Carnacki. You're supposed to make sure I / keep it on!

Dodgson. Give it to me. Give it to me, Carnacki.

The third candle goes out.

Carnacki. It's got to you. You're mad.

Dodgson. What happened to the power of my mundane existence?

The fourth candle goes out.

Dodgson. *Seizes Carnacki's left wrist and wrestles the charm from it.*

Carnacki. *Draws his revolver.*

Dodgson. *Wraps the charm in the note and sets both alight at the fifth candle.*

Carnacki. *Aims the revolver at roughly where he last heard Dodgson speak.*
Confound it, Dodgson!

Dodgson. *Tosses the burning note and charm out of the Pentacle.*

Carnacki. What's got into you, man?

The fifth and final candle goes out. The glow of the Electric Pentacle steadies. The sound of wingbeats recedes.

Carnacki. *Lowers his revolver.*

Dodgson. Has that done it?

Carnacki. I can't hear it any more.

Dodgson. Hear what?

Carnacki. The herald. I don't see it overhead either.

Dodgson. Then I was right? The curse was nothing to do with the Allenby family.
It was / something in the charm.

Carnacki. What one might term a haunted or cursed artefact, masquerading as a hereditary spiritual entanglement or family curse. Of course the victims tore the thing off, the moment they realised it was guiding the herald toward them, but the realisation always came too late. And if the charm were of the herald's own being, as it were, a part of the creature itself, then of course it would remain uninsulated by the Electric Pentacle.

Dodgson. You're yourself once again, I see.

Carnacki. Myself, yes. I think so. But not yet whole.

Dodgson. You see the chasm still?

Carnacki. Yes. Though as long as the Pentacle holds, without the charm to give me away, I should knit back together quite naturally. I may yet write that monograph.

The cry of a monstrous carrion bird. The sound of monstrous, frantic wingbeats.
Wind.

*The Electric Pentacle flares bright, then goes out with a pop and a spray of sparks.
Darkness.*

Dodgson. What in Heaven's name / was that?

Carnacki. Dodgson, take my gun. / Where are you, Dodgson?

Dodgson. Why? What for? What's happening?

Carnacki. I can't see. I may miss. / I may hit you.

Dodgson. I heard it, Carnacki. Is it coming for me, now, too?

Carnacki. No. Perhaps. I doubt it can discriminate. Take my gun.

Dodgson. But / what for?

Carnacki. It's coming here, Dodgson. It's lost track of me in the abyss so it means to manifest itself on the physical plane. Death is preferable to whatever it has in mind. Where / are you?

Dodgson. I won't do it.

Carnacki. You must. I'm not afraid. I've seen beyond the veil. There's nothing there.

Dodgson. I refuse.

Carnacki. *Puts the gun to his temple and cocks it.*

A sound like many voices whispering in an unknown language becomes audible over the sound of wings.

*The Electric Pentacle lights back up. The chalk lines of the Water Circle glow. So do the signs of the Saaamaaa Ritual which **Carnacki** drew on the floor with water. And so does a new series of lines, which combine with those of the Water Circle to form a new, more intricate pentacle (see Appendix 3). Signs of the Saaamaaa Ritual appear, glowing, on **Carnacki's** and **Dodgson's** foreheads.*

Carnacki. *Drops the gun.* / Dodgson.

Dodgson. Is this it?

Carnacki. The centre, Dodgson.

Dodgson. *Goes for the gun.*

Carnacki. *Manhandles **Dodgson** into the centre of the circle, by the trunk. Back to back, now. We have to ride it out.*

The wind gains strength.

The whispering overpowers the wingbeats.

The cry of a monstrous carrion bird in pain.

Stillness. Silence. Darkness.

Dodgson. Did you see? Ghostly faces in the dark. Watching.

Carnacki. I saw.

Pause.

Carnacki. I've said before there are entities that sometimes intervene when a human spirit is threatened by the Outer Monstrosities. Of course it doesn't do to count on these things, / but...

Dodgson. Carnacki.

Carnacki. I suppose the whole business with stranding spirits in the Outer Circle was a way to circumvent the notice of those powers.

Dodgson. Tom.

Carnacki. William.

Dodgson. Must you?

Carnacki. Must I what?

Dodgson. We're alive, aren't we? Can't you leave it at that, just this once?

Carnacki. Perhaps I'd better.

Pause.

Dodgson. You're working it out in your head. I can tell.

Carnacki. I'll need an explanation ready for Arkright. You know what he's like.

Beat.

Dodgson. *Laughs.*

Carnacki. *Laughs.*

Morning.

Carnacki. *Is dismantling the Electric Pentacle and scrubbing out the Water Circle.*

Florence. The first time I got lost. When I was just a little girl. We were by the sea. I was exploring the rock pools and I must have gotten carried away. When I looked back it was dark and I couldn't see Mother. The tide was in and nothing around me looked familiar any more. I thought I might be out there among the rocks all night, alone. It still makes my heart jump just thinking about it.

Carnacki. I know the feeling.

Florence. Well, it's like that. Only more. Imagine not being able to see home even as a distant star.

Carnacki. I doubt I can even begin to.

Florence. Are you envious?

Beat.

Florence. Where did it all start?

Carnacki. We'll never know.

Florence. But you have a theory. You can't not have theories about things.

Carnacki. I don't know. Perhaps some ancestor of yours got on the wrong side of some shaman or mystic with knowledge of the Unseen World.

Florence. Someone like you?

Carnacki. Or perhaps it was meant for someone else entirely, and your ancestor just happened to fall afoul of it. The one responsible may not have foreseen how it would come to be passed down through the generations. Though if that part was deliberate...

Beat.

Florence. You are envious. I can tell. Is that why you lured it back?

Carnacki. That is not what I was trying to do.

Florence. Still. I know where home is now. Everything looks familiar again. I've seen such horrors and such wonders. Would you like to hear about them before I go?

Beat.

Florence. Will you visit once in a while?

Beat.

Carnacki. I'm sorry you went through what you did. I ought to have seen what was happening.

Dodgson. Don't feel badly, old chap. You had a far worse night than I.

Carnacki. Hm? Sorry, Dodgson. I was miles and miles away.

Dodgson. Are you quite all right?

Carnacki. I'm alive, aren't I?

Dodgson. And in one piece again.

Carnacki. Just about.

Beat.

Dodgson. Thank you.

Carnacki. Thank me? Why?

Dodgson. It's thanks to your precautions that I'm safe.

Carnacki. I suppose you're right. That's something, at least. Help me with this, would you? *Hefts one end of the trunk.*

Dodgson. *Hefts the other end of the trunk.*

They exit carrying the trunk between them.

The premiere

Audience with the Ghost Finder premiered in a double bill with *London Pride* by Katie McCullough, produced by Blackshaw Theatre as part of Wandsworth Arts Festival and Fringe 2013. Theatre is fluid and defies definition; this text may differ slightly from the play as performed.

Venue: The Selkirk Upstairs, 60 Selkirk Road, Tooting Broadway, London SW17 0ES

Dates: 8–10 and 15–17 May 2013

Praise for the premiere

★★★★ ”brilliantly written” – Deborah Klayman, The Public Reviews

4/5 “a great new play ... highly recommended” – Christianna Mason, What’s Been Seen?

“Double Thumbs Up ... fun mystery” – Helen Gush, stage2page

“having been raised on a diet of ’70s sci-fi and TV repeats of *The Devil Rides Out*, I had a whale of a time” – Lauren Mooney, A Younger Theatre

Original cast in order of appearance

ALEXANDER PANKHURST (CARNACKI)

For Blackshaw: *Gormenghast: Titus Groan* (Alfred Prunesquallor)

Other theatre includes: *Rabbit* (Tom), *The Shakespeare Conspiracy* (Richard III), *Airport* (Jamie), *The White House* (Harry), *Henry VI Part I* (Suffolk, Alençon), *The Night Before Christmas* (Gary), *Five Finger Exercise* (Walter Langer), *Our Country’s Good* (Major Robbie Ross)

Film includes: *Slow* – music video (Male Lead)

CERIDWEN SMITH (DODGSON, MRS ALLENBY, FLORENCE)

For Blackshaw: *Gormenghast: Titus Groan* (Fuchsia Groan)

Other theatre includes: *The Girl With No Heart* (Freia), *Olga’s Room* (Ana), *Mervyn Peake’s Noah’s Ark* (Hyena), *The Clockmaster* (Monkey, Actor-musician), *A Midsummer Night’s Dream* (Puck)

Original crew

ELLIE PITKIN (DIRECTOR)

For Blackshaw: *Gormenghast: Titus Groan*

Other theatre includes: *Our Country’s Good*, *Arcadia*

M. J. Starling

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TUTKU BARBAROS (ASSISTANT DIRECTOR)

Other theatre includes: *Tangent, Emoticon, Around the World in 80 Days, Waiting for Lefty*

As director: *Made For Him, Living With Strangers, Galaxy, What Remains in the East, Millennium, Bitter Looks, Flattering Words, If I Had A Hammer*

LIZZIE COOPER (STAGE MANAGER)

For Blackshaw: *Gormenghast: Titus Groan*

Other theatre includes: *Play!, Who Is Moloch?*

DAVID TURNBULL (SOUND DESIGNER)

For Blackshaw: *Gormenghast: Titus Groan*

Television includes: *The Thick Of It*

Film includes: *Alan Partridge: Alpha Papa*

SHERRY COENEN (LIGHTING DESIGNER)

Other theatre includes: *Conquest of the South Pole, ENTER, The Cabinet of Dr Caligari, Your Last Breath, Anton Chekhov, Frobisher's Gold, Mysterious Skin, Othello, Bernarda Alba, Where the Flowers Grow, The Shakespeare Conspiracy.*

ZAHRA MANSOURI (SET AND COSTUME DESIGNER)

For Blackshaw: *Gormenghast: Titus Groan*

Other theatre includes: *The Great Gatsby, The Shakespeare Conspiracy, Finding Butterfly, Being Tommy Cooper*

www.zahramansouri.com

MICHELLE BRISTOW (COSTUME ASSISTANT)

Other theatre includes: *The Rover, Two Days In The Smoke, City Slacker*

PETRA HJORTSBERG (PROPS MAKER)

Other theatre includes: *Body Electric, DISCOConnected, Treasure this? (part of Bush Bazaar), In Extremis, Occupied, Cnoic Chlaonta, Shift(h)er, Celebrity, Romeo and Juliet, A Man for All Seasons*

Film includes: *Magpie, Way of the Monkey's Claw, Screaming Guns, PubMonkey*

MIRANDA MARVIN (ASSISTANT STAGE MANAGER)

ANDREW CRANE (SOUND OPERATOR)
BARNEY BARRON (PUBLICITY, PR AND MARKETING)
HELEN JOHNSON (PUBLICITY, PR AND MARKETING)
COLE CAMPBELL (PUBLICITY, PR AND MARKETING)
NICK TATCHELL (ASSISTANT EVENTS MANAGER)
VIKKI WESTON (EDUCATION MANAGER)
RICHARD STRATTON (IT AND WEBSITE MANAGER)
NIVINE KEATING (REHEARSAL PHOTOGRAPHY)
www.morrighanimages.co.uk

Blackshaw Theatre

Blackshaw Theatre is committed to the production of quality theatre in all its forms. Among its talented members are writers, directors, actors, designers and technicians; all of whom see the value in embracing a wide range of disciplines. This allows Blackshaw to undertake adaptations of fiction for stage, new writing and revivals. As a group of multidisciplinary practitioners, the company also offers an element of flexibility to each of its members, allowing for individual growth and development.

www.blackshawonline.com

Interview with the ghost writer

Vikki Weston: What drew you to Carnacki in the first place and what is it you like about the Edwardian era?

M. J. Starling: I discovered the stories through weekly short story podcasts. And *PodCastle*¹³ ran *The Whistling Room*, which is the third or fourth story that William Hope Hodgson released. I listened to that one walking home through Croydon, from a play I'd seen, in the middle of the night, and it became really spooky as I listened to most of it waiting at the bus stop opposite a furniture store that burnt down in the London riots in 2011 so my memory of that story is a memory of a ghostly building that doesn't exist anymore.

I really liked the anachronistic technology that he uses and I really enjoy the framing device of it being an intimate fireside tale that Carnacki's telling to his friends. I picked up the rest of the stories from Project Gutenberg¹⁴ not long after that and read through all of them. What made me want to put it on the stage was the Electric Pentacle. I just saw it as an image that I wanted to see in real life, the idea of the vigil inside the pentacle; I really wanted to see a person on the stage in this glowing star.

What drew me to the era, well, I love the kind of language of that time; it's all repressed and stiff upper lip. There's no suffering of cowardice, you have to face everything with brilliant words like "pluck". So it's ripe for subtext when you've got language that's so repressed. And it's fun to write in an idiom that isn't your own, it feels more fantastical so it's a challenge to write and there's the element of escapism; getting your brain around the different way of thinking and speaking.

VW: Do you feel like because it's a fantasy, because the world Carnacki inhabits "isn't real", that means you don't have to get too hung up on things like historical accuracy?

MJS: I did do some research but I held myself back from researching and double-checking anachronisms until I'd finished. I thought, "I'll write the thing and I'll write whatever I think is cool or whatever I think will work in the story and if I discover afterwards that I need to change a hansom cab to a horse then I can do that." I don't think the supernatural setting means that you can be cavalier with period detail, though, because it's a secret world fantasy rather than an alternate world fantasy, it's not like steampunk. It is the world we knew but there are details of it bubbling below the surface that nobody believed were real. So you do have to make it period accurate; the supernatural stuff has to not change the world, I think that's the main distinction. It has to work within the constraints of history.

VW: So, did you want the audience to be thinking about it as if it was something that might have actually happened in 1912 and it was just that no one knew about it so it could be real?

MJS: Yes, I would love people to take that from it. I think that feeds into the fact that Hodgson puts a vaguely pseudo-scientific spin on everything. He is concerned with making it seem like something that is believable. Obviously there are parallels

¹³ <http://www.podcastle.org/>

¹⁴ <http://www.gutenberg.org/>

between Carnacki and Holmes but there are between Conan Doyle and Hodgson as well. The contrast is Conan Doyle really did believe that faeries existed and his non-Holmes books were very concerned with secret worlds and supernatural monsters existing under the Brecon Beacons, whereas all Hodgson stories are rooted in rationalism. Carnacki is a very rational character with a scientific explanation for everything even if that scientific explanation is “I don’t know” — which is, in a way, the most scientific explanation you can have for anything.

To paraphrase Tim Minchin, throughout history, every mystery we’ve ever solved has turned out not to be magic. Anything you don’t understand, it doesn’t mean it’s inherently inexplicable, it just means we don’t have the tools or knowledge to understand it yet. Why would we approach that by saying “We’ll never understand this, let’s never try”? Why not say, “I want to try to understand this, I want to formulate a theory about it”? However ridiculous that theory might sound. And some of Hodgson’s theories are patently ridiculous — talking about rings of gases stretching millions of miles out from the earth — but it is a theory.

VW: So, the storyline in *Ghost Finder* is your own creation, not an original Carnacki story?

MJS: I started off trying to do the Black Veil, which is a case that Carnacki mentions several times in the stories but Hodgson never wrote the story of it. Someone else has written that story though. The detail we get of the Black Veil is that it’s the first time Carnacki uses the Electric Pentacle, obviously a black veil was involved and there’s a person called Aster who saw the Pentacle and Carnacki’s trappings as silly superstition and ignored them, and died. So I started writing that draft and I set it in a family museum in the North and the veil was one of their mysterious artifacts and it just got too complicated and I tied myself in knots trying to write the story I wanted to while staying within the confines that Hodgson gives and in the end I just decided to do my own story instead. I feel like the Black Veil story is more powerful because we never know everything about it, Carnacki never tells the story in full, that adds to the trauma and horror of it and I like that the reader gets to make up their own details for it.

The short answer to this question is this isn’t an adaptation of a Hodgson story, it has two original Hodgson characters (Carnacki and Dodgson) and two I made up myself (Florence and Mrs Allenby) and the whole story is from my imagination (*editor’s note: plus a few details borrowed from H. P. Lovecraft’s The Dreams in the Witch-House*).

VW: Is there anything in particular that gave you the inspiration for the storyline? I’m thinking particularly of the bit at the end of *Ghost Finder*, which is like the Luck Ring case (in *The Gateway of the Monster*) where the thing that he’s holding as protection in the Pentacle in the first place turns out to be the thing that’s malevolent. I particularly liked the part where Dodgson works it out and takes immediate action to destroy the charm to save Carnacki because it’s a great twist that turns it all on its head.

MJS: I’m really pleased with the reaction to that bit because people worked it out before Carnacki — because it’s not a mystery that stays a mystery right up until the moment Dodgson works it out in the play. There are plenty of clues and you know there’s something a bit fishy about the talisman early on. But people didn’t come up to me and say, “Your mystery was bad because I solved it,” somebody came up to me and proudly said, “I out-Carnackied Carnacki, I solved the mystery before he did,”

and that's what you want from a mystery plot, to feel like you're cleverer than the detective. I'm so glad it was received that way.

It was from the story I wanted to tell about the characters. Wanting to have the mis-en-scene image of them in the Electric Pentacle was not quite enough to hang a story on but I knew I wanted them in that situation. I had to investigate the character and ask, "What journey do I want to take the character on? What story do I want to tell that Hodgson didn't tell?" Otherwise I wouldn't be adding anything by doing a new Carnacki story. So the thing I wanted to do was challenge Carnacki's rationalism and put him in a situation where he can't trust his own senses. I knew I wanted the vigil in the Pentacle, Carnacki not being able to trust his own judgement, and that's just like *Gateway of the Monster* because he doesn't just have the object with him, he's also affected by it. It was also the fact that he refers to these things as monstrous and he tells everyone how terrified he was, he's unafraid to admit he's scared — but he still takes relish in being afraid so I wanted to interrogate that contradiction within him, which is why I wanted at the very end, when Florence challenges him about if he wishes their places were reversed, to show that what the audience sees as a bad fate for her, he sees as a privilege. I'm interested in characters that have completely alien world-views. It's why I watch a lot of cop shows about serial killers, because I'm interested in strange psychology and abnormal or ab-natural psychology, so I wanted a situation where I could display to the audience that Carnacki would see having his mind dissociated from his body and being banished to the Outer Circle of the universe as not necessarily a bad thing.

VW: Have you got a favourite Carnacki moment?

MJS: I like it when he lectures people, and he refers to it as lecturing people. "I gave him a lecture on being brave and another on the dissociation of the inanimate-inert," or something. His reaction to anything is always to educate but I think that he doesn't see it that way — but I think it's comical that he does that. And there are moments where he's heroic, even if it's to save his own skin, diving out of windows and things like that.

VW: Was there anything you really wanted to put in that you couldn't include?

MJS: Yes, cameras. He does a lot of stuff with cameras in *The House Among the Laurels* and *The Gateway of the Monster*. I had early drafts where there were, that was an effect I wanted to see on stage: a pitch black stage just lit every now and again by a camera flash. I thought that would be really powerful but I couldn't get it in. And I realised when re-reading *House Among the Laurels* that he breaks his own rules with his camera flash, because no light is supposed to come from within the pentacle. He says, "I took away the policemen's cigarettes and pipes so they couldn't light up and cause a light," and there he is, sitting in the middle of the pentacle, snapping away with his camera flash. My other earlier draft had him snapping off camera flashes in the pentacle and thus admitting the thing that was haunting him. I wanted him to make a mistake and that was the mistake in an earlier draft so I am sad I had to cut the camera because I liked that.

VW: Would you consider writing more Carnacki stuff or do you think *Ghost Finder* is it?

MJS: A couple of people asked me that during the premiere run and my immediate answer was, "No, I've done everything I want to do with the character". I've had fun with him, I've explored the situations I wanted to put him in that were different to

what Hodgson had done with him before. But, if somebody offered me a six series TV show then I would think of something! You do start to think of other things, though, so I wouldn't rule it out.

VW: So this is your first proper play, has that opened the door for playwriting for you?

MJS: Yes, I have other plays, not quite “in the works” but planned. It seems like a weird thing to say about my only play, but this is kind of an exception as it's not like any of my other ideas. It sort of goes against what I think of as my “principles” for writing theatre because we have a problem on the stage with representation of female characters and what have I done? I've written a play where the main characters are male. Having said that, I've put more women in the play than Hodgson ever put in his stories. They're always off-stage, like Carnacki's mother in *The Searcher of the End House*, as soon as anything mysterious happens he sends her off on holiday. And there's Miss Hisgins who is just a victim, sitting on her bed in the middle of a pentacle screaming, while her beau gets mauled by a guy in a horse costume.

Also, I get incredibly annoyed in the cinema when it's just adaptation after adaptation and there's no original work and I try to avoid that in my playwriting too. Admittedly, it's not the most well-known work so I hope I'm making it more well-known, Hodgson is massively under-appreciated and his novels are excellent as well. I feel like the next few plays I write will most likely be bigger and more diverse casts, more experimental in form as well and are unlikely to be in a historical setting, as I'm allergic to research.

VW: Besides Hodgson did any other writers inspire you when writing *Audience with the Ghost Finder*?

MJS: Well, Conan Doyle is the obvious other reference point because of all the similarities between Carnacki and Sherlock Holmes because they're like two sides of the same coin, and that's how I've been pitching the play, as *Sherlock Holmes* meets *Ghostbusters*. But other than that, not really, I completely immersed myself in Hodgson. I read and re-read the stories, I did a read-through of the stories looking for Carnacki idioms that I needed to get into his speech, and I read and re-read his theories of the ab-natural to make sure everything tallied with what Hodgson had written.

Warren Ellis talks about reading other things when you're trying to write and how it's like spoilt milk in the fridge, when you open the fridge everything tastes like spoilt milk. So no, I tried to only read Hodgson while I was writing this and not let anything else influence me.

VW: There's quite limited information about the characters, mainly Dodgson so, did you have to do anything to develop the characters or did they come about organically?

MJS: Limited information is quite good — it gives you room to add things — but Carnacki I think is very clearly characterised and it's nice that in the original stories you get him from two perspectives, his own perspective and Dodgson's. The handles for Carnacki were his bravery but also believing that he's a coward. And also the rationalism that runs through him like a stick of rock that gives rise to what Ellie [Pitkin, director of Blackshaw Theatre's premiere production of *Ghost Finder*] refers to as his “terms and conditions” that whenever he gives anyone any theory or explanation about anything he always follows it with, “Well, I can't be sure about this

you know, this is based on theories and it might not work, there's no certainty in any defence."

With Dodgson, I had much more free play because he's hardly characterised at all in the stories so I deduced things about him based on his contrast with the other members of the cabal. There's a chance comment Carnacki makes about Arkright "studying almost as much magic as he has" so that immediately positions Arkright as the smug one, who does all the research and has a bit more experience than the rest of them. Jessop is only mentioned once or twice but Hodgson wrote another novel called *The Ghost Pirates* where the main character is called Jessop, and there's absolutely no reason why it wouldn't be the same character as he has a supernatural experience and that's exactly the sort of thing that would lead him into contact with Carnacki. Taylor gets no mention so I decided he was the runt of the litter. I wanted to make Dodgson the complete contrast of Carnacki which is the person with the entirely mundane existence because Dodgson is representing the audience's point of view so he's the one who's enthralled by stories of the supernatural and the reason he's so enraptured is, I figured, because he's not had experiences like this himself.

VW: Why Florence and her Mother and why did you keep it as such a small cast?

MJS: I always saw it as a cast of two and I always saw it as being confined within the circle so I didn't add any more characters because I thought it would get crowded. I left it open so that it can be staged with different performers but when I pictured it in my head it was two actors playing four characters. Florence is another foil for Carnacki in a different way to Dodgson, he's the sympathetic foil who is Carnacki's friend and is loyal to him and believes the things he says, whereas Florence will challenge him and I needed someone who would do that. Seeing her as his opposition led to other decisions like making her younger and making her female, although in some ways that was more to do with getting more women into the story because I think that was something Hodgson missed out. I didn't want her to be entirely defined by the main character, though in a story with a protagonist everyone's defined by their relationship with that person, especially when they're the only one who's on stage the entire time. So, I wanted her to be able to take action herself and not just be waiting to be saved by the expert.

Mrs Allenby is the least characterised person in the play. If this was a film noir she's the client, she comes to Carnacki with the case. Her main role in it was to give him that guilt scene. I wanted someone to really give him hell about his failings so she needed to be stern and she also helped me bring out the theme of rationalism versus faith.

VW: If you had an opportunity to further develop the script is there anything you'd change or add?

MJS: I'm pretty happy with it as it is. I am going to further develop it because hopefully it'll be put on again. I've had some feedback from people that were involved about some scenes that could be tightened up. I watched it nearly every night of the premiere run and there are certain lines that sprang out at me after so many viewings that I think I'll take another look at but I don't think there are any structural changes or any extra additions to the stories I would make. It's been a long development process anyway and I've had lots of feedback at every stage so I am pretty happy with it. The ending changed quite a lot over the process between first finished draft and the draft that was performed. Early on I tried too hard to keep it ambiguous and it ended up being a bit woolly and the feedback I got on that made the ending so much

stronger. There was none of the challenge to Carnacki about whether he wishes that he'd failed and been taken by the monster so, having revised it to get that in, I don't think there's much more I could do with it.

VW: There are fantastic comic moments in the play, did you intend for it to be funny as well as scary or was that a happy accident?

MJS: I almost can't remember, there were definitely moments that I didn't expect to be as funny as they are when I saw it performed. There are moments that I wrote in to be a release of tension, where I'd had a long period of scary and I needed something to give the audience relief and I don't think I'd understood that that release would manifest itself as laughter. And also I think that a lot of the comic moments are nothing to do with me at all and are to do with the direction and performances rather than the writing. I don't think I set out for it to be funny but I'm pleased that it is in places and it serves an important purpose in terms of the pacing of the play to have that build and release.

There are ways in which Carnacki is a clown. He's an eccentric, and a more down-to-earth eccentric than some of the other characters written around the same time. I think he's less eccentric than Holmes, despite the fact the field of his expertise might be considered more eccentric. He's very practical and he can probably be a bit of a bore at times and there are moments when he is a clown and what Ellie really focused on in the premiere run was his alien-ness and the fact that he doesn't understand people and situations as well as he understands the supernatural and that's where the comedy comes from, him responding to people in what he thinks is a reassuring way but is actually entirely unreassuring and much more information than you would ever want in a scary situation.

Volume Two: The tales

Thomas Carnacki, the famous Investigator of “real” ghost stories, tells here the results of his peculiar and weird investigations

William Hope Hodgson: Dreamer on the Borderland

William Hope Hodgson (1877–1918) is known not only as the writer of such sea horror tales as *The Voice in the Night*, *From the Tideless Sea*, *The Ghost Pirates* and *The Boats of the “Glen Carrig”* but also for the pioneer science-fiction classics *The Night Land* and *The House on the Borderland*. His works have been hailed by many critics and writers including H. P. Lovecraft and Clark Ashton Smith. Not surprisingly, his life was just as interesting as his stories.

WHH (known as “Hope” to his family and friends) was born in 1877, the second son of Essex clergyman Samuel Hodgson and his wife, Lizzie. The family would eventually grow to include twelve children but three of WHH’s brothers would die in infancy before their second years.

By all reports, Samuel Hodgson was a difficult man to live with. This is perhaps supported by the fact that he was constantly transferred throughout most of his career. Samuel was moved at least twelve times during the years 1871–1890 and, in 1887, the family was sent to do missionary work in Ireland at Ardrahan, County Galway. This would provide the setting for one of Hodgson’s most famous novels, *The House on the Borderland*.

During his youth, WHH was in love with the sea and made several attempts to run away but was always returned to his family. Finally, through the intervention of his uncle, Reverend Thomas Lumsdon Brown, WHH was apprenticed to the firm of Shaw and Savill for four years as a seaman in the Merchant Marine in 1891. This would begin his long association with the sea which would leave him with such a depth of anger and hatred that WHH had no choice but to express it in his many sea stories.

In 1898, WHH would rescue a fellow crewman from shark-infested waters after the man fell overboard. For this act, WHH received a medal from the Royal Human Society but even this could not keep him at sea which he finally abandoned for good in 1900.

After Samuel Hodgson’s death from throat cancer in 1892, the family was plunged into poverty. This state would exist until the death of WHH’s paternal grandfather in 1900 when he left the family an inheritance. Still, money would be a constant concern in the Hodgson home.

In 1901, WHH opened his “School of Physical Culture” in Blackburn. After devoting much of his attention to “physical culture” during his time at sea, WHH would remain an avid follower of health and strength development. WHH had worked at increasing his own strength and physical power in order to protect himself from the bullying of other seamen even including some junior officers. He would use this interest to write several articles on the subject of fitness which were published in various physical culture magazines.

During his European tour of 1902, Harry Houdini appeared at the Palace Theatre in Blackburn where his traditional challenge to escape from any handcuffs was accepted by WHH. The result was a two hour ordeal for Houdini who finally escaped and would later remember the occurrence as one of the worst in his performing career. Hodgson, with his knowledge of muscles and physical culture, had shackled Houdini so thoroughly that Houdini would still bear the physical scars from his escape twenty years later.

Unfortunately, the “School for Physical Culture” did not last and WHH closed it by 1903. Having some little success at writing before, WHH now turned his attention to becoming a full-time writer. For the next several years, WHH would spend his time writing his four novels and many of his most well-known short-stories.

Even though faced with many initial rejections, WHH persevered and his first short story, *The Goddess of Death* was published in 1906. WHH would now publish frequently for the next ten years. His first published novel, *The Boats of the “Glen Carrig”*, appeared in 1907 followed by *The House on the Borderland* in 1908, *The Ghost Pirates* in 1909 and *The Night Land* in 1912. Recent criticism has presented the theory that these novels were written in the reverse order of publication which would make *The Night Land* (a SF masterpiece) as possibly his first novel and *The Boats of the “Glen Carrig”* (a combination of adventure and horror) his last novel.

Each one of these novels is a remarkable achievement. Together, they form much of Hodgson’s legacy. In *The Boats of the “Glen Carrig”*, an adventure on the high sea takes the reader through many supernatural events and ends in WHH’s own infamous Sargasso Sea, a part of the ocean choked by immovable seaweed and giant sea monsters. *The Ghost Pirates* chronicles the last voyage of a cursed vessel and the spectres that haunt it. In *The House on the Borderland*, a man finds himself in an isolated house that is besieged by outside forces and features passages of incredibly imaginative science fiction. Hodgson’s masterpiece, *The Night Land*, presents an Earth in the far future when the sun has burnt out, humanity lives in a giant metal pyramid and there are great evils that walk the land.

Sadly, despite many positive reviews, WHH did not make a great deal of money with these novels. This is likely why he abandoned novels to concentrate more on short stories. Many of these tales would become recognised as classics of weird fiction including *The Voice in the Night* which has been reprinted many times and also adapted (most notably as the Japanese film, *Matango*, in 1963). Adrift in the ocean, several sailors are hailed by a mysterious figure in a distant rowboat that begs their mercy for supplies for he and his fiancée but refuses to come closer or into the light. When pressed, he tells the sailors a gruesome tale of horror that remains long after the story is read.

One of Hodgson’s most famous creations was the Sargasso Sea. First appearing in print in *From the Tideless Sea* in 1906, this setting appears several times throughout WHH’s fiction. It is a real spot in the North Atlantic Ocean where the tides cause the seaweed to grow large and thick. In WHH’s fiction, this seaweed actually traps ships inside it much in the same way that ice traps ships in the Arctic Ocean. But, to make matters worse, the Sargasso Sea is the home of many huge sea monsters who constantly attack those ships unlucky enough to get caught in the weeds.

Undaunted, WHH created one of his most famous characters, the occult investigator, Carnacki. Appearing in several stories in 1910 (collected into an anthology in 1913), the Carnacki stories remain one of the most popular of WHH works. Carnacki is a

“ghost-finder” but, where he differs from more traditional psychic detectives, Carnacki uses modern devices such as photography and vacuum tubes to combat the evil. *The Whistling Room* is one of the best of these stories and remains WHH’s most reprinted story. Carnacki himself has remained popular and new stories by other authors featuring the “ghost-finder” have appeared and the character himself has made an appearance in Alan Moore’s graphic novel, *The League of Extraordinary Gentlemen*.

In 1913, WHH marries Bessie G. Farnworth and the couple move to France apparently in an effort to save money. WHH continues writing but most of his most notable stories are now behind him. When England declares war on Germany in 1914, the couple returns to England and WHH joins the Officer Training Corps of the University of London.

Ever patriotic, WHH receives his commission as a Lieutenant in the 171st Battery of the Royal Field Artillery but, while training new soldiers, WHH is thrown from his horse and suffers a broken jaw and a concussion. Due to his injuries, WHH is discharged and sent back to his family in Borth.

But Hodgson refused to sit out the war on the sidelines. Due in great part to his lifelong physical training, WHH recovered and re-enlists in October, 1917. He is assigned to the 11th Brigade which is sent to Ypres. From there, he joins the 84th Battery which, in turn, relieves a forward Battery south of Rugby Dump.

In March of 1918, the 84th Brigade takes over positions at Brombeek and suffers heavy gas and high velocity shelling at the Tourelle Crossroads. After being relieved by Belgian Artillery, the 84th marches to Ploegsteert area and takes position at Le Touquet Berthe. A German attack briefly hospitalises WHH but he recovers in time for the 84th Battery to withdraw and set up a Forward Observation Post (FOP).

Despite it being virtually a “suicide mission”, WHH volunteers for duty at the FOP with another soldier. On April 19th, 1918, the FOP suffers a direct hit from German mortar fire which kills both men and leaves little in the way of remains. They are buried by French soldiers on the eastern slope of Mont Kemmel in Belgium.

After WHH’s death, Bessie returned to her family and oversaw WHH’s literary estate until her death in 1943. At that point, the estate reverted to WHH’s sister, Lissie, who handled it (not in the best way) until her own death in 1959.

Since WHH’s death, his fame has increased. Despite some episodes of rarity, much (if not all) of Hodgson’s fiction is now available either online or via Print on Demand publishers. As we move towards the 100th anniversary of his death, let us take up the banner of this talented author and carry it forward into a new century!

Biographer’s note: I would like to acknowledge my debt to those Hodgson biographers who have gone before me. Much of the information here is a result of their work so I thank R. Alain Everts, Sam Moskowitz and Jane Frank.

Sam Gafford

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The Gateway of the Monster

Originally published in *The Idler*, January 1910

In response to Carnacki's usual card of invitation to have dinner and listen to a story, I arrived promptly at 427, Cheyne Walk, to find the three others who were always invited to these happy little times, there before me. Five minutes later, Carnacki, Arkright, Jessop, Taylor and I were all engaged in the "pleasant occupation" of dining.

"You've not been long away, this time," I remarked as I finished my soup; forgetting momentarily, Carnacki's dislike of being asked even to skirt the borders of his story until such time as he was ready. Then he would not stint words.

"That's all," he replied with brevity; and I changed the subject, remarking that I had been buying a new gun, to which piece of news he gave an intelligent nod, and a smile which I think showed a genuinely good-humoured appreciation of my intentional changing of the conversation.

Later, when dinner was finished, Carnacki snuggled himself comfortably down in his big chair, along with his pipe, and began his story, with very little circumlocution:

"As Dodgson was remarking just now, I've only been away a short time, and for a very good reason too — I've only been away a short distance. The exact locality I am afraid I must not tell you; but it is less than twenty miles from here; though, except for changing a name, that won't spoil the story. And it is a story too! One of the most extraordinary things I have ever run against.

"I received a letter a fortnight ago from a man I must call Anderson, asking for an appointment. I arranged a time, and when he came, I found that he wished me to investigate, and see whether I could not clear up a long standing and well — too well — authenticated case of what he termed 'haunting.' He gave me very full particulars, and finally, as the thing seemed to present something unique, I decided to take it up.

"Two days later, I drove to the house, late in the afternoon. I found it a very old place, standing quite alone in its own grounds. Anderson had left a letter with the butler, I found, pleading excuses for his absence, and leaving the whole house at my disposal for my investigations. The butler evidently knew the object of my visit, and I questioned him pretty thoroughly during dinner, which I had in rather lonely state. He is an old and privileged servant, and had the history of the Grey Room exact in detail. From him I learned more particulars regarding two things that Anderson had mentioned in but a casual manner. The first was that the door of the Grey Room would be heard in the dead of night to open, and slam heavily, and this even though the butler knew it was locked, and the key on the bunch in his pantry. The second was that the bedclothes would always be found torn off the bed, and hurled in a heap into a corner.

"But it was the door slamming that chiefly bothered the old butler. Many and many a time, he told me, had he lain awake and just got shivering with fright, listening; for sometimes the door would be slammed time after time — thud! thud! thud! — so that sleep was impossible.

"From Anderson, I knew already that the room had a history extending back over a hundred and fifty years. Three people had been strangled in it — an ancestor of his

and his wife and child. This is authentic, as I had taken very great pains to discover, so that you can imagine it was with a feeling that I had a striking case to investigate, that I went upstairs after dinner to have a look at the Grey Room.

“Peter, the old butler, was in rather a state about my going, and assured me with much solemnity that in all the twenty years of his service, no one had ever entered that room after nightfall. He begged me, in quite a fatherly way, to wait till the morning, when there would be no danger, and then he could accompany me himself.

“Of course, I smiled a little at him, and told him not to bother. I explained that I should do no more than look around a bit, and perhaps affix a few seals. He need not fear; I was used to that sort of thing. But he shook his head, when I said that.

“‘There isn’t many ghosts like ours, sir,’ he assured me, with mournful pride. And, by Jove! he was right, as you will see.

“I took a couple of candles, and Peter followed, with his bunch of keys. He unlocked the door; but would not come inside with me. He was evidently in a fright, and renewed his request, that I would put off my examination, until daylight. Of course, I laughed at him again, and told him he could stand sentry at the door, and catch anything that came out.

“‘It never comes outside, sir,’ he said, in his funny, old, solemn manner. Somehow he managed to make me feel as if I were going to have the ‘creeps’ right away. Anyway, it was one to him, you know.

“I left him there, and examined the room. It is a big apartment, and well furnished in the grand style, with a huge four-poster, which stands with its head to the end wall. There were two candles on the mantelpiece and two on each of the three tables that were in the room. I lit the lot, and after that the room felt a little less inhumanly dreary; though, mind you, it was quite fresh, and well kept in every way.

“After I had taken a good look round I sealed lengths of baby ribbon across the windows, along the walls, over the pictures, and over the fireplace and the wall-closets. All the time, as I worked, the butler stood just without the door, and I could not persuade him to enter; though I jested with him a little, as I stretched the ribbons, and went here and there about my work. Every now and again, he would say:— ‘You’ll excuse me, I’m sure, sir; but I do wish you would come out, sir. I’m fair in a quake for you.’

“I told him he need not wait; but he was loyal enough in his way to what he considered his duty. He said he could not go away and leave me all alone there. He apologised; but made it very clear that I did not realise the danger of the room; and I could see, generally, that he was in a pretty frightened state. All the same, I had to make the room so that I should know if anything material entered it; so I asked him not to bother me, unless he really heard something. He was beginning to get on my nerves, and the ‘feel’ of the room was bad enough, without making it any nastier.

“For a time further, I worked, stretching ribbons across the floor, and sealing them, so that the merest touch would have broken them, were anyone to venture into the room in the dark with the intention of playing the fool. All this had taken me far longer than I had anticipated; and, suddenly, I heard a clock strike eleven. I had taken off my coat soon after commencing work; now, however, as I had practically made an end of all that I intended to do, I walked across to the settee, and picked it up. I was in the act of getting into it when the old butler’s voice (he had not said a word for the last hour) came sharp and frightened:— ‘Come out, sir, quick! There’s

something going to happen!’ Jove! but I jumped, and then, in the same moment, one of the candles on the table to the left of the bed went out. Now whether it was the wind, or what, I do not know; but just for a moment, I was enough startled to make a run for the door; though I am glad to say that I pulled up before I reached it. I simply could not bunk out, with the butler standing there, after having, as it were, read him a sort of lesson on ‘bein’ brave, y’know.’ So I just turned right round, picked up the two candles off the mantelpiece, and walked across to the table near the bed. Well, I saw nothing. I blew out the candle that was still alight; then I went to those on the two other tables, and blew them out. Then, outside of the door, the old man called again:— ‘Oh! sir, do be told! Do be told!’

“All right, Peter,’ I said, and, by Jove, my voice was not as steady as I should have liked! I made for the door, and had a bit of work, not to start running. I took some thundering long strides, as you can imagine. Near the door, I had a sudden feeling that there was a cold wind in the room. It was almost as if the window had been suddenly opened a little. I got to the door and the old butler gave back a step, in a sort of instinctive way. ‘Collar the candles, Peter!’ I said, pretty sharply, and shoved them into his hands. I turned, and caught the handle, and slammed the door shut, with a crash. Somehow, do you know, as I did so, I thought I felt something pull back on it; but it must have been only fancy. I turned the key in the lock, and then again, double-locking the door. I felt easier then, and set-to and sealed the door. In addition, I put my card over the keyhole, and sealed it there; after which I pocketed the key, and went downstairs — with Peter; who was nervous and silent, leading the way. Poor old beggar! It had not struck me until that moment that he had been enduring a considerable strain during the last two or three hours.

“About midnight, I went to bed. My room lay at the end of the corridor upon which opens the door of the Grey Room. I counted the doors between it and mine, and found that five rooms lay between. And I am sure you can understand that I was not sorry. Then, just as I was beginning to undress, an idea came to me, and I took my candle and sealing-wax, and sealed the doors of all the five rooms. If any door slammed in the night, I should know just which one.

“I returned to my room, locked the door, and went to bed. I was waked suddenly from a deep sleep by a loud crash somewhere out in the passage. I sat up in bed and listened, but heard nothing. Then I lit my candle. I was in the very act of lighting it when there came the bang of a door being violently slammed, along the corridor. I jumped out of bed, and got my revolver. I unlocked my door, and went out into the passage, holding my candle high, and keeping the pistol ready. Then a queer thing happened. I could not go a step towards the Grey Room. You all know I am not really a cowardly chap. I’ve gone into too many cases connected with ghostly things, to be accused of that; but I tell you I funked it; simply funked it, just like any blessed kid. There was something precious unholy in the air that night. I backed into my bedroom, and shut and locked the door. Then I sat on the bed all night, and listened to the dismal thudding of a door up the corridor. The sound seemed to echo through all the house.

“Daylight came at last, and I washed and dressed. The door had not slammed for about an hour, and I was getting back my nerve again. I felt ashamed of myself; though in some ways it was silly, for when you’re meddling with that sort of thing, your nerve is bound to go, sometimes. And you just have to sit quiet and call yourself a coward until daylight. Sometimes it is more than just cowardice, I fancy. I believe

at times it is something warning you, and fighting for you. But, all the same, I always feel mean and miserable, after a time like that.

“When the day came properly, I opened my door, and, keeping my revolver handy, went quietly along the passage. I had to pass the head of the stairs, on the way, and who should I see coming up, but the old butler, carrying a cup of coffee. He had merely tucked his nightshirt into his trousers, and he had an old pair of carpet slippers on.

“Hello, Peter!’ I said, feeling suddenly cheerful; for I was as glad as any lost child to have a live human being close to me. ‘Where are you off to with the refreshments?’

“The old man gave a start, and slopped some of the coffee. He stared up at me and I could see that he looked white and done-up. He came on up the stairs and held out the little tray to me. ‘I’m very thankful indeed, sir, to see you safe and well,’ he said. ‘I feared, one time, you might risk going into the Grey Room, sir. I’ve lain awake all night, with the sound of the door. And when it came light, I thought I’d make you a cup of coffee. I knew you would want to look at the seals, and somehow it seems safer if there’s two, sir.’

”Peter,’ I said, ‘you’re a brick. This is very thoughtful of you.’ And I drank the coffee. ‘Come along,’ I told him, and handed him back the tray. ‘I’m going to have a look at what the brutes have been up to. I simply hadn’t the pluck to in the night.’

”I’m very thankful, sir,’ he replied. ‘Flesh and blood can do nothing, sir, against devils; and that’s what’s in the Grey Room after dark.’

”I examined the seals on all the doors, as I went along, and found them right; but when I got to the Grey Room, the seal was broken; though the card, over the keyhole, was untouched. I ripped it off, and unlocked the door, and went in, rather cautiously, as you can imagine; but the whole room was empty of anything to frighten one, and there was heaps of light. I examined all my seals, and not a single one was disturbed. The old butler had followed me in, and, suddenly, he called out:— ‘The bedclothes, sir!’

”I ran up to the bed, and looked over; and, surely, they were lying in the corner to the left of the bed. Jove! you can imagine how queer I felt. Something had been in the room. I stared for a while, from the bed, to the clothes on the floor. I had a feeling that I did not want to touch either. Old Peter, though, did not seem to be affected that way. He went over to the bed-coverings, and was going to pick them up, as, doubtless, he had done every day these twenty years back; but I stopped him. I wanted nothing touched, until I had finished my examination. This, I must have spent a full hour over, and then I let Peter straighten up the bed; after which we went out and I locked the door; for the room was getting on my nerves.

”I had a short walk, and then breakfast; after which I felt more my own man, and so returned to the Grey Room, and, with Peter’s help, and one of the maids, I had everything taken out except the bed, even the very pictures. I examined the walls, floor and ceiling then, with probe, hammer and magnifying glass; but found nothing suspicious. And I can assure you, I began to realise, in very truth, that some incredible thing had been loose in the room during the past night. I sealed up everything again, and went out, locking and sealing the door, as before.

”After dinner that night, Peter and I unpacked some of my stuff, and I fixed up my camera and flashlight opposite to the door of the Grey Room, with a string from the trigger of the flashlight to the door. Then, you see, if the door were really opened, the

flashlight would blare out, and there would be, possibly, a very queer picture to examine in the morning. The last thing I did, before leaving, was to uncap the lens; and after that I went off to my bedroom, and to bed; for I intended to be up at midnight; and to ensure this, I set my little alarm to call me; also I left my candle burning.

"The clock woke me at twelve, and I got up and into my dressing-gown and slippers. I shoved my revolver into my right side-pocket, and opened my door. Then, I lit my dark-room lamp, and withdrew the slide, so that it would give a clear light. I carried it up the corridor, about thirty feet, and put it down on the floor, with the open side away from me, so that it would show me anything that might approach along the dark passage. Then I went back, and sat in the doorway of my room, with my revolver handy, staring up the passage towards the place where I knew my camera stood outside the door of the Grey Room.

"I should think I had watched for about an hour and a half, when, suddenly, I heard a faint noise, away up the corridor. I was immediately conscious of a queer prickling sensation about the back of my head, and my hands began to sweat a little. The following instant, the whole end of the passage flicked into sight in the abrupt glare of the flashlight. Then came the succeeding darkness, and I peered nervously up the corridor, listening tensely, and trying to find what lay beyond the faint glow of my dark-lamp, which now seemed ridiculously dim by contrast with the tremendous blaze of the flash-powder... And then, as I stooped forward, staring and listening, there came the crashing thud of the door of the Grey Room. The sound seemed to fill the whole of the large corridor, and go echoing hollowly through the house. I tell you, I felt horrible — as if my bones were water. Simply beastly. Jove! how I did stare, and how I listened. And then it came again — thud, thud, thud, and then a silence that was almost worse than the noise of the door; for I kept fancying that some brutal thing was stealing upon me along the corridor. And then, suddenly, my lamp was put out, and I could not see a yard before me. I realised all at once that I was doing a very silly thing, sitting there, and I jumped up. Even as I did so, I thought I heard a sound in the passage, and quite near me. I made one backward spring into my room, and slammed and locked the door. I sat on my bed, and stared at the door. I had my revolver in my hand; but it seemed an abominably useless thing. I felt that there was something the other side of that door. For some unknown reason I knew it was pressed up against the door, and it was soft. That was just what I thought. Most extraordinary thing to think.

"Presently I got hold of myself a bit, and marked out a pentacle hurriedly with chalk on the polished floor; and there I sat in it almost until dawn. And all the time, away up the corridor, the door of the Grey Room thudded at solemn and horrid intervals. It was a miserable, brutal night.

"When the day began to break, the thudding of the door came gradually to an end, and, at last, I got hold of my courage, and went along the corridor, in the half light, to cap the lens of my camera. I can tell you, it took some doing; but if I had not done so my photograph would have been spoilt, and I was tremendously keen to save it. I got back to my room, and then set-to and rubbed out the five-pointed star in which I had been sitting.

"Half an hour later there was a tap at my door. It was Peter with my coffee. When I had drunk it, we both went along to the Grey Room. As we went, I had a look at the seals on the other doors, but they were untouched. The seal on the door of the Grey

Room was broken, as also was the string from the trigger of the flashlight; but the card over the keyhole was still there. I ripped it off and opened the door. Nothing unusual was to be seen until we came to the bed; then I saw that, as on the previous day, the bedclothes had been torn off, and hurled into the left-hand corner, exactly where I had seen them before. I felt very queer; but I did not forget to look at all the seals, only to find that not one had been broken.

"Then I turned and looked at old Peter, and he looked at me, nodding his head.

"Let's get out of here!' I said. 'It's no place for any living human to enter, without proper protection.'

"We went out then, and I locked and sealed the door, again.

"After breakfast, I developed the negative; but it showed only the door of the Grey Room, half opened. Then I left the house, as I wanted to get certain matters and implements that might be necessary to life; perhaps to the spirit; for I intended to spend the coming night in the Grey Room.

"I got back in a cab, about half-past-five, with my apparatus, and this, Peter and I carried up to the Grey Room, where I piled it carefully in the centre of the floor. When everything was in the room, including a cat which I had brought, I locked and sealed the door, and went towards my bedroom, telling Peter I should not be down to dinner. He said, 'Yes, sir,' and went downstairs, thinking that I was going to turn in, which was what I wanted him to believe, as I knew he would have worried both me and himself, if he had known what I intended.

"But I merely got my camera and flashlight from my bedroom, and hurried back to the Grey Room. I locked and sealed myself in, and set to work, for I had a lot to do before it got dark.

"First I cleared away all the ribbons across the floor; then I carried the cat — still fastened in its basket — over towards the far wall, and left it. I returned then to the centre of the room, and measured out a space twenty-one feet in diameter, which I swept with a 'broom of hyssop.' About this I drew a circle of chalk, taking care never to step over the circle. Beyond this I smudged, with a bunch of garlic, a broad belt right around the chalked circle, and when this was complete, I took from among my stores in the centre a small jar of a certain water. I broke away the parchment and withdrew the stopper. Then, dipping my left forefinger in the little jar, I went round the circle again, making upon the floor, just within the line of chalk, the Second Sign of the Saaamaaa Ritual, and joining each Sign most carefully with the left-handed crescent. I can tell you, I felt easier when this was done and the 'Water-Circle' complete. Then, I unpacked some more of the stuff that I had brought, and placed a lighted candle in the 'valley' of each crescent. After that, I drew a pentacle, so that each of the five points of the defensive star touched the chalk circle. In the five points of the star I placed five portions of bread, each wrapped in linen, and in the five 'vales,' five opened jars of the water I had used to make the Water-Circle. And now I had my first protective barrier complete.

"Now, anyone, except you who know something of my methods of investigation, might consider all this a piece of useless and foolish superstition; but you all remember the 'Black Veil' case, in which I believe my life was saved by a very similar form of protection, whilst Aster, who sneered at it, and would not come inside, died. I got the idea from the Sigsand MS., written, so far as I can make out, in the 14th century. At first, naturally, I imagined it was just an expression of the superstition of

his time; and it was not until a year later that it occurred to me to test his 'Defence,' which I did, as I've just said, in that horrible 'Black Veil' business. You know how that turned out. Later, I used it several times, and always I came through safe, until that 'Moving Fur' case. It was only a partial Defence there and I nearly died in the pentacle. After that I came across Professor Garder's 'Experiments with a Medium.' When they surrounded the Medium with a current, in vacuum, he lost his power — almost as if it cut him off from the Immaterial. That made me think a lot; and that is how I came to make the Electric Pentacle, which is a most marvellous Defence against certain manifestations. I used the shape of the defensive star for this protection, because I have, personally, no doubt at all but that there is some extraordinary virtue in the old magic figure. Curious thing for a Twentieth Century man to admit, is it not? But then, as you all know, I never did, and never will, allow myself to be blinded by a little cheap laughter. I ask questions, and keep my eyes open!

"In this last case I had little doubt that I had run up against a supernatural monster, and I meant to take every possible care; for the danger is abominable.

"I turned-to now to fit the Electric Pentacle, setting it so that each of its 'points' and 'vales' coincided exactly with the 'points' and 'vales' of the drawn pentagram upon the floor. Then I connected up the battery, and the next instant the pale blue glare from the intertwining vacuum tubes shone out.

"I glanced about me then, with something of a sigh of relief, and realised suddenly that the dusk was upon me, for the window was grey and unfriendly. Then round at the big, empty room, over the double barrier of electric and candle light. I had an abrupt, extraordinary sense of weirdness thrust upon me — in the air, you know; as it were, a sense of something inhuman impending. The room was full of the stench of bruised garlic, a smell I hate.

"I turned now to my camera, and saw that it and the flashlight were in order. Then I tested my revolver, carefully; though I had little thought that it would be needed. Yet, to what extent materialisation of an ab-natural creature is possible, given favourable conditions, no one can say, and I had no idea what horrible thing I was going to see, or feel the presence of. I might, in the end, have to fight with a materialised monster. I did not know, and could only be prepared. You see, I never forgot that three people had been strangled in the bed close to me, and the fierce slamming of the door I had heard myself. I had no doubt that I was investigating a dangerous and ugly case.

"By this time the night had come; though the room was very light with the burning candles; and I found myself glancing behind me, constantly, and then all round the room. It was nervy work waiting for that thing to come. Then, suddenly, I was aware of a little, cold wind sweeping over me, coming from behind. I gave one great nerve-thrill, and a prickly feeling went all over the back of my head. Then I hove myself round with a sort of stiff jerk, and stared straight against that queer wind. It seemed to come from the corner of the room to the left of the bed — the place where both times I had found the heap of tossed bedclothes. Yet, I could see nothing unusual; no opening — nothing!...

"Abruptly I was aware that the candles were all a-flicker in that unnatural wind... I believe I just squatted there and stared in a horribly frightened, wooden way for some minutes. I shall never be able to let you know how disgustingly horrible it was sitting in that vile, cold wind! And then, flick! flick! all the candles round the outer

barrier went out; and there was I, locked and sealed in that room, and with no light beyond the weakish blue glare of the Electric Pentacle.

”A time of abominable tenseness passed, and still that wind blew upon me; and then, suddenly, I knew that something stirred in the corner to the left of the bed. I was made conscious of it, rather by some inward, unused sense, than by either sight or sound; for the pale, short-radius glare of the Pentacle gave but a very poor light for seeing by. Yet, as I stared, something began slowly to grow upon my sight — a moving shadow, a little darker than the surrounding shadows. I lost the thing amid the vagueness, and for a moment or two I glanced swiftly from side to side, with a fresh, new sense of impending danger. Then my attention was directed to the bed. All the coverings were being drawn steadily off, with a hateful, stealthy sort of motion. I heard the slow, dragging slither of the clothes; but I could see nothing of the thing that pulled. I was aware in a funny, subconscious, introspective fashion that the ‘creep’ had come upon me; yet I was cooler mentally than I had been for some minutes; sufficiently so to feel that my hands were sweating coldly, and to shift my revolver, half-consciously, whilst I rubbed my right hand dry upon my knee; though never, for an instant, taking my gaze or my attention from those moving clothes.

”The faint noises from the bed ceased once, and there was a most intense silence, with only the sound of the blood beating in my head. Yet, immediately afterwards, I heard again the slurring of the bedclothes being dragged off the bed. In the midst of my nervous tension I remembered the camera, and reached round for it; but without looking away from the bed. And then, you know, all in a moment, the whole of the bed-coverings were torn off with extraordinary violence, and I heard the flump they made as they were hurled into the corner.

”There was a time of absolute quietness then for perhaps a couple of minutes; and you can imagine how horrible I felt. The bedclothes had been thrown with such savageness! And then again, the brutal unnaturalness of the thing that had just been done before me!

”Abruptly, over by the door, I heard a faint noise — a sort of crickling sound and then a pitter or two upon the floor. A great nervous thrill swept over me, seeming to run up my spine and over the back of my head; for the seal that secured the door had just been broken. Something was there. I could not see the door; at least, I mean to say that it was impossible to say how much I actually saw, and how much my imagination supplied. I made it out only as a continuation of the grey walls... And then it seemed to me that something dark and indistinct moved and wavered there among the shadows.

”Abruptly, I was aware that the door was opening, and with an effort I reached again for my camera; but before I could aim it the door was slammed with a terrific crash that filled the whole room with a sort of hollow thunder. I jumped, like a frightened child. There seemed such a power behind the noise; as though a vast, wanton Force were ‘out.’ Can you understand?

”The door was not touched again; but, directly afterwards, I heard the basket, in which the cat lay, creak. I tell you, I fairly pringed all along my back. I knew that I was going to learn definitely whether what was abroad was dangerous to life. From the cat there rose suddenly a hideous caterwaul, that ceased abruptly, and then — too late — I snapped on the flashlight. In the great glare, I saw that the basket had been overturned, and the lid was wrenched open, with the cat lying half in, and half out

upon the floor. I saw nothing else, but I was full of the knowledge that I was in the presence of some Being or Thing that had power to destroy.

"During the next two or three minutes, there was an odd, noticeable quietness in the room, and you must remember I was half-blinded, for the time, because of the flashlight; so that the whole place seemed to be pitchy dark just beyond the shine of the Pentacle. I tell you it was most horrible. I just knelt there in the star, and whirled round, trying to see whether anything was coming at me.

"My power of sight came gradually, and I got a little hold of myself; and abruptly I saw the thing I was looking for, close to the Water-Circle. It was big and indistinct, and wavered curiously, as though the shadow of a vast spider hung suspended in the air, just beyond the barrier. It passed swiftly round the circle, and seemed to probe ever towards me; but only to draw back with extraordinary jerky movements, as might a living person if they touched the hot bar of a grate.

"Round and round it moved, and round and round I turned. Then, just opposite to one of the 'vales' in the pentacles, it seemed to pause, as though preliminary to a tremendous effort. It retired almost beyond the glow of the vacuum light, and then came straight towards me, appearing to gather form and solidity as it came. There seemed a vast, malign determination behind the movement, that must succeed. I was on my knees, and I jerked back, falling on to my left hand and hip, in a wild endeavour to get back from the advancing thing. With my right hand I was grabbing madly for my revolver, which I had let slip. The brutal thing came with one great sweep straight over the garlic and the Water-Circle, almost to the vale of the pentacle. I believe I yelled. Then, just as suddenly as it had swept over, it seemed to be hurled back by some mighty, invisible force.

"It must have been some moments before I realised that I was safe; and then I got myself together in the middle of the pentacles, feeling horribly gone and shaken, and glancing round and round the barrier; but the thing had vanished. Yet I had learnt something, for I knew now that the Grey Room was haunted by a monstrous hand.

"Suddenly, as I crouched there, I saw what had so nearly given the monster an opening through the barrier. In my movements within the pentacle I must have touched one of the jars of water; for just where the thing had made its attack the jar that guarded the 'deep' of the 'vale' had been moved to one side, and this had left one of the 'five doorways' unguarded. I put it back, quickly, and felt almost safe again, for I had found the cause and the Defence was still good. And I began to hope again that I should see the morning come in. When I saw that thing so nearly succeed, I'd had an awful, weak, overwhelming feeling that the barriers could never bring me safe through the night against such a Force. You can understand?

"For a long time I could not see the hand; but, presently, I thought I saw, once or twice, an odd wavering, over among the shadows near the door. A little later, as though in a sudden fit of malignant rage, the dead body of the cat was picked up, and beaten with dull, sickening blows against the solid floor. That made me feel rather queer.

"A minute afterwards, the door was opened and slammed twice with tremendous force. The next instant the thing made one swift, vicious dart at me, from out of the shadows. Instinctively I started sideways from it, and so plucked my hand from upon the Electric Pentacle, where — for a wickedly careless moment — I had placed it. The monster was hurled off from the neighbourhood of the pentacles; though — owing to

my inconceivable foolishness — it had been enabled for a second time to pass the outer barriers. I can tell you, I shook for a time, with sheer funk. I moved right to the centre of the pentacles again, and knelt there, making myself as small and compact as possible.

”As I knelt, there came to me presently, a vague wonder at the two ‘accidents’ which had so nearly allowed the brute to get at me. Was I being influenced to unconscious voluntary actions that endangered me? The thought took hold of me, and I watched my every movement. Abruptly, I stretched a tired leg, and knocked over one of the jars of water. Some was spilled; but because of my suspicious watchfulness, I had it upright and back within the vale while yet some of the water remained. Even as I did so, the vast, black, half-materialised hand beat up at me out of the shadows, and seemed to leap almost into my face; so nearly did it approach; but for the third time it was thrown back by some altogether enormous, over-mastering force. Yet, apart from the dazed fright in which it left me, I had for a moment that feeling of spiritual sickness, as if some delicate, beautiful, inward grace had suffered, which is felt only upon the too near approach of the ab-human, and is more dreadful, in a strange way, than any physical pain that can be suffered. I knew by this, more of the extent and closeness of the danger; and for a long time I was simply cowed by the butt-headed brutality of that Force upon my spirit. I can put it no other way.

”I knelt again in the centre of the pentacles, watching myself with more fear, almost, than the monster; for I knew now that, unless I guarded myself from every sudden impulse that came to me, I might simply work my own destruction. Do you see how horrible it all was?

”I spent the rest of the night in a haze of sick fright, and so tense that I could not make a single movement naturally. I was in such fear that any desire for action that came to me might be prompted by the Influence that I knew was at work on me. And outside of the barrier that ghastly thing went round and round, grabbing and grabbing in the air at me. Twice more was the body of the dead cat molested. The second time, I heard every bone in its body scrunch and crack. And all the time the horrible wind was blowing upon me from the corner of the room to the left of the bed.

”Then, just as the first touch of dawn came into the sky, that unnatural wind ceased, in a single moment; and I could see no sign of the hand. The dawn came slowly, and presently the wan light filled all the room, and made the pale glare of the Electric Pentacle look more unearthly. Yet, it was not until the day had fully come, that I made any attempt to leave the barrier, for I did not know but that there was some method abroad, in the sudden stopping of that wind, to entice me from the pentacles.

”At last, when the dawn was strong and bright, I took one last look round, and ran for the door. I got it unlocked, in a nervous, clumsy fashion; then locked it hurriedly, and went to my bedroom, where I lay on the bed, and tried to steady my nerves. Peter came, presently, with the coffee, and when I had drunk it, I told him I meant to have a sleep, as I had been up all night. He took the tray, and went out quietly; and after I had locked my door I turned in properly, and at last got to sleep.

”I woke about midday, and after some lunch, went up to the Grey Room. I switched off the current from the Pentacle, which I had left on in my hurry; also, I removed the body of the cat. You can understand I did not want anyone to see the poor brute. After that, I made a very careful search of the corner where the bedclothes had been thrown. I made several holes, and probed, but found nothing. Then it occurred to me

to try with my instrument under the skirting. I did so, and heard my wire ring on metal. I turned the hook-end that way, and fished for the thing. At the second go, I got it. It was a small object, and I took it to the window. I found it to be a curious ring, made of some greyish metal. The curious thing about it was that it was made in the form of a pentagon; that is, the same shape as the inside of the magic pentacle, but without the 'mounts' which form the points of the defensive star. It was free from all chasing or engraving.

"You will understand that I was excited, when I tell you that I felt sure I held in my hand the famous Luck Ring of the Anderson family; which, indeed, was of all things the one most intimately connected with the history of the haunting. This ring was handed on from father to son through generations, and always — in obedience to some ancient family tradition — each son had to promise never to wear the ring. The ring, I may say, was brought home by one of the Crusaders, under very peculiar circumstances; but the story is too long to go into here.

"It appears that young Sir Hulbert, an ancestor of Anderson's, made a bet, in drink, you know, that he would wear the ring that night. He did so, and in the morning his wife and child were found strangled in the bed, in the very room in which I stood. Many people, it would seem, thought young Sir Hulbert was guilty of having done the thing in drunken anger; and he, in an attempt to prove his innocence, slept a second night in the room. He also was strangled. Since, as you may imagine, no one has spent a night in the Grey Room, until I did so. The ring had been lost so long, that it had become almost a myth; and it was most extraordinary to stand there, with the actual thing in my hand, as you can understand.

"It was whilst I stood there, looking at the ring, that I got an idea. Supposing that it were, in a way, a doorway — you see what I mean? A sort of gap in the world-hedge. It was a queer idea, I know, and probably was not my own, but came to me from the Outside. You see, the wind had come from that part of the room where the ring lay. I thought a lot about it. Then the shape — the inside of a pentacle. It had no 'mounts', and without mounts, as the Sigsand MS. has it:— 'Thee mownts wych are thee Five Hills of safetie. To lack is to gyve pow'r to thee daemon; and surlie to fayvor thee Evill Thyng.' You see, the very shape of the ring was significant; and I determined to test it.

"I unmade my pentacle, for it must be made afresh and around the one to be protected. Then I went out and locked the door; after which I left the house, to get certain matters, for neither 'yarbs nor fyre nor water' must be used a second time. I returned about seven-thirty, and as soon as the things I had brought had been carried up to the Grey Room, I dismissed Peter for the night, just as I had done the evening before. When he had gone downstairs, I let myself into the room and locked and sealed the door. I went to the place in the centre of the room where all the stuff had been packed, and set to work with all my speed to construct a barrier about me and the ring.

"I do not remember whether I explained to you. But I had reasoned that if the ring were in any way a 'medium of admission,' and it were enclosed with me in the Electric Pentacle it would be, to express it loosely, insulated. Do you see? The Force, which had visible expression as a Hand, would have to stay beyond the Barrier which separates the Ab from the Normal; for the 'gateway' would be removed from accessibility.

"As I was saying, I worked with all my speed to get the barrier completed about me and the ring, for it was already later than I cared to be in that room 'unprotected.' Also, I had a feeling that there would be a vast effort made that night to regain the use of the ring. For I had the strongest conviction that the ring was a necessity to materialisation. You will see whether I was right.

"I completed the barriers in about an hour, and you can imagine something of the relief I felt when I saw the pale glare of the Electric Pentacle once more all about me. From then, onwards, for about two hours, I sat quietly, facing the corner from which the wind came. About eleven o'clock a queer knowledge came that something was near to me; yet nothing happened for a whole hour after that. Then, suddenly, I felt the cold, queer wind begin to blow upon me. To my astonishment, it seemed now to come from behind me, and I whipped round, with a hideous quake of fear. The wind met me in the face. It was blowing up from the floor close to me. I stared down, in a sickening maze of new frights. What on earth had I done now! The ring was there, close beside me, where I had put it. Suddenly, as I stared, bewildered, I was aware that there was something queer about the ring — funny shadowy movements and convolutions. I looked at them, stupidly. And then, abruptly, I knew that the wind was blowing up at me from the ring. A queer indistinct smoke became visible to me, seeming to pour upwards through the ring, and mix with the moving shadows. Suddenly, I realised that I was in more than any mortal danger; for the convoluting shadows about the ring were taking shape, and the death-hand was forming within the Pentacle. My goodness! do you realise it! I had brought the 'gateway' into the pentacles, and the brute was coming through — pouring into the material world, as gas might pour out from the mouth of a pipe.

"I should think that I knelt for a moment in a sort of stunned fright. Then, with a mad, awkward movement, I snatched at the ring, intending to hurl it out of the Pentacle. Yet it eluded me, as though some invisible, living thing jerked it hither and thither. At last, I gripped it; yet, in the same instant, it was torn from my grasp with incredible and brutal force. A great, black shadow covered it, and rose into the air, and came at me. I saw that it was the Hand, vast and nearly perfect in form. I gave one crazy yell, and jumped over the Pentacle and the ring of burning candles, and ran despairingly for the door. I fumbled idiotically and ineffectually with the key, and all the time I stared, with a fear that was like insanity, toward the barriers. The hand was plunging towards me; yet, even as it had been unable to pass into the pentacle when the ring was without, so, now that the ring was within, it had no power to pass out. The monster was chained, as surely as any beast would be, were chains riveted upon it.

"Even then, I got a flash of this knowledge; but I was too utterly shaken with fright, to reason; and the instant I managed to get the key turned, I sprang into the passage, and slammed the door with a crash. I locked it, and got to my room, somehow; for I was trembling so that I could hardly stand, as you can imagine. I locked myself in, and managed to get the candle lit; then I lay down on the bed, and kept quiet for an hour or two, and so I got steadied.

"I got a little sleep, later; but woke when Peter brought my coffee. When I had drunk it I felt altogether better, and took the old man along with me whilst I had a look into the Grey Room. I opened the door, and peeped in. The candles were still burning, wan against the daylight; and behind them was the pale, glowing star of the Electric Pentacle. And there in the middle was the ring... The gateway of the monster, lying demure and ordinary.

"Nothing in the room was touched, and I knew that the brute had never managed to cross the pentacles. Then I went out, and locked the door.

"After a sleep of some hours, I left the house. I returned in the afternoon in a cab. I had with me an oxy-hydrogen jet, and two cylinders, containing the gases. I carried the things to the Grey Room, and there, in the centre of the Electric Pentacle, I erected the little furnace. Five minutes later the Luck Ring, once the 'luck,' but now the 'bane,' of the Anderson family, was no more than a little solid splash of hot metal."

Carnacki felt in his pocket, and pulled out something wrapped in tissue paper. He passed it to me. I opened it and found a small circle of greyish metal, something like lead, only harder and rather brighter.

"Well?" I asked, at length, after examining it and handing it round to the others. "Did that stop the haunting?"

Carnacki nodded. "Yes," he said. "I slept three nights in the Grey Room, before I left. Old Peter nearly fainted when he knew that I meant to; but by the third night he seemed to realise that the house was just safe and ordinary. And, you know, I believe, in his heart, he hardly approved."

Carnacki stood up and began to shake hands. "Out you go!" he said, genially. And, presently, we went, pondering to our various homes.

The House Among the Laurels

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“This is a curious yarn that I am going to tell you,” said Carnacki, as after a quiet little dinner we made ourselves comfortable in his cosy dining-room.

“I have just got back from the West of Ireland,” he continued. “Wentworth, a friend of mine, has lately had rather an unexpected legacy, in the shape of a large estate and manor, about a mile and a half outside of the village of Korunton. The place is named Gannington Manor, and has been empty a great number of years; as you will find is almost always the case with houses reputed to be haunted, as it is usually termed.

“It seems that when Wentworth went over to take possession, he found the place in very poor repair, and the estate totally uncared for, and, as I know, looking very desolate and lonesome generally. He went through the big house by himself, and he admitted to me that it had an uncomfortable feeling about it; but, of course, that might be nothing more than the natural dismalness of a big, empty house, which has been long uninhabited, and through which you are wandering alone.

“When he had finished his look round, he went down to the village, meaning to see the one-time agent of the estate, and arrange for someone to go in as caretaker. The agent, who proved by the way to be a Scotchman, was very willing to take up the management of the estate once more; but he assured Wentworth that they would get no one to go in as caretaker and that his — the agent’s — advice was to have the house pulled down, and a new one built.

“This, naturally, astonished my friend, and, as they went down to the village, he managed to get a sort of explanation from the man. It seems that there had been always curious stories told about the place, which in the early days was called Landru Castle, and that within the last seven years there had been two extraordinary deaths there. In each case they had been tramps, who were ignorant of the reputation of the house, and had probably thought the big empty place suitable for a night’s free lodging. There had been absolutely no signs of violence, to indicate the method by which death was caused, and on each occasion the body had been found in the great entrance hall.

“By this time they had reached the inn where Wentworth had put up, and he told the agent that he would prove that it was all rubbish about the haunting, by staying a night or two in the Manor himself. The death of the tramps was certainly curious; but did not prove that any supernatural agency had been at work. They were but isolated accidents, spread over a large number of years by the memory of villagers, which was natural enough in a little place like Korunton. Tramps had to die some time, and in some place, and it proved nothing that two, out of possibly hundreds who had slept in the empty house, had happened to take the opportunity to die under shelter.

“But the agent took his remark very seriously, and both he and Dennis, the landlord of the inn, tried their best to persuade him not to go. For his ‘sowl’s sake,’ Irish Dennis begged him to do no such thing; and because of his ‘life’s sake,’ the Scotchman was equally in earnest.

“It was late afternoon at the time, and as Wentworth told me, it was warm and bright and it seemed such utter rot to hear those two talking seriously about the impossible.

He felt full of pluck, and he made up his mind he would smash the story of the haunting at once, by staying that very night, in the Manor. He made this quite clear to them, and told them that it would be more to the point and to their credit, if they offered to come up along with him and keep him company. But poor old Dennis was quite shocked, I believe, at the suggestion; and though Tabbitt, the agent, took it more quietly, he was very solemn about it.

“It appears that Wentworth did go; though, as he said to me, when the evening began to come on, it seemed a very different sort of thing to tackle.

“A whole crowd of the villagers assembled to see him off; for by this time they all knew of his intention. Wentworth had his gun with him, and a big packet of candles; and he made it clear to them all that it would not be wise for anyone to play any tricks; as he intended to shoot ‘at sight.’ And then, you know, he got a hint of how serious they considered the whole thing; for one of them came up to him, leading a great bull-mastiff, and offered it to him, to take to keep him company. Wentworth patted his gun; but the old man who owned the dog, shook his head and explained that the brute might warn him in sufficient time for him to get away from the castle. For it was obvious that he did not consider the gun would prove of any use.

“Wentworth took the dog, and thanked the man. He told me that, already, he was beginning to wish that he had not said definitely that he would go; but, as it was, he was simply forced to. He went through the crowd of men, and found suddenly that they had all turned in a body and were keeping him company. They stayed with him all the way to the Manor, and then went right over the whole place with him.

“It was still daylight when this was finished; though turning to dusk; and, for a little, the men stood about, hesitating, as if they felt ashamed to go away and leave Wentworth there all alone. He told me that, by this time, he would gladly have given fifty pounds to be going back with them. And then, abruptly, an idea came to him. He suggested that they should stay with him, and keep him company through the night. For a time they refused, and tried to persuade him to go back with them; but finally he made a proposition that got home to them all. He planned that they should all go back to the inn, and there get a couple of dozen bottles of whisky, a donkey-load of turf and wood, and some more candles. Then they would come back, and make a great fire in the big fire-place, light all the candles, and put them round the place, open the whisky and make a night of it. And, by Jove! he got them to agree.

“They set off back, and were soon at the inn, and here, while the donkey was being loaded, and the candles and whisky distributed, Dennis was doing his best to keep Wentworth from going back; but he was a sensible man in his way; for when he found that it was no use, he stopped. You see, he did not want to frighten the others from accompanying Wentworth.

“‘I tell ye, sorr,’ he told him, ‘tis no use at all at all, thryin’ ter reclaim ther castle. ‘Tis curst with innocent blood, an’ ye’ll be betther pullin’ it down, an’ buildin’ a fine new wan. But if ye be intendin’ to shtay this night, kape the big dhoor open whide, an’ watch for the bhlood-dhrip. If so much as a single dhrip falls, don’t shtay though all the gold in the worrld was offered ye.’

“Wentworth asked him what he meant by the blood-drip.

“‘Shure,’ he said, ‘tis the bhlood av thim as ould Black Mick ‘way back in the ould days kilt in their shlape. ‘Twas a feud as he pretendid to patch up, an’ he invited thim — the O’Haras they was — sivinty av thim. An’ he fed thim, an’ shpoke soft to thim,

an' thim thrustin' him, shtayed to shlope with him. Thin, he an' thim with him, shtarted in an' mhurdered thim wan an' all as they slep'. 'Tis from me father's grandfather ye have the sthory. An' sence thin 'tis death to any, so they say, to pass the night in the castle whin the bhlood-drip comes. 'Twill put out candle an' fire, an' thin in the darkness the Virgin Herself would be powerless to protect ye.'

“Wentworth told me he laughed at this; chiefly because, as he put it:— One always must laugh at that sort of yarn, however it makes you feel inside. He asked old Dennis whether he expected him to believe it.

“‘Yes, sorr,’ said Dennis, ‘I do mane ye to b’lieve it; an’, please God, if ye’ll b’lieve, ye may be back safe befor’ mornin’.’ The man’s serious simplicity took hold of Wentworth, and he held out his hand. But, for all that, he went; and I must admire his pluck.

“There were now about forty men, and when they got back to the Manor — or castle as the villagers always call it — they were not long in getting a big fire going, and lighted candles all round the great hall. They had all brought sticks; so that they would have been a pretty formidable lot to tackle by anything simply physical; and, of course, Wentworth had his gun. He kept the whisky in his own charge; for he intended to keep them sober; but he gave them a good strong tot all round first, so as to make things seem cheerful; and to get them yarning. If you once let a crowd of men like that grow silent, they begin to think, and then to fancy things.

“The big entrance door had been left wide open, by his orders; which shows that he had taken some notice of Dennis. It was a quiet night, so this did not matter, for the lights kept steady and all went on in a jolly sort of fashion for about three hours. He had opened a second lot of bottles, and everyone was feeling cheerful; so much so that one of the men called out aloud to the ghosts to come out and show themselves. And then, you know, a very extraordinary thing happened; for the ponderous main door swung quietly and steadily to, as though pushed by an invisible hand, and shut with a sharp click.

“Wentworth stared, feeling suddenly rather chilly. Then he remembered the men, and looked round at them. Several had ceased their talk, and were staring in a frightened way at the big door; but the greater number had never noticed, and were talking and yarning. He reached for his gun, and the following instant the great bull-mastiff set up a tremendous barking, which drew the attention of the whole company.

“The hall I should tell you is oblong. The south wall is all windows; but the north and the east have rows of doors, leading into the house, whilst the west wall is occupied by the great entrance. The rows of doors leading into the house were all closed, and it was towards one of these in the north wall that the big dog ran; yet he would not go very close; and suddenly the door began to move slowly open, until the blackness of the passage beyond was shown. The dog came back among the men, whimpering, and for perhaps a minute there was an absolute silence.

“Then Wentworth went out from the men a little, and aimed his gun at the doorway.

“‘Whoever is there, come out or I shall fire,’ he shouted, but nothing came, and he blazed both barrels into the dark. As though the report had been a signal, all the doors along the north and east walls moved slowly open, and Wentworth and his men were staring, frightened, into the black shapes of the empty doorways.

“Wentworth loaded his gun quickly, and called to the dog; but the brute was burrowing away in among the men; and this fear on the dog’s part frightened Wentworth more, he told me, than anything. Then something else happened. Three of the candles over in the corner of the hall went out; and immediately about half a dozen in different parts of the place. More candles were put out, and the hall had become quite dark in the corners.

“The men were all standing now, holding their clubs, and crowded together. And no one said a word. Wentworth told me he felt positively ill with fright. I know the feeling. Then, suddenly, something splashed on to the back of his left hand. He lifted it, and looked. It was covered with a great splash of red that dripped from his fingers. An old Irishman near to him, saw it, and croaked out in a quavering voice:— ‘The bhlood-dhrip!’ When the old man called out, they all looked, and in the same instant others felt it upon them. There were frightened cries of:— ‘The bhlood-dhrip! The bhlood-dhrip!’ And then, about a dozen candles went out simultaneously, and the hall was suddenly almost dark. The dog let out a great, mournful howl, and there was a horrible little silence, with everyone standing rigid. Then the tension broke, and there was a mad rush for the main door. They wrenched it open, and tumbled out into the dark; but something slammed it with a crash after them, and shut the dog in; for Wentworth heard it howling, as they raced down the drive. Yet no one had the pluck to go back to let it out, which does not surprise me.

“Wentworth sent for me the following day. He had heard of me in connection with that ‘Steeple Monster’ case. I arrived by the night mail, and put up with Wentworth at the inn. The next day we went up to the old Manor, which certainly lies in rather a wilderness; though what struck me most was the extraordinary number of laurel bushes about the house. The place was smothered with them; so that the house seemed to be growing up out of a sea of green laurel. These, and the grim, ancient look of the old building, made the place look a bit dank and ghostly, even by daylight.

“The hall was a big place, and well lit by daylight; for which I was not sorry. You see, I had been rather wound-up by Wentworth’s yarn. We found one rather funny thing, and that was the great bull-mastiff, lying stiff with its neck broken. This made me feel very serious; for it showed that whether the cause was supernatural or not, there was present in the house some force exceedingly dangerous to life.

“Later, whilst Wentworth stood guard with his shot-gun, I made an examination of the hall. The bottles and mugs from which the men had drunk their whisky were scattered about; and all over the place were the candles, stuck upright in their own grease. But in that somewhat brief and general search, I found nothing; and decided to begin my usual exact examination of every square foot of the place — not only of the hall, in this case, but of the whole interior of the castle.

“I spent three uncomfortable weeks, searching, but without results of any kind. And, you know, the care I take at this period is extreme; for I have solved hundreds of cases of so-called ‘hauntings’ at this early stage, simply by the most minute investigation, and the keeping of a perfectly open mind. But, as I have said, I found nothing. During the whole of the examination I got Wentworth to stand guard with his loaded shot-gun; and I was very particular that we were never caught there after dusk.

“I decided now to make the experiment of staying a night in the great hall, of course ‘protected.’ I spoke about it to Wentworth; but his own attempt had made him so

nervous that he begged me to do no such thing. However, I thought it well worth the risk and I managed in the end to persuade him to be present.

“With this in view I went to the neighbouring town of Gaunt, and by an arrangement with the Chief Constable I obtained the services of six policemen with their rifles. The arrangement was unofficial, of course, and the men were allowed to volunteer, with a promise of payment.

“When the constables arrived early that evening at the inn, I gave them a good feed; and after that we all set out for the Manor. We had four donkeys with us, loaded with fuel and other matters; also two great boar hounds, which one of the police led. When we reached the house, I set the men to unload the donkeys; whilst Wentworth and I set-to and sealed all the doors, except the main entrance, with tape and wax; for if the doors were really opened, I was going to be sure of the fact. I was going to run no risk of being deceived by ghostly hallucination, or mesmeric influence.

“By the time that this was done, the policemen had unloaded the donkeys, and were waiting, looking about them, curiously. I set two of them to lay a fire in the big grate, and the others I used as I required them. I took one of the boar hounds to the end of the hall furthest from the entrance, and there I drove a staple into the floor, to which I tied the dog with a short tether. Then, round him, I drew upon the floor the figure of a pentacle, in chalk. Outside of the pentacle, I made a circle with garlic. I did exactly the same thing with the other hound; but over more in the north-east corner of the big hall, where the two rows of doors make the angle.

“When this was done, I cleared the whole centre of the hall, and put one of the policemen to sweep it; after which I had all my apparatus carried into the cleared space. Then I went over to the main door and hooked it open, so that the hook would have to be lifted out of the hasp, before the door could be closed. After that, I placed lighted candles before each of the sealed doors, and one in each corner of the big room; and then I lit the fire. When I saw that it was properly alight, I got all the men together, by the pile of things in the centre of the room, and took their pipes from them; for, as the Sigsand MS. has it:— ‘Theyre must noe lyght come from wythin the barryier.’ And I was going to make sure.

“I got my tape-measure then, and measured out a circle thirty-three feet in diameter, and immediately chalked it out. The police and Wentworth were tremendously interested, and I took the opportunity to warn them that this was no piece of silly mumming on my part; but done with a definite intention of erecting a barrier between us and any ab-human thing that the night might show to us. I warned them that, as they valued their lives, and more than their lives, it might be, no one must on any account whatever pass beyond the limits of the barrier that I was making.

“After I had drawn the circle, I took a bunch of the garlic, and smudged it right round the chalk circle, a little outside of it. When this was complete I called for candles from my stock of material. I set the police to lighting them, and as they were lit I took them and sealed them down on to the floor, just inside the chalk circle, five inches apart. As each candle measured one inch in diameter, it took sixty-six candles to complete the circle; and I need hardly say that every number and measurement has a significance.

“Then from candle to candle I took a ‘gayrd’ of human hair, entwining it alternately to the left and to the right, until the circle was completed, and the ends of the final hairs shod with silver, and pressed into the wax of the sixty-sixth candle.

“It had now been dark some time, and I made haste to get the ‘Defence’ complete. To this end, I got the men well together, and began to fit the Electric Pentacle right around us, so that the five points of the defensive star came just within the Hair-Circle. This did not take me long, and a minute later I had connected up the batteries, and the weak blue glare of the intertwining vacuum tubes shone all around us. I felt happier then; for this Pentacle is, as you all know, a wonderful Defense. I have told you before, how the idea came to me, after reading Professor Garder’s ‘Experiments with a Medium.’ He found that a current, a certain number of vibrations, in vacuo, ‘insulated’ the Medium. It is difficult to suggest an explanation non-technically, and if you are really interested you should read Garder’s Lecture on ‘Astaral Vibrations Compared with Matero-involuted Vibrations Below the Six-Billion Limit.’

“As I stood up from my work, I could hear outside in the night a constant drip from the laurels, which as I have said, come right up around the house, very thick. By the sound, I knew that a soft rain had set in; and there was absolutely no wind, as I could tell by the steady flames of the candles.

“I stood a moment or two, listening, and then one of the men touched my arm, and asked me in a low voice, what they should do. By his tone, I could tell that he was feeling something of the strangeness of it all; and the other men, including Wentworth, were so quiet that I was afraid they were beginning to get shaky.

“I set-to, then, and arranged them with their backs to one common centre; so that they were sitting flat upon the floor, with their feet radiating outwards. Then, by compass, I laid their legs to the eight chief points, and afterwards I drew a circle with chalk round them; and opposite to their feet, I made the Eight Signs of the Saaamaaa Ritual. The eighth place was, of course, empty; but ready for me to occupy at any moment; for I had omitted to make the Sealing Sign to that point, until I had finished all my preparations, and could enter the ‘Inner Star.’

“I took a last look round the great hall, and saw that the two big hounds were lying quietly, with their noses between their paws. The fire was big and cheerful, and the candles before the two rows of doors, burnt steadily, as well as the solitary ones in the corners. Then I went round the little star of men, and warned them not to be frightened whatever happened; but to trust to the Defence; and to let nothing tempt or drive them to cross the barriers. Also, I told them to watch their movements, and to keep their feet strictly to their places. For the rest, there was to be no shooting, unless I gave the word.

“And now at last, I went to my place, and sitting down, made the Eighth Sign just beyond my feet. Then I arranged my camera and flashlight handy, and examined my revolver.

“Wentworth sat behind the First Sign, and as the numbering went round reversed, that put him next to me on my left. I asked him, in a rather low voice, how he felt; and he told me, rather nervous; but that he had confidence in my knowledge, and was resolved to go through with the matter, whatever happened.

“We settled down then to wait. There was no talking, except that, once or twice the police bent towards one another, and whispered odd remarks concerning the hall, that appeared queerly audible in the intense silence. But in a while there was not even a word from anyone, and only the monotonous drip, drip of the quiet rain without the great entrance, and the low, dull sound of the fire in the big fireplace.

“It was a queer group that we made sitting there, back to back, with our legs starred outwards; and all around us the strange blue glow of the Pentacle, and beyond that the brilliant shining of the great ring of lighted candles. Outside of the glare of the candles, the large empty hall looked a little gloomy, by contrast, except where the lights shone before the sealed doors, and the blaze of the big fire made a good honest mass of flame on the monster hearth. And the feeling of mystery! Can you picture it all?”

“It might have been an hour later that it came to me suddenly that I was aware of an extraordinary sense of dreeness, as it were, come into the air of the place. Not the nervous feeling of mystery that had been with us all the time; but a new feeling, as if there were something going to happen any moment.

“Abruptly, there came a slight noise from the east end of the hall, and I felt the star of men move suddenly. ‘Steady! Keep steady!’ I shouted, and they quietened. I looked up the hall, and saw that the dogs were up on their feet, and staring in an extraordinary fashion towards the great entrance. I turned and stared also, and felt the men move as they craned their heads to look. Suddenly, the dogs set up a tremendous barking, and I glanced across to them, and found they were still ‘pointing’ for the big doorway. They ceased their noise just as quickly, and seemed to be listening. In the same instant, I heard a faint chink of metal to my left, that set me staring at the hook which held the great door wide. It moved, even as I looked. Some invisible thing was meddling with it. A queer, sickening thrill went through me, and I felt all the men about me, stiffen and go rigid with intensity. I had a certainty of something impending; as it might be the impression of an invisible, but overwhelming, Presence. The hall was full of a queer silence, and not a sound came from the dogs. Then I saw the hook slowly raised from out of its hasp, without any visible thing touching it. Then a sudden power of movement came to me. I raised my camera, with the flashlight fixed, and snapped it at the door. There came the great flare of the flashlight, and a simultaneous roar of barking from the two dogs.

“The intensity of the flash made all the place seem dark for some moments, and in that time of darkness, I heard a jingle in the direction of the door, and strained to look. The effect of the bright light passed, and I could see clearly again. The great entrance door was being slowly closed. It shut with a sharp snick, and there followed a long silence, broken only by the whimpering of the dogs.

“I turned suddenly, and looked at Wentworth. He was looking at me.

“‘Just as it did before,’ he whispered.

“‘Most extraordinary,’ I said, and he nodded and looked round, nervously.

“The policemen were pretty quiet, and I judged that they were feeling rather worse than Wentworth; though for that matter, you must not think that I was altogether natural; yet I have seen so much that is extraordinary, that I daresay I can keep my nerves steady longer than most people.

“I looked over my shoulder at the men, and cautioned them, in a low voice, not to move outside of the barriers, whatever happened; not even though the house seem to be rocking and about to tumble on to them; for well I knew what some of the great Forces are capable of doing. Yet, unless it should prove to be one of the cases of the more terrible Saitii Manifestation, we were almost certain of safety, so long as we kept to our order within the Pentacle.

“Perhaps an hour and a half passed, quietly, except when, once in a way, the dogs would whine distressfully. Presently, however, they ceased even from this, and I could see them lying on the floor with their paws over their noses, in a most peculiar fashion, and shivering visibly. The sight made me feel more serious, as you can understand.

“Suddenly, the candle in the corner furthest from the main door, went out. An instant later, Wentworth jerked my arm, and I saw that a candle before one of the sealed doors had been put out. I held my camera ready. Then, one after another, every candle about the hall was put out, and with such speed and irregularity that I could never catch one in the actual act of being extinguished. Yet, for all that, I took a flashlight of the hall in general.

“There was a time in which I sat half-blinded by the great glare of the flash, and I blamed myself for not having remembered to bring a pair of smoked goggles, which I have sometimes used at these times. I had felt the men jump, at the sudden light, and I called out loud to them to sit quiet, and to keep their feet exactly to their proper places. My voice, as you can imagine, sounded rather horrid and frightening in the great room, and altogether it was a beastly moment.

“Then I was able to see again, and I stared here and there around the hall; but there was nothing showing unusual; only, of course, it was dark now over in the corners.

“Suddenly, I saw that the great fire was blackening. It was going out visibly, as I looked. If I said that some monstrous, invisible, impossible creature sucked the life from it, I could best explain my impression of the way the light and flame went out of it. It was most extraordinary to watch. In the time that I watched it, every vestige of fire was gone from it, and there was no light outside of the ring of candles around the Pentacle.

“The deliberateness of the thing troubled me more than I can make clear to you. It conveyed to me such a sense of a calm, deliberate Force present in the hall. The steadfast intention to ‘make a darkness’ was horrible. The extent of the power to affect the Material was now the one constant, anxious questioning in my brain. You can understand?

“Behind me, I heard the policemen moving again, and I knew that they were getting thoroughly frightened. I turned half round, and told them, quietly but plainly, that they were safe only so long as they stayed within the Pentacle, in the position in which I had put them. If they once broke, and went outside of the barrier, no knowledge of mine could state the full extent or dreadfulness of the danger.

“I steadied them up by this quiet, straight reminder; but if they had known, as I knew, that there is no certainty in any ‘protection,’ they would have suffered a great deal more, and probably have broken the Defence and made a mad, foolish run for an impossible safety.

“Another hour passed, after this, in an absolute quietness. I had a sense of awful strain and oppression, as though I were a little spirit in the company of some invisible, brooding monster of the unseen world, who, as yet, was scarcely conscious of us. I leant across to Wentworth, and asked him in a whisper whether he had a feeling as if something were in the room. He looked very pale, and his eyes kept always on the move. He glanced just once at me and nodded; then stared away round the hall again. And when I came to think, I was doing the same thing.

“Abruptly, as though a hundred unseen hands had snuffed them, every candle in the barrier went dead out, and we were left in a darkness that seemed, for a little, absolute; for the light from the Pentacle was too weak and pale to penetrate far across the great hall.

“I tell you, for a moment, I just sat there as though I had been frozen solid. I felt the ‘creep’ go all over me, and seem to stop in my brain. I felt all at once to be given a power of hearing that was far beyond normal. I could hear my own heart thudding most extraordinarily loud. I began, however, to feel better, after a little; but I simply had not the pluck to move. You can understand?

“Presently, I began to get my courage back. I gripped at my camera and flashlight, and waited. My hands were simply soaked with sweat. I glanced once at Wentworth. I could see him only dimly. His shoulders were hunched a little, his head forward; but though it was motionless, I knew that his eyes were not. It is queer how one knows that sort of thing at times. The police were just as silent. And thus a while passed.

“A sudden sound broke across the silence. From two sides of the room there came faint noises. I recognised them at once, as the breaking of the sealing-wax. The sealed doors were opening. I raised the camera and flashlight, and it was a peculiar mixture of fear and courage that helped me to press the button. As the great belch of light lit up the hall, I felt the men all about me, jump. The darkness fell like a clap of thunder, if you can understand, and seemed tenfold. Yet, in the moment of brightness, I had seen that all the sealed doors were wide open.

“Suddenly, all around us, there sounded a drip, drip, drip, upon the floor of the great hall. I thrilled with a queer, realising emotion and a sense of a very real and present danger — imminent. The ‘blood-drip’ had commenced. And the grim question was now whether the barriers could save us from whatever had come into the huge room.

“Through some awful minutes the ‘blood-drip’ continued to fall in an increasing rain; and presently some began to fall within the barriers. I saw several great drops splash and star upon the pale glowing intertwining tubes of the Electric Pentacle; but, strangely enough, I could not trace that any fell among us. Beyond the strange horrible noise of the ‘drip,’ there was no other sound. And then, abruptly, from the boar hound over in the far corner, there came a terrible yelling howl of agony, followed instantly by a sickening, breaking noise, and an immediate silence. If you have ever, when out shooting, broken a rabbit’s neck, you will know the sound — in miniature! Like lightning, the thought sprang into my brain:— IT has crossed the pentacle. For you will remember that I had one about each of the dogs. I thought instantly, with a sick apprehension, of our own barriers. There was something in the hall with us that had passed the barrier of the pentacle about one of the dogs. In the awful succeeding silence, I positively quivered. And suddenly, one of the men behind me gave out a scream, like any woman, and bolted for the door. He fumbled, and had it open in a moment. I yelled to the others not to move; but they followed like sheep, and I heard them kick the candles flying, in their panic. One of them stepped on the Electric Pentacle, and smashed it, and there was an utter darkness. In an instant, I realised that I was defenceless against the powers of the Unknown World, and with one savage leap I was out of the useless barriers, and instantly through the great doorway, and into the night. I believe I yelled with sheer funk.

“The men were a little ahead of me, and I never ceased running, and neither did they. Sometimes, I glanced back over my shoulder; and I kept glancing into the laurels

which grew all along the drive. The beastly things kept rustling, rustling in a hollow sort of way, as though something were keeping parallel with me, among them. The rain had stopped, and a dismal little wind kept moaning through the grounds. It was disgusting.

“I caught Wentworth and the police at the lodge gate. We got outside, and ran all the way to the village. We found old Dennis up, waiting for us, and half the villagers to keep him company. He told us that he had known in his ‘sowl’ that we should come back, that is, if we came back at all; which is not a bad rendering of his remark.

“Fortunately, I had brought my camera away from the house — possibly because the strap had happened to be over my head. Yet, I did not go straight away to develop, but sat with the rest in the bar, where we talked for some hours, trying to be coherent about the whole horrible business.

“Later, however, I went up to my room and proceeded with my photography. I was steadier now, and it was just possible, so I hoped, that the negatives might show something.

“On two of the plates, I found nothing unusual: but on the third, which was the first one that I snapped, I saw something that made me quite excited. I examined it very carefully with a magnifying glass; then I put it to wash, and slipped a pair of rubber half-shoes over my boots.

“The negative had shown me something very extraordinary, and I had made up my mind to test the truth of what it seemed to indicate, without losing another moment. It was no use telling anything to Wentworth and the police, until I was certain; and, also, I believed that I stood a greater chance to succeed by myself; though, for that matter, I do not suppose anything would have got them up to the Manor again that night.

“I took my revolver, and went quietly downstairs, and into the dark. The rain had commenced again; but that did not bother me. I walked hard. When I came to the lodge gates, a sudden, queer instinct stopped me from going through, and I climbed the wall into the park. I kept away from the drive, and approached the building through the dismal, dripping laurels. You can imagine how beastly it was. Every time a leaf rustled, I jumped.

“I made my way round to the back of the big house, and got in through a little window which I had taken note of during my search; for, of course, I knew the whole place now from roof to cellars. I went silently up the kitchen stairs, fairly quivering with funk; and at the top, I went to the left, and then into a long corridor that opened, through one of the doorways we had sealed, into the big hall. I looked up it, and saw a faint flicker of light away at the end; and I tiptoed silently towards it, holding my revolver ready. As I came near to the open door, I heard men’s voices, and then a burst of laughing. I went on, until I could see into the hall. There were several men there, all in a group. They were well dressed, and one, at least, I saw was armed. They were examining my barriers against the supernatural, with a good deal of unkind laughter. I never felt such a fool in my life.

“It was plain to me that they were a gang of men who had made use of the empty Manor, perhaps for years, for some purpose of their own; and now that Wentworth was attempting to take possession, they were acting up to the traditions of the place, with the view of driving him away, and keeping so useful a place still at their

disposal. But what they were, I mean whether coiners, thieves, inventors, or what, I could not imagine.

“Presently, they left the Pentacle, and gathered round the living boarhound, which seemed curiously quiet, as though it were half-drugged. There was some talk as to whether to let the poor brute live, or not, but finally they decided it would be good policy to kill it. I saw two of them force a twisted loop of rope into its mouth, and the two bights of the loop were brought together at the back of the hound’s neck. Then a third thrust a thick walking-stick through the two loops. The two men with the rope, stooped to hold the dog, so that I could not see what was done; but the poor beast gave a sudden awful howl, and immediately there was a repetition of the uncomfortable breaking sound, I had heard earlier in the night, as you will remember.

“The men stood up and left the dog lying there, quiet enough now, as you may suppose. For my part, I fully appreciated the calculated remorselessness which had decided upon the animal’s death, and the cold determination with which it had been afterwards executed so neatly. I guessed that a man who might get into the ‘light’ of these particular men, would be likely to come to quite as uncomfortable an ending.

“A minute later, one of the men called out to the rest that they should ‘shift the wires.’ One of the men came towards the doorway of the corridor in which I stood, and I ran quickly back into the darkness of the upper end. I saw the man reach up and take something from the top of the door, and I heard the slight, ringing jangle of steel wire.

“When he had gone, I ran back again, and saw the men passing, one after another, through an opening in the stairs, formed by one of the marble steps being raised. When the last man had vanished, the slab that made the step was shut down, and there was not a sign of the secret door. It was the seventh step from the bottom, as I took care to count; and a splendid idea; for it was so solid that it did not ring hollow, even to a fairly heavy hammer, as I found later.

“There is little more to tell. I got out of the house as quickly and quietly as possible, and back to the inn. The police came without any coaxing, when they knew the ‘ghosts’ were normal flesh and blood. We entered the park and the Manor in the same way that I had done. Yet, when we tried to open the step, we failed, and had finally to smash it. This must have warned the haunters; for when we descended to a secret room which we found at the end of a long and narrow passage in the thickness of the walls, we found no one.

“The police were horribly disgusted, as you can imagine; but for my part, I did not care either way. I had ‘laid the ghost,’ as you might say, and that was what I had set out to do. I was not particularly afraid of being laughed at by the others; for they had all been thoroughly ‘taken in’; and in the end, I had scored, without their help.

“We searched right through the secret ways, and found that there was an exit, at the end of a long tunnel, which opened in the side of a well, out in the grounds. The ceiling of the hall was hollow, and reached by a little secret stairway inside of the big staircase. The ‘blood-drip’ was merely coloured water, dropped through minute crevices of the ornamented ceiling. How the candles and fire were put out, I do not know; for the haunters certainly did not act quite up to tradition, which held that the lights were put out by the ‘blood-drip.’ Perhaps it was too difficult to direct the fluid, without positively squirting it, which might have given the whole thing away. The

candles and the fire may possibly have been extinguished by the agency of carbonic acid gas; but how suspended, I have no idea.

“The secret hiding places were, of course, ancient. There was also, did I tell you? a bell which they had rigged up to ring, when anyone entered the gates at the end of the drive. If I had not climbed the wall, I should have found nothing, for my pains; for the bell would have warned them, had I gone in through the gateway.”

“What was on the negative?” I asked, with much curiosity.

“A picture of the fine wire with which they were grappling for the hook that held the entrance door open. They were doing it from one of the crevices in the ceiling. They had evidently made no preparations for lifting the hook. I suppose they never thought that anyone would make use of it, and so they had to improvise a grapple. The wire was too fine to be seen by the amount of light we had in the hall, but the flashlight ‘picked it out.’ Do you see?”

“The opening of the inner doors was managed by wires, as you will have guessed, which they unshipped after use, or else I should soon have found them, when I made my search.

“I think I have now explained everything. The hound was killed, of course, by the men direct. You see, they made the place as dark as possible first. Of course, if I had managed to take a flashlight just at that instant, the whole secret of the haunting would have been exposed. But Fate just ordered it the other way.”

“And the tramps?” I asked.

“Oh, you mean the two tramps who were found dead in the Manor,” said Carnacki. “Well, of course it is impossible to be sure, one way or the other. Perhaps they happened to find out something, and were given a hypodermic. Or it is quite as probable that they had come to the time of their dying, and just died naturally. It is conceivable that a great many tramps had slept in the old house, at one time or another.”

Carnacki stood up and knocked out his pipe. We rose also, and went for our coats and hats.

“Out you go!” said Carnacki, genially, using the recognised formula. And we went out on to the Embankment, and presently through the darkness to our various homes.

The Whistling Room

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Editor's note: Complaints continue to reach us from all parts of the country to the effect that Mr. W. HOPE HODGSON's "Carnacki" stories are producing a widespread epidemic of Nervous Prostration! So far from being able to reassure or calm our nervous readers, we are compelled to warn them that "The Whistling Room", which we publish this month, is worse than ever. Our advertising manager had to go to bed for two days after reading the advance sheets; a proof reader has sent in his resignation; and, worst of all, our smartest office boy — But this is no place to bewail or seek for sympathy. Yet another of those stories will appear in April!

Carnacki shook a friendly fist at me, as I entered, late. Then, he opened the door into the dining-room, and ushered the four of us — Jessop, Arkright, Taylor and myself — in to dinner.

We dined well, as usual, and equally as usual, Carnacki was pretty silent during the meal. At the end we took our wine and cigars to our accustomed positions and Carnacki — having got himself comfortable in his big chair — began without any preliminary:—

"I have just got back from Ireland, again," he said. "And I thought you chaps would be interested to hear my news. Besides, I fancy I shall see the thing clearer, after I have told it all out straight. I must tell you this, though, at the beginning — up to the present moment I have been utterly and completely 'stumped.' I have tumbled upon one of the most peculiar cases of 'haunting' — or devilment of some sort — that I have come against. Now listen.

"I have been spending the last few weeks at Iastrae Castle, about twenty miles north-east of Galway. I got a letter about a month ago from a Mr. Sid K. Tassoc, who it seemed had bought the place lately, and moved in, only to find that he had got a very peculiar piece of property.

"When I got there, he met me at the station, driving a jaunting-car, and drove me up to the castle, which, by the way, he called a 'house-shanty.' I found that he was 'pigging it' there with his boy brother and another American who seemed to be half-servant and half-companion. It seems that all the servants had left the place, in a body, as you might say; and now they were managing among themselves, assisted by some day-help.

"The three of them got together a scratch feed, and Tassoc told me all about the trouble, whilst we were at table. It is most extraordinary and different from anything that I have had to do with; though that 'Buzzing' case was very queer, too.

"Tassoc began right in the middle of his story. 'We've got a room in this shanty,' he said, 'which has got a most infernal whistling in it; sort of haunting it. The thing starts any time; you never know when, and it goes on until it frightens you. All the servants have gone, as you know. It's not ordinary whistling, and it isn't the wind. Wait till you hear it.'

“We’re all carrying guns,’ said the boy; and slapped his coat pocket.

“As bad as that?’ I said; and the older brother nodded. ‘It may be soft,’ he replied, ‘but wait till you’ve heard it. Sometimes I think it’s some infernal thing and the next moment I’m just as sure that someone’s playing a trick on us.’

“Why?’ I asked. ‘What is to be gained?’

“You mean,’ he said, ‘that people usually have some good reason for playing tricks as elaborate as this. Well, I’ll tell you. There’s a lady in this province by the name of Miss Donnehue, who’s going to be my wife, this day two months. She’s more beautiful than they make them, and so far as I can see, I’ve just stuck my head into an Irish hornet’s nest. There’s about a score of hot young Irishmen been courting her these two years gone, and now that I’ve come along and cut them out, they feel raw against me. Do you begin to understand the possibilities?’

“Yes,’ I said. ‘Perhaps I do in a vague sort of way; but I don’t see how all this affects the room?’

“Like this,’ he said. ‘When I’d fixed it up with Miss Donnehue, I looked out for a place, and bought this little house-shanty. Afterwards, I told her — one evening during dinner, that I’d decided to tie up here. And then she asked me whether I wasn’t afraid of the whistling room. I told her it must have been thrown in gratis, as I’d heard nothing about it. There were some of her men friends present, and I saw a smile go round. I found out, after a bit of questioning, that several people have bought this place during the last twenty-odd years. And it was always on the market again, after a trial.

“Well, the chaps started to bait me a bit, and offered to take bets after dinner that I’d not stay six months in the place. I looked once or twice at Miss Donnehue, so as to be sure I was “getting the note“ of the talkee-talkee; but I could see that she didn’t take it as a joke, at all. Partly, I think, because there was a bit of a sneer in the way the men were tackling me, and partly because she really believes there is something in this yarn of the whistling room.

“However, after dinner, I did what I could to even things up with the others. I nailed all their bets and screwed them down good and safe. I guess some of them are going to be hard hit, unless I lose; which I don’t mean to. Well, there you have practically the whole yarn.’

“Not quite,’ I told him. ‘All that I know, is that you have bought a castle with a room in it that is in some way “queer,” and that you’ve been doing some betting. Also, I know that your servants have got frightened, and run away. Tell me something about the whistling?’

“Oh, that!’ said Tassoc; ‘that started the second night we were in. I’d had a good look round the room, in the daytime, as you can understand; for the talk up at Arlestrae — Miss Donnehue’s place — had made me wonder a bit. But it seems just as usual as some of the other rooms in the old wing, only perhaps a bit more lonesome. But that may be only because of the talk about it, you know.

“The whistling started about ten o’clock, on the second night, as I said. Tom and I were in the library, when we heard an awfully queer whistling, coming along the East Corridor — the room is in the East Wing, you know.

““That’s that blessed ghost!“ I said to Tom, and we collared the lamps off the table, and went up to have a look. I tell you, even as we dug along the corridor, it took me a

bit in the throat, it was so beastly queer. It was a sort of tune, in a way, but more as if a devil or some rotten thing were laughing at you, and going to get round at your back. That's how it makes you feel.

“When we got to the door, we didn't wait; but rushed it open; and then I tell you the sound of the thing fairly hit me in the face. Tom said he got it the same way — sort of felt stunned and bewildered. We looked all round, and soon got so nervous, we just cleared out, and I locked the door.

“We came down here, and had a stiff peg each. Then we got fit again and began to think we'd been nicely had. So we took sticks, and went out into the grounds, thinking after all it must be some of these confounded Irishmen working the ghost-trick on us. But there was not a leg stirring.

“We went back into the house, and walked over it, and then paid another visit to the room. But we simply couldn't stand it. We fairly ran out, and locked the door again. I don't know how to put it into words; but I had a feeling of being up against something that was rottenly dangerous. You know! We've carried our guns ever since.

“Of course, we had a real turn-out of the room next day, and the whole house-place; and we even hunted round the grounds; but there was nothing queer. And now I don't know what to think; except that the sensible part of me tells me that it's some plan of these Wild Irishmen to try to take a rise out of me.’

“Done anything since?’ I asked him.

“Yes,’ he said. ‘Watched outside of the door of the room at nights, and chased round the grounds, and sounded the walls and floor of the room. We've done everything we could think of; and it's beginning to get on our nerves; so we sent for you.’

“By this time we had finished eating. As we rose from the table Tassoc suddenly called out:— ‘Ssh! Hark!’

“We were instantly silent, listening. Then I heard it, an extraordinary hooning whistle, monstrous and inhuman, coming from far away through corridors to my right.

“By God!’ said Tassoc, ‘and it's scarcely dark yet! Collar those candles, both of you and come along.’

“In a few moments, we were all out of the door and racing up the stairs. Tassoc turned into a long corridor, and we followed, shielding our candles as we ran. The sound seemed to fill all the passage as we drew near, until I had the feeling that the whole air throbbled under the power of some wanton immense Force — a sense of an actual taint, as you might say, of monstrosity all about us.

“Tassoc unlocked the door; then, giving it a push with his foot, jumped back, and drew his revolver. As the door flew open, the sound beat out at us, with an effect impossible to explain to one who has not heard it — with a certain, horrible personal note in it; as if in there in the darkness you could picture the room rocking and creaking in a mad, vile glee to its own filthy piping and whistling and hooning. To stand there and listen, was to be stunned by Realisation. It was as if someone showed you the mouth of a vast pit suddenly, and said:— That's Hell. And you knew that they had spoken the truth. Do you get it, even a little bit?

“I stepped a pace into the room, and held the candle over my head, and looked quickly round. Tassoc and his brother joined me, and the man came up at the back, and we all held our candles high. I was deafened with the shrill, piping hoon of the whistling; and then, clear in my ear, something seemed to be saying to me:— ‘Get out of here — quick! Quick! Quick!’

“As you chaps know, I never neglect that sort of thing. Sometimes it may be nothing but nerves; but as you will remember, it was just such a warning that saved me in the ‘Grey Dog’ case, and in the ‘Yellow Finger’ experiments; as well as other times. Well, I turned sharp round to the others: ‘Out!’ I said. ‘For God’s sake, out quick!’ And in an instant I had them into the passage.

“There came an extraordinary yelling scream into the hideous whistling, and then, like a clap of thunder, an utter silence. I slammed the door, and locked it. Then, taking the key, I looked round at the others. They were pretty white, and I imagine I must have looked that way too. And there we stood a moment, silent.

“‘Come down out of this, and have some whisky,’ said Tassoc, at last, in a voice he tried to make ordinary; and he led the way. I was the back man, and I knew we all kept looking over our shoulders. When we got downstairs, Tassoc passed the bottle round. He took a drink, himself, and slapped his glass on to the table. Then sat down with a thud.

“‘That’s a lovely thing to have in the house with you, isn’t it!’ he said. And directly afterwards:— ‘What on earth made you hustle us all out like that, Carnacki?’

“‘Something seemed to be telling me to get out, quick,’ I said. ‘Sounds a bit silly — superstitious, I know; but when you are meddling with this sort of thing, you’ve got to take notice of queer fancies, and risk being laughed at.’

“I told him then about the ‘Grey Dog’ business, and he nodded a lot to that. ‘Of course,’ I said, ‘this may be nothing more than those would-be rivals of yours playing some funny game; but, personally, though I’m going to keep an open mind, I feel that there is something beastly and dangerous about this thing.’

“We talked for a while longer, and then Tassoc suggested billiards, which we played in a pretty half-hearted fashion, and all the time cocking an ear to the door, as you might say, for sounds; but none came, and later, after coffee, he suggested early bed, and a thorough overhaul of the room on the morrow.

“My bedroom was in the newer part of the castle, and the door opened into the picture gallery. At the east end of the gallery was the entrance to the corridor of the East Wing; this was shut off from the gallery by two old and heavy oak doors, which looked rather odd and quaint beside the more modern doors of the various rooms.

“When I reached my room, I did not go to bed; but began to unpack my instrument-trunk, of which I had retained the key. I intended to take one or two preliminary steps at once, in my investigation of the extraordinary whistling.

“Presently, when the castle had settled into quietness, I slipped out of my room, and across to the entrance of the great corridor. I opened one of the low, squat doors, and threw the beam of my pocket searchlight down the passage. It was empty, and I went through the doorway, and pushed-to the oak behind me. Then along the great passage-way, throwing my light before and behind, and keeping my revolver handy.

“I had hung a ‘protection belt’ of garlic round my neck, and the smell of it seemed to fill the corridor and give me assurance; for as you all know, it is a wonderful

‘protection’ against the more usual Aeirrii forms of semi-materialisation, by which I supposed the whistling might be produced; though at that period of my investigation I was still quite prepared to find it due to some perfectly natural cause; for it is astonishing the enormous number of cases that prove to have nothing abnormal in them.

“In addition to wearing the necklet, I had plugged my ears loosely with garlic, and as I did not intend to stay more than a few minutes in the room, I hoped to be safe.

“When I reached the door, and put my hand into my pocket for the key, I had a sudden feeling of sickening funk. But I was not going to back out, if I could help it. I unlocked the door and turned the handle. Then I gave the door a sharp push with my foot, as Tassoc had done, and drew my revolver, though I did not expect to have any use for it, really.

“I shone the searchlight all round the room, and then stepped inside, with a disgustingly horrible feeling of walking slap into a waiting Danger. I stood a few seconds, waiting, and nothing happened, and the empty room showed bare from corner to corner. And then, you know, I realised that the room was full of an abominable silence; can you understand that? A sort of purposeful silence, just as sickening as any of the filthy noises the Things have power to make. Do you remember what I told you about that ‘Silent Garden’ business? Well, this room had just that same malevolent silence — the beastly quietness of a thing that is looking at you and not seeable itself, and thinks that it has got you. Oh, I recognised it instantly, and I whipped the top off my lantern, so as to have light over the whole room.

“Then I set-to, working like fury, and keeping my glance all about me. I sealed the two windows with lengths of human hair, right across, and sealed them at every frame. As I worked, a queer, scarcely perceptible tenseness stole into the air of the place, and the silence seemed, if you can understand me, to grow more solid. I knew then that I had no business there without ‘full protection’; for I was practically certain that this was no mere Aeirrii development, but one of the worse forms, as the Saitii; like that ‘Grunting Man’ case — you know.

“I finished the window, and hurried over to the great fireplace. This is a huge affair, and has a queer gallows-iron, I think they are called, projecting from the back of the arch. I sealed the opening with seven human hairs — the seventh crossing the six others.

“Then, just as I was making an end, a low, mocking whistle grew in the room. A cold, nervous prickling went up my spine, and round my forehead from the back. The hideous sound filled all the room with an extraordinary, grotesque parody of human whistling, too gigantic to be human — as if something gargantuan and monstrous made the sounds softly. As I stood there a last moment, pressing down the final seal, I had little doubt but that I had come across one of those rare and horrible cases of the Inanimate reproducing the functions of the Animate. I made a grab for my lamp, and went quickly to the door, looking over my shoulder, and listening for the thing that I expected. It came, just as I got my hand upon the handle — a squeal of incredible, malevolent anger, piercing through the low hooning of the whistling. I dashed out, slamming the door and locking it.

“I leant a little against the opposite wall of the corridor, feeling rather funny; for it had been a hideously narrow squeak... ‘thyr be noe sayfetic to be gained bye gayrds of holieness when the monyster hath pow’r to speak throe woode and stoene.’ So runs

the passage in the Sigsand MS., and I proved it in that ‘Nodding Door’ business. There is no protection against this particular form of monster, except possibly for a fractional period of time; for it can reproduce itself in, or take to its purposes, the very protective material which you may use, and has power to ‘forme wythine the pentycle,’ though not immediately. There is, of course, the possibility of the Unknown Last Line of the Saaamaaa Ritual being uttered; but it is too uncertain to count upon, and the danger is too hideous; and even then it has no power to protect for more than ‘maybe fyve beats of the harte,’ as the Sigsand has it.

“Inside of the room, there was now a constant, meditative, hooning whistling; but presently this ceased, and the silence seemed worse; for there is such a sense of hidden mischief in a silence.

“After a little, I sealed the door with crossed hairs, and then cleared off down the great passage, and so to bed.

“For a long time I lay awake; but managed eventually to get some sleep. Yet, about two o’clock I was waked by the hooning whistling of the room coming to me, even through the closed doors. The sound was tremendous, and seemed to beat through the whole house with a presiding sense of terror. As if (I remember thinking) some monstrous giant had been holding mad carnival with itself at the end of that great passage.

“I got up and sat on the edge of the bed, wondering whether to go along and have a look at the seal; and suddenly there came a thump on my door, and Tassoc walked in, with his dressing-gown over his pyjamas.

“‘I thought it would have waked you so I came along to have a talk,’ he said. ‘I can’t sleep. Beautiful! Isn’t it!’

“‘Extraordinary!’ I said, and tossed him my case.

“He lit a cigarette, and we sat and talked for about an hour; and all the time that noise went on, down at the end of the big corridor.

“Suddenly, Tassoc stood up:—

“‘Let’s take our guns, and go and examine the brute,’ he said, and turned towards the door.

“‘No!’ I said. ‘By Jove — NO! I can’t say anything definite yet; but I believe that room is about as dangerous as it well can be.’

“‘Haunted — really haunted?’ he asked, keenly and without any of his frequent banter.

“I told him, of course, that I could not say a definite yes or no to such a question; but that I hoped to be able to make a statement soon. Then I gave him a little lecture on the False Re-materialisation of the Animate-force through the Inanimate-inert. He began then to see the particular way in which the room might be dangerous, if it were really the subject of a manifestation.

“About an hour later, the whistling ceased quite suddenly, and Tassoc went off again to bed. I went back to mine, also, and eventually got another spell of sleep.

“In the morning, I went along to the room. I found the seals on the door intact. Then I went in. The window seals and the hair were all right; but the seventh hair across the great fireplace was broken. This set me thinking. I knew that it might, very

possibly, have snapped, through my having tensioned it too highly; but then, again, it might have been broken by something else. Yet, it was scarcely possible that a man, for instance, could have passed between the six unbroken hairs; for no one would ever have noticed them, entering the room that way, you see; but just walked through them, ignorant of their very existence.

“I removed the other hairs, and the seals. Then I looked up the chimney. It went up straight, and I could see blue sky at the top. It was a big, open flue, and free from any suggestion of hiding places or corners. Yet, of course, I did not trust to any such casual examination, and after breakfast, I put on my overalls and climbed to the very top, sounding all the way; but I found nothing.

“Then I came down and went over the whole of the room — floor, ceiling, and walls, mapping them out in six-inch squares, and sounding with both hammer and probe. But there was nothing abnormal.

“Afterwards, I made a three-weeks’ search of the whole castle, in the same thorough way; but found nothing. I went even further, then; for at night, when the whistling commenced, I made a microphone test. You see, if the whistling were mechanically produced, this test would have made evident to me the working of the machinery, if there were any such concealed within the walls. It certainly was an up-to-date method of examination, as you must allow.

“Of course I did not think that any of Tassoc’s rivals had fixed up any mechanical contrivance; but I thought it just possible that there had been some such thing for producing the whistling, made away back in the years, perhaps with the intention of giving the room a reputation that would ensure its being free of inquisitive folk. You see what I mean? Well, of course, it was just possible, if this were the case, that someone knew the secret of the machinery, and was utilising the knowledge to play this devil of a prank on Tassoc. The microphone test of the walls would certainly have made this known to me, as I have said; but there was nothing of the sort in the castle; so that I had practically no doubt at all now, but that it was a genuine case of what is popularly termed ‘haunting.’

“All this time, every night, and sometimes most of each night, the hooning whistling of the room was intolerable. It was as if an Intelligence there, knew that steps were being taken against it, and piped and hooned in a sort of mad, mocking contempt. I tell you, it was as extraordinary as it was horrible. Time after time, I went along — tiptoeing noiselessly on stockinged feet — to the sealed floor (for I always kept the room sealed). I went at all hours of the night, and often the whistling, inside, would seem to change to a brutally malignant note, as though the half-animate monster saw me plainly through the shut door. And all the time the shrieking, hooning whistling would fill the whole corridor, so that I used to feel a precious lonely chap, messing about there with one of Hell’s mysteries.

“And every morning, I would enter the room and examine the different hairs and seals. You see, after the first week, I had stretched parallel hairs all along the walls of the room, and along the ceiling; but over the floor, which was of polished stone, I had set out little, colourless wafers, tacky-side uppermost. Each wafer was numbered, and they were arranged after a definite plan, so that I should be able to trace the exact movements of any living thing that went across the floor.

“You will see that no material being or creature could possibly have entered that room, without leaving many signs to tell me all about it. But nothing was ever

disturbed, and I began to think that I should have to risk an attempt to stay a night in the room, in the Electric Pentacle. Yet, mind you, I knew that it would be a crazy thing to do; but I was getting stumped, and ready to try anything.

“Once, about midnight, I did break the seal on the door, and have a quick look in; but, I tell you, the whole room gave one mad yell, and seemed to come towards me in a great belly of shadows, as if the walls had bellied in towards me. Of course, that must have been fancy. Anyway, the yell was sufficient, and I slammed the door, and locked it, feeling a bit weak down my spine. You know the feeling.

“And then, when I had got to that state of readiness for anything, I made what, at first, I thought was something of a discovery. It was about one in the morning, and I was walking slowly round the castle, keeping in the soft grass. I had come under the shadow of the East Front, and far above me, I could hear the vile, hooning whistling of the room, up in the darkness of the unlit wing. Then, suddenly, a little in front of me, I heard a man’s voice speaking low, but evidently in glee:—

“By George! You chaps; but I wouldn’t care to bring a wife home to that!’ it said, in the tone of the cultured Irish.

“Someone started to reply; but there came a sharp exclamation, and then a rush, and I heard footsteps running in all directions. Evidently, the men had spotted me.

“For a few seconds, I stood there, feeling an awful ass. After all, they were at the bottom of the haunting! Do you see what a big fool it made me seem? I had no doubt but that they were some of Tassoc’s rivals; and here I had been feeling in every bone that I had hit on a real, bad, genuine case! And then, you know, there came the memory of hundreds of details, that made me just as much in doubt again. Anyway, whether it was natural, or ab-natural, there was a great deal yet to be cleared up.

“I told Tassoc, next morning, what I had discovered, and through the whole of every night, for five nights, we kept a close watch round the East Wing; but there was never a sign of anyone prowling about; and all this time, almost from evening to dawn, that grotesque whistling would hoon incredibly, far above us in the darkness.

“On the morning after the fifth night, I received a wire from here, which brought me home by the next boat. I explained to Tassoc that I was simply bound to come away for a few days; but told him to keep up the watch round the castle. One thing I was very careful to do, and that was to make him absolutely promise never to go into the room, between sunset and sunrise. I made it clear to him that we knew nothing definite yet, one way or the other; and if the room were what I had first thought it to be, it might be a lot better for him to die first, than enter it after dark.

“When I got here, and had finished my business, I thought you chaps would be interested; and also I wanted to get it all spread out clear in my mind; so I rang you up. I am going over again tomorrow, and when I get back, I ought to have something pretty extraordinary to tell you. By the way, there is a curious thing I forgot to tell you. I tried to get a phonographic record of the whistling; but it simply produced no impression on the wax at all. That is one of the things that has made me feel queer, I can tell you. Another extraordinary thing is that the microphone will not magnify the sound — will not even transmit it; seems to take no account of it, and acts as if it were non-existent. I am absolutely and utterly stumped, up to the present. I am a wee bit curious to see whether any of you dear clever heads can make daylight of it. I cannot — not yet.’

He rose to his feet.

M. J. Starling

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“Good-night, all,” he said, and began to usher us out abruptly, but without offence, into the night.

A fortnight later, he dropped us each a card, and you can imagine that I was not late this time. When we arrived, Carnacki took us straight into dinner, and when we had finished, and all made ourselves comfortable, he began again, where he had left off:—

“Now just listen quietly; for I have got something pretty queer to tell you. I got back late at night, and I had to walk up to the castle, as I had not warned them that I was coming. It was bright moonlight; so that the walk was rather a pleasure, than otherwise. When I got there, the whole place was in darkness, and I thought I would go round outside, to see whether Tassoc or his brother was keeping watch. But I could not find them anywhere, and concluded that they had got tired of it, and gone off to bed.

“As I returned across the front of the East Wing, I caught the hooning whistling of the room, coming down strangely through the stillness of the night. It had a queer note in it, I remember — low and constant, queerly meditative. I looked up at the window, bright in the moonlight, and got a sudden thought to bring a ladder from the stable-yard, and try to get a look into the room, through the window.

“With this notion, I hunted round at the back of the castle, among the straggle of offices, and presently found a long, fairly light ladder; though it was heavy enough for one, goodness knows! I thought at first that I should never get it reared. I managed at last and let the ends rest very quietly against the wall a little below the sill of the larger window. Then, going silently, I went up the ladder. Presently I had my face above the sill and was looking in, alone with the moonlight.

“Of course, the queer whistling sounded louder up there; but it still conveyed that peculiar sense of something whistling quietly to itself — can you understand? Though, for all the meditative lowness of the note, the horrible, gargantuan quality was distinct — a mighty parody of the human, as if I stood there, and listened to the whistling from the lips of a monster with a man’s soul.

“And then, you know, I saw something. The floor in the middle of the huge, empty room, was puckered upwards in the centre into a strange, soft-looking mound, parted at the top into an ever-changing hole, that pulsated to that great, gentle hooning. At times, as I watched, I saw the heaving of the indented mound, gap across with a queer, inward suction, as with the drawing of an enormous breath; then the thing would dilate and pout once more to the incredible melody. And suddenly, as I stared, dumb, it came to me that the thing was living. I was looking at two enormous, blackened lips, blistered and brutal, there in the pale moonlight...

“Abruptly, they bulged out to a vast pouting mound of force and sound, stiffened and swollen, and hugely massive and clean-cut in the moonbeams. And a great sweat lay heavy on the vast upper-lip. In the same moment of time, the whistling had burst into a mad screaming note, that seemed to stun me, even where I stood, outside of the window. And then, the following moment, I was staring blankly at the solid, undisturbed floor of the room — smooth, polished stone flooring, from wall to wall; and there was an absolute silence.

”You can picture me staring into the quiet room, and knowing what I knew. I felt like a sick, frightened kid, and I wanted to slide quietly down the ladder, and run away. But in that very instant, I heard Tassoc’s voice calling to me from within the room, for help, help. My God! but I got such an awful dazed feeling; and I had a vague,

bewildered notion that, after all, it was the Irishmen who had got him in there, and were taking it out of him. And then the call came again, and I burst the window, and jumped in to help him. I had a confused idea that the call had come from within the shadow of the great fireplace, and I raced across to it; but there was no one there.

“Tassoc!” I shouted, and my voice went empty-sounding round the great apartment; and then, in a flash, I knew that Tassoc had never called. I whirled round, sick with fear, towards the window, and as I did so, a frightful, exultant whistling scream burst through the room. On my left the end wall had bellied-in towards me, in a pair of gargantuan lips, black and utterly monstrous, to within a yard of my face. I fumbled for a mad instant at my revolver; not for it, but myself, for the danger was a thousand times worse than death. And then, suddenly, the Unknown Last Line of the Saaamaaa Ritual was whispered quite audibly in the room. Instantly, the thing happened that I have known once before. There came a sense as of dust falling continually and monotonously, and I knew that my life hung uncertain and suspended for a flash, in a brief, reeling vertigo of unseeable things, Then that ended, and I knew that I might live. My soul and body blended again, and life and power came to me. I dashed furiously at the window, and hurled myself out head-foremost, for I can tell you that I had stopped being afraid of death. I crashed down on to the ladder, and slithered, grabbing and grabbing; and so came some way or other alive to the bottom. And there I sat in the soft, wet grass, with the moonlight all about me; and far above, through the broken window of the room, there was a low whistling.

“That is the chief of it. I was not hurt, and I went round to the front, and knocked Tassoc up. When they let me in, we had a long yarn, over some good whisky — for I was shaken to pieces — and I explained things as much as I could. I told Tassoc that the room would have to come down, and every fragment of it be burned in a blast-furnace, erected within a pentacle. He nodded. There was nothing to say. Then I went to bed.

“We turned a small army on to the work, and within ten days, that lovely thing had gone up in smoke, and what was left was calcined, and clean.

“It was when the workmen were stripping the panelling, that I got hold of a sound notion of the beginnings of that beastly development. Over the great fireplace, after the great oak panels had been torn down, I found that there was let into the masonry a scrollwork of stone, with on it an old inscription, in ancient Celtic, that here in this room was burned Dian Tiansay, jester of King Alzof, who made the Song of Foolishness upon King Ernore of the Seventh Castle.

“When I got the translation clear, I gave it to Tassoc. He was tremendously excited; for he knew the old tale, and took me down to the library to look at an old parchment that gave the story in detail. Afterwards, I found that the incident was well-known about the countryside; but always regarded more as a legend, than as history. And no one seemed ever to have dreamt that the old East Wing of Iastrae Castle was the remains of the ancient Seventh Castle.

“From the old parchment, I gathered that there had been a pretty dirty job done, away back in the years. It seems that King Alzof and King Ernore had been enemies by birthright, as you might say truly; but that nothing more than a little raiding had occurred on either side for years, until Dian Tiansay made the Song of Foolishness upon King Ernore, and sang it before King Alzof; and so greatly was it appreciated that King Alzof gave the jester one of his ladies, to wife.

“Presently, all the people of the land had come to know the song, and so it came at last to King Ernore, who was so angered that he made war upon his old enemy, and took and burned him and his castle; but Dian Tiansay, the jester, he brought with him to his own place, and having torn his tongue out because of the song which he had made and sung, he imprisoned him in the room in the East Wing (which was evidently used for unpleasant purposes), and the jester’s wife, he kept for himself, having a fancy for her prettiness.

“But one night, Dian Tiansay’s wife was not to be found, and in the morning they discovered her lying dead in her husband’s arms and he sitting, whistling the Song of Foolishness, for he had no longer the power to sing it.

“Then they roasted Dian Tiansay, in the great fireplace — probably from that self-same ‘gallows-iron’ which I have already mentioned. And until he died, Dian Tiansay ‘ceased not to whistle’ the Song of Foolishness, which he could no longer sing. But afterwards, ‘in that room’, there was often heard at night the sound of something whistling; and there ‘grew a power in that room,’ so that none dared to sleep in it. And presently, it would seem, the King went to another castle; for the whistling troubled him.

“There you have it all. Of course, that is only a rough rendering of the translation from the parchment. It’s a bit quaint! Don’t you think so?”

“Yes,” I said, answering for the lot. “But how did the thing grow to such a tremendous manifestation?”

“One of those cases of continuity of thought producing a positive action upon the immediate surrounding material,” replied Carnacki. “The development must have been going forward through centuries, to have produced such a monstrosity. It was a true instance of Saiitii Manifestation, which I can best explain by likening it to a living spiritual fungus, which involves the very structure of the aether-fibre itself, and, of course, in so doing, acquires an essential control over the ‘material-substance’ involved in it. It is impossible to make it plainer in a few words.”

“What broke the seventh hair?” asked Taylor.

But Carnacki did not know. He thought it was probably nothing but being too severely tensioned. He also explained that they found out that the men who had run away, had not been up to mischief; but had come over secretly, merely to hear the whistling, which, indeed, had suddenly become the talk of the whole countryside.

“One other thing,” said Arkright, “have you any idea what governs the use of the Unknown Last Line of the Saaamaaa Ritual? I know, of course, that it was used by the Ab-human Priests in the Incantation of the Raaee; but what used it on your behalf, and what made it?”

“You had better read Harzam’s Monograph, and my Addenda to it, on ‘Astral and Astarral Co-ordination and Interference,’” said Carnacki. “It is an extraordinary subject, and I can only say here that the human-vibration may not be insulated from the astarral (as is always believed to be the case, in interferences by the ab-human), without immediate action being taken by those Forces which govern the spinning of the Outer Circle. In other words, it is being proved, time after time, that there is some inscrutable Protective Force constantly intervening between the human-soul (not the body, mind you) and the Outer Monstrosities. Am I clear?”

“Yes, I think so,” I replied. “And you believe that the room had become the material expression of the ancient jester — that his soul, rotted with hatred, had bred into a monster — eh?” I asked.

“Yes,” said Carnacki, nodding. “I think you’ve put my thought rather neatly. It is a queer coincidence that Miss Donnehue is supposed to be descended (so I have heard since) from the same King Ernore. It makes one think some rather curious thoughts, doesn’t it? The marriage coming on, and the room waking to fresh life. If she had gone into that room, ever... eh? IT had waited a long time. Sins of the fathers. Yes, I’ve thought of that. They’re to be married next week, and I am to be best man, which is a thing I hate. And he won his bets, rather! Just think, if ever she had gone into that room. Pretty horrible, eh?”

He nodded his head, grimly, and we four nodded back. Then he rose and took us collectively to the door, and presently thrust us forth in friendly fashion on to the Embankment and into the fresh night air.

“Good night,” we all called back, and went to our various homes. If she had, eh? If she had? That is what I kept thinking.

The Horse of the Invisible

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When I reached 427, Cheyne Walk, Chelsea, I found Carnacki sitting alone. As I came into the room, he rose with a perceptibly stiff movement, and extended his left hand. His face seemed to be badly scarred and bruised, and his right hand was bandaged. He shook hands and offered me his paper, which I refused. Then he passed me a handful of photographs, and returned to his reading.

Now, that is just Carnacki. Not a word had come from him, and not a question from me. He would tell us all about it later. I spent about half an hour, looking at the photographs, which were chiefly “snaps“ (some by flashlight) of an extraordinarily pretty girl; though in some of the photographs it was wonderful that her prettiness was so evident, for so frightened and startled was her expression, that it was difficult not to believe that she had been photographed in the presence of some imminent and overwhelming danger.

The bulk of the photographs were of interiors of different rooms and passages, and in every one the girl might be seen, either full length in the distance, or closer, with, perhaps, only a hand or arm, or portion of the head or dress included in the photograph. All of these had evidently been taken with some definite aim, that did not have for its first purpose the picturing of the girl, but obviously of her surroundings; and they made me very curious, as you can imagine.

Near the bottom of the pile, however, I came upon something definitely extraordinary. It was a photograph of the girl, standing abrupt and clear in the great blaze of a flashlight, as was plain to be seen. Her face was turned a little upward, as if she had been frightened suddenly by some noise. Directly above her, as though half-formed and coming down out of the shadows, was the shape of a single, enormous hoof.

I examined this photograph for a long time, without understanding it more than that it had probably to do with some queer case in which Carnacki was interested.

When Jessop, Arkwright, and Taylor came in, Carnacki quietly held out his hand for the photographs, which I returned in the same spirit, and afterwards we all went in to dinner. When we had spent a quiet but profitable hour at the table, we pulled our chairs round, and made ourselves snug; and Carnacki began:—

“I’ve been north,” he said, speaking slowly and painfully, between puffs at his pipe. “Up to Hisgins of East Lancashire. It has been a pretty strange business all round, as I fancy you chaps will think, when I have finished. I knew, before I went, something about the ‘horse story,’ as I have heard it called; but I never thought of it as coming my way, somehow. Also I know now that I never considered it seriously — in spite of my rule always to keep an open mind. Funny creatures, we humans!

“Well, I got a wire, asking for an appointment, which of course told me that there was some trouble. On the date I fixed, old Captain Hisgins himself came up to see me. He told me a great many new details about the horse story; though, naturally, I had always known the main points, and understood that if the first child were a girl, that girl would be haunted by the Horse, during her courtship.

“It is, as you can see, an extraordinary story, and though I have always known about it, I have never thought it to be anything more than old-time legend, as I have already hinted. You see, for seven generations the Hisgins family have had men children for their first-born, and even the Hisgins themselves have long considered the tale to be little more than a myth.

“To come to the present, the eldest child of the reigning family, is a girl, and she has been often teased and warned in jest by her friends and relations that she is the first girl to be the eldest for seven generations, and that she would have to keep her men friends at arm’s length, or go into a nunnery, if she hoped to escape the haunting. And this, I think, shows us how thoroughly the tale had grown to be considered as nothing worthy of the least serious thought. Don’t you think so?

“Two months ago, Miss Hisgins became engaged to Beaumont, a young Naval Officer, and on the evening of the very day of the engagement, before it was even formally announced, a most extraordinary thing happened, which resulted in Captain Hisgins making the appointment, and my ultimately going down to their place to look into the thing.

“From the old family records and papers that were trusted to me, I found that there could be no possible doubt that prior to something like a hundred and fifty years ago there were some very extraordinary and disagreeable coincidences, to put the thing in the least emotional way. In the whole of the two centuries prior to that date, there were five first-born girls, out of a total of seven generations of the family. Each of these girls grew up to maidenhood, and each became engaged, and each one died during the period of engagement, two by suicide, one by falling from a window, one from a ‘broken heart’ (presumably heart failure, owing to sudden shock through fright). The fifth girl was killed one evening in the park round the house; but just how, there seemed to be no exact knowledge; only that there was an impression that she had been kicked by a horse. She was dead, when found.

“Now, you see, all of these deaths might be attributed in a way — even the suicides — to natural causes, I mean, as distinct from supernatural. You see? Yet, in every case, the maidens had undoubtedly suffered some extraordinary and terrifying experiences during their various courtships, for in all of the records there was mention either of the neighing of an unseen horse, or of the sounds of an invisible horse galloping, as well as many other peculiar and quite inexplicable manifestations. You begin to understand now, I think, just how extraordinary a business it was that I was asked to look into.

“I gathered from the records that the haunting of the girls was so constant and horrible that two of the girls’ lovers fairly ran away from their lady-loves. And I think it was this, more than anything else, that made me feel that there had been something more in it, than a mere succession of uncomfortable coincidences.

“I got hold of these facts, before I had been many hours in the house; and after this I went pretty carefully into the details of the things that happened on the night of Miss Hisgins’ engagement to Beaumont. It seems that as the two of them were going through the big lower corridor, just after dusk and before the lamps had been lighted, there had been a sudden, horrible neighing in the corridor, close to them. Immediately afterward, Beaumont received a tremendous blow or kick, which broke his right forearm. Then the rest of the family came running, to know what was wrong, and the servants. Lights were brought, and the corridor and, afterwards, the whole house searched; but nothing unusual was found.

“You can imagine the excitement in the house, and the half-incredulous, half-believing talk about the old legend. Later on, in the middle of the night, the old Captain was awakened by the sound of a great horse galloping round and round the house.

“Several times after this, both Beaumont and the girl said that they had heard the sounds of hoofs near to them, after dusk, in several of the rooms and corridors.

“Three nights later, Beaumont was awakened by a strange neighing in the night-time, seeming to come from the direction of his sweetheart’s bedroom. He ran hurriedly for her father, and the two of them raced to her room. They found her awake, and ill with sheer terror, having been awakened by the neighing, seemingly close to her bed.

“The night before I arrived, there had been a fresh happening, and they were all in a frightfully nervy state, as you can imagine.

“I spent most of the first day, as I have hinted, in getting hold of details; but after dinner, I slacked off, and played billiards all the evening with Beaumont and Miss Hisgins. We stopped about ten o’clock, and had coffee, and I got Beaumont to give me full particulars about the thing that happened the night before.

“He and Miss Hisgins had been sitting quietly in her aunt’s boudoir, whilst the old lady chaperoned them, behind a book. It was growing dusk, and the lamp was at her end of the table. The rest of the house was not yet lit, as the evening had come earlier than usual.

“Well, it seems that the door into the hall was open, and suddenly the girl said: ‘Sh’sh! what’s that?’

“They both listened, and then Beaumont heard it — the sound of a horse, outside the front door.

“‘Your father?’ he suggested; but she reminded him that her father was not riding.

“Of course, they were both ready to feel queer, as you can suppose; but Beaumont made an effort to shake this off, and went into the hall to see whether anyone was at the entrance. It was pretty dark in the hall, and he could see the glass panels of the inner draught-door, clear-cut in the darkness of the hall. He walked over to the glass, and looked through into the drive beyond; but there was nothing in sight.

“He felt nervous and puzzled, and opened the inner door and went out on to the carriage-circle. Almost directly afterward, the great hall door swung to with a crash behind him. He told me that he had a sudden awful feeling of having been trapped in some way — that is how he put it. He whirled round, and gripped the door handle; but something seemed to be holding it with a vast grip on the other side. Then, before it could be fixed in his mind that this was so, he was able to turn the handle, and open the door.

“He paused a moment in the doorway, and peered into the hall; for he had hardly steadied his mind sufficiently to know whether he was really frightened or not. Then he heard his sweetheart blow him a kiss out of the greyness of the big, unlit hall, and he knew that she had followed him, from the boudoir. He blew her a kiss back, and stepped inside the doorway, meaning to go to her. And then, suddenly, in a flash of sickening knowledge, he knew that it was not his sweetheart who had blown him that kiss. He knew that something was trying to tempt him alone into the darkness, and that the girl had never left the boudoir. He jumped back, and in the same instant of time, he heard the kiss again, nearer to him. He called out at the top of his voice:—

‘Mary, stay in the boudoir. Don’t move out of the boudoir until I come to you.’ He heard her call something in reply, from the boudoir, and then he had struck a clump of a dozen, or so, matches, and was holding them above his head, and looking round the hall. There was no one in it; but even as the matches burned out, there came the sounds of a great horse galloping down the empty drive.

‘Now, you see, both he and the girl had heard the sounds of the horse galloping; but when I questioned more closely, I found that the aunt had heard nothing; though, it is true, she is a bit deaf, and she was further back in the room. Of course, both he and Miss Hisgins had been in an extremely nervous state, and ready to hear anything. The door might have been slammed by a sudden puff of wind, owing to some inner door being opened; and as for the grip on the handle, that may have been nothing more than the sneck catching.

‘With regard to the kisses and the sounds of the horse galloping, I pointed out that these might have seemed ordinary enough sounds, if they had been only cool enough to reason. As I told him, and as he knew, the sounds of a horse galloping, carry a long way on the wind; so that what he had heard might have been nothing more than a horse being ridden, some distance away. And as for the kiss, plenty of quiet noises — the rustle of a paper or a leaf — have a somewhat similar sound, especially if one is in an overstrung condition, and imagining things.

‘I was preaching this little sermon on common sense, versus hysteria, as we put out the lights and left the billiard room. But neither Beaumont nor Miss Hisgins would agree that there had been any fancy on their parts.

‘We had come out of the billiard room, by this, and were going along the passage; and I was still doing my best to make both of them see the ordinary, commonplace possibilities of the happening, when what killed my pig, as the saying goes, was the sound of a hoof in the dark billiard room, we had just left.

‘I felt the ‘creep‘ come on me in a flash, up my spine and over the back of my head. Miss Hisgins whooped like a child with whooping-cough, and ran up the passage, giving little gasping screams. Beaumont, however, ripped round on his heels, and jumped back a couple of yards. I gave back too, a bit, as you can understand.

‘‘There it is,’ he said, in a low, breathless voice. ‘Perhaps you’ll believe now.’

‘‘There’s certainly something,’ I whispered back, and never taking my gaze off the closed door of the billiard room.

‘‘H’sh!’ he muttered, ‘There it is again.’

‘There was a sound like a great horse pacing round and round the billiard room, with slow, deliberate steps. A horrible cold fright took me, so that it seemed impossible to take a full breath, you know the feeling; and then I know we must have walked backwards, for we found ourselves suddenly at the opening of the long passage.

‘We stopped there, and listened. The sounds went on steadily with a horrible sort of deliberateness; as if the brute were taking a sort of malicious gusto in walking about all over the room in which we had just been. Do you understand just what I mean?

‘Then there was a pause, and a long time of absolute quiet, except for an excited whispering from some of the people down in the big hall. The sound came plainly up the wide stair-way. I fancy they were gathered round Miss Hisgins, with some notion of protecting her.

“I should think Beaumont and I stood there, at the end of the passage, for about five minutes, listening for any noise in the billiard-room. Then I realised what a horrible funk I was in, and I said to him:— ‘I’m going to see what’s there.’

“So’m I,’ he answered. He was pretty white; but he had heaps of pluck. I told him to wait one instant, and I made a dash into my bedroom, and got my camera and flashlight. I slipped my revolver into my right-hand pocket and a knuckle-duster over my left fist, where it was ready, and yet would not stop me from being able to work my flashlight.

“Then I ran back to Beaumont. He held out his right hand, to show me that he had his pistol, and I nodded; but whispered to him not to be too quick to shoot, as there might be some silly practical joking at work, after all. He had got a lamp from a bracket in the upper hall, which he was holding in the crook of his damaged arm, so that we had a good light. Then we went down the passage, towards the billiard room; and you can imagine that we were a pretty nervous couple.

“All this time, there had not been a sound; but abruptly when we were within perhaps a couple of yards of the door, we heard the sudden clumping of a hoof on the solid parquet-floor of the billiard room. In the instant afterward, it seemed to me that the whole place shook beneath the ponderous hoof-falls of some huge thing, coming towards the door. Both Beaumont and I gave back a pace or two, and then realised, and hung on to our courage, as you might say, and waited. The great tread came right up to the door and then stopped, and there was an instant of absolute silence, except that, so far as I was concerned, the pulse in my throat and temples almost deafened me.

“I daresay we waited quite half a minute, and then came the further restless clumping of a great hoof. Immediately afterward, the sounds came right on, as if some invisible thing passed through the closed door, and the passage, and I know that I spread myself stiff against the wall. The clungk, clunck, clungk, clunck, of the great hoof-falls passed right between us, and slowly and with deadly deliberateness, down the passage. I heard them through a haze of blood-beats in my ears and temples, and my body extraordinarily rigid and pringling and breathless. I stood for a little time like this, my head turned, so that I should see up the passage. I was conscious only that there was a hideous danger abroad. Do you understand?

“And then, suddenly, my pluck came back to me. I was aware that the noise of the hoof-beats sounded near the other end of the passage. I twisted quickly, and got my camera to bear, and snapped the flashlight. Immediately afterward, Beaumont let fly a storm of shots down the passage, and began to run, shouting:— ‘It’s after Mary. Run! Run!’

“He rushed down the passage, and I after him. We came out on the main landing and heard the sound of a hoof on the stairs, and after that, nothing. And from thence, onwards, nothing.

“Down, below us in the big hall, I could see a number of the household round Miss Hisgins, who seemed to have fainted; and there were several of the servants clumped together a little way off, staring up at the main landing, and no one saying a single word. And about some twenty steps up the stairs was old Captain Hisgins with a drawn sword in his hand, where he had halted just below the last hoof-sound. I think I never saw anything finer than the old man standing there between his daughter and that infernal thing.

“I daresay you can understand the queer feeling of horror I had at passing that place on the stairs where the sounds had ceased. It was as if the monster were still standing there, invisible. And the peculiar thing was that we never heard another sound of the hoof, either up or down the stairs.

“After they had taken Miss Hisgins to her room, I sent word that I should follow so soon as they were ready for me. And, presently, when a message came to tell me that I could come any time, I asked her father to give me a hand with my instrument box, and between us we carried it into the girl’s bedroom. I had the bed pulled well out into the middle of the room; after which I erected the Electric Pentacle round the bed. Then I directed that lamps should be placed round the room, but that on no account must any light be made within the Pentacle, neither must anyone pass in or out. The girl’s mother I had placed within the Pentacle and directed that her maid should sit without, ready to carry any message, so as to make sure that Mrs. Hisgins did not have to leave the Pentacle. I suggested also, that the girl’s father should stay the night in the room, and that he had better be armed.

“When I left the room, I found Beaumont waiting outside the door, in a miserable state of anxiety. I told him what I had done, and explained to him that Miss Hisgins was probably perfectly safe within the ‘protection’; but that, in addition to her father remaining the night in the room, I intended to stand guard at the door. I told him that I should like him to keep me company, for I knew that he could never sleep, and I should not be sorry to have a companion. Also, I wanted to have him under my own observation; for there was no doubt but that he was actually in greater danger than the girl. At least, that was my opinion; and is still, as I think you will agree later.

“I asked him whether he would object to my drawing a pentacle round him, for the night, and got him to agree; but I saw that he did not know whether to be superstitious about it, or to regard it more as a piece of foolish mumming; but he took it seriously enough, when I gave him some particulars about the ‘Black Veil’ case, when young Aster died. You remember, he said it was a piece of silly superstition, and stayed outside. Poor devil!

“As it chanced, the night passed quietly enough, until a little while before dawn when we both heard the sounds of a great horse galloping round and round the house, just as old Captain Hisgins had described it. You can imagine how queer it made me feel, and directly afterward, I heard someone stir within the room. I knocked at the door; for I was uneasy, and the Captain came. I asked whether everything was right; to which he replied yes, and immediately asked me whether I had heard the sounds of the galloping; so that I knew he had heard them also. I suggested that it might be well to leave the bedroom door open a little, until the dawn came in, as there was certainly something abroad. This was done, and he went back into the room, to be near his wife and daughter.

“I had better say here, that I was doubtful whether there was any value in the Defence about Miss Hisgins; for what I term the ‘personal-sounds’ of the manifestation were so extraordinarily material, that I was inclined to parallel the case with that of Hartford’s, where the hand of the child kept materialising within the pentacle, and patting the floor. As you will remember, that was a hideous business.

“Yet, as it chanced, nothing further happened; and so soon as daylight had fully come, we all went off to bed.

“Beaumont knocked me up about midday, and I went down and made breakfast into lunch. Miss Hisgins was there, and seemed in very fair spirits, considering. She told me that I had made her feel almost safe, for the first time for days. She told me also that her cousin, Harry Parsket, was coming down from London, and she knew that he would do anything to help fight the ghost. And after that she and Beaumont went out into the grounds, to have a little time together.

“I had a walk in the grounds myself, and went round the house, but saw no traces of hoof-marks; and after that, I spent the rest of the day, making an examination of the house; but found nothing.

“I made an end of my search, before dark, and went to my room to dress for dinner. When I got down, the cousin had just arrived; and I found him one of the nicest men I have met for a long time. A chap with a tremendous amount of pluck, and the particular kind of man I like to have with me, in a bad case like the one I was on.

“I could see that what puzzled him most was our belief in the genuineness of the haunting; and I found myself almost wanting something to happen, just to show him how true it was. As it chanced, something did happen, with a vengeance.

“Beaumont and Miss Hisgins had gone out for a stroll in the dusk, and Captain Hisgins asked me to come into his study for a short chat whilst Parsket went upstairs with his traps, for he had no man with him.

“I had a long conversation with the old Captain, in which I pointed out that the ‘haunting’ had evidently no particular connection with the house, but only with the girl herself, and that the sooner she was married, the better, as it would give Beaumont a right to be with her at all times; and further than this, it might be that the manifestations would cease, if the marriage were actually performed. The old man nodded agreement to this, especially to the first part, and reminded me that three of the girls who were said to have been ‘haunted’ had been sent away from home, and met their deaths whilst away. And then in the midst of our talk there came a pretty frightening interruption; for all at once the old butler rushed into the room, most extraordinarily pale:—

“‘Miss Mary, sir! Miss Mary, sir!’ he gasped out, using the old name. ‘She’s screaming... out in the park, sir! And they say they can hear the Horse—’

“The Captain made one dive for a rack of arms, and snatched down his old sword, and ran out, drawing it as he ran. I dashed out and up the stairs, snatched my camera-flashlight and a heavy revolver, gave one yell at Parsket’s door:— ‘The Horse!’ and was down and into the grounds.

“Out in the darkness there was a confused shouting, and I caught the sounds of shooting, away out among the scattered trees. And then, from a patch of blackness to my left, there burst suddenly an infernal gobbling sort of neighing. Instantly I whipped round and snapped off the flashlight. The great glare of the light blazed out momentarily, showing me the leaves of a big tree close at hand, quivering in the night breeze; but there had been nothing else; and then the ten-fold blackness came down upon me, and I heard Parsket shouting a little way back to know whether I had seen anything.

“The next instant he was beside me, and I felt safer for his company; for there was some incredible thing near to us, and I was momentarily blind, because of the brightness of the flashlight. ‘What was it? What was it?’ he kept repeating in an excited voice. And all the time I was staring into the darkness and answering,

mechanically, ‘I don’t know. I don’t know.’ There was a burst of shouting somewhere ahead, and then a shot. We ran towards the sounds, yelling to the people not to shoot; for in the darkness and panic there was this danger also. Then there came two of the gamekeepers, racing hard up the drive, with lanterns and their guns; and immediately afterwards a row of lights dancing towards us from the house, carried by some of the men-servants.

“As the lights came up, I saw we had come close to Beaumont. He was standing over Miss Hisgins, and he had his revolver in his right hand. Then I saw his face, and there was a great wound across his forehead. By him was the Captain, turning his naked sword this way and that, and peering into the darkness; and a little behind him stood the old butler, a battle-axe from one of the arm-stands in the hall, in his hands. Yet there was nothing strange to be seen anywhere.

“We got the girl into the house, and left her with her mother and Beaumont, whilst a groom rode for a doctor. And then the rest of us, with four other keepers, all armed with guns and carrying lanterns, searched round the home-park. But we found nothing.

“When we got back, we found that the doctor had been. He had bound up Beaumont’s wound, which, luckily, was not deep, and ordered Miss Hisgins straight to bed. I went upstairs with the Captain and found Beaumont on guard outside the girl’s door. I asked him how he felt; and then, so soon as they were ready for us, Captain Hisgins and I went into the bedroom and fixed the Pentacle again round the bed. They had already got lamps about the room; and after I had set the same order of watching, as on the previous night, I joined Beaumont, outside of the door.

“Parsket had come up while I had been in the bedroom, and between us we got some idea from Beaumont as to what had happened out in the park. It seems that they were coming home after their stroll, from the direction of the West Lodge; when, suddenly, Miss Hisgins said, ‘Hush!’ and came to a standstill. He stopped, and listened; but heard nothing for a little. Then he caught it — the sound of a horse, seemingly a long way off, galloping towards them over the grass. He told the girl that it was nothing, and started to hurry her towards the house, but she was not deceived, of course. In less than a minute, they heard it quite close to them in the dark, and they began to run. Then Miss Hisgins caught her foot, and fell. She began to scream, and that is what the butler heard. As Beaumont lifted the girl, he heard the hoofs come thudding right at him. He stood over her, and fired all five chambers of his revolver at the sounds. He told us that he was sure he saw something that looked like an enormous horse’s head, right upon him, in the light of the last flash of his pistol. Immediately afterwards, he was struck a tremendous blow, which knocked him down; and then the Captain and the butler came running up, shouting. The rest, of course, we knew.

“About ten o’clock, the butler brought us up a tray; for which I was very glad; as the night before I had got rather hungry. I warned Beaumont, however, to be very particular not to drink any spirits, and I also made him give me his pipe and matches. At midnight, I drew a pentacle round him, and Parsket and I sat one on each side of him; but outside of the pentacle; for I had no fear that there would be any manifestation made against anyone, except Beaumont or Miss Hisgins.

“After that, we kept pretty quiet. The passage was lit by a big lamp at each end; so that we had plenty of light; and we were all armed. Beaumont and I with revolvers,

and Parsket with a shot-gun. In addition to my weapon, I had my camera and flashlight.

“Now and again we talked in whispers; and twice the Captain came out of the bedroom to have a word with us. About half past one, we had all grown very silent; and suddenly, about twenty minutes later, I held up my hand, silently; for there seemed to me to be a sound of galloping, out in the night. I knocked on the bedroom door, for the Captain to open it, and when he came, I whispered to him that we thought we heard the Horse. For some time we stayed, listening, and both Parsket and the Captain thought they heard it; but now I was not so sure, neither was Beaumont. Yet afterwards, I thought I heard it again.

“I told Captain Hisgins I thought he had better go back into the bedroom, and leave the door a little open, and this he did. But from that time onward, we heard nothing; and presently the dawn came in, and we all went very thankfully to bed.

“When I was called at lunch-time, I had a little surprise; for Captain Hisgins told me that they had held a family council, and had decided to take my advice, and have the marriage without a day’s more delay than possible. Beaumont was already on his way to London to get a special licence, and they hoped to have the wedding the next day.

“This pleased me; for it seemed the sanest thing to be done, in the extraordinary circumstances; and meanwhile I should continue my investigations; but until the marriage was accomplished, my chief thought was to keep Miss Hisgins near to me.

“After lunch, I thought I would take a few experimental photographs of Miss Hisgins and her surroundings. Sometimes the camera sees things that would seem very strange to normal human eyesight. You see what I mean? With this intention, and partly to make an excuse to keep her in my company as much as possible, I asked Miss Hisgins to join me in my experiments. She seemed glad to do this, and I spent several hours with her, wandering all over the house, from room to room; and whenever the impulse came, I took a flashlight of her and the room or corridor in which we chanced to be at the moment.

“After we had gone right through the house in this fashion, I asked her whether she felt sufficiently brave to repeat the experiments in the cellars. She said, yes; and so I rooted out Captain Hisgins and Parsket; for I was not going to take her down even into what you might call artificial darkness, without help and companionship at hand.

“When we were ready, we went down into the wine cellar, Captain Hisgins carrying a shot-gun, and Parsket a specially-prepared background and a lantern. I got the girl to stand in the middle of the cellar, whilst Parsket and the Captain held out the background behind her. Then I fired off the flashlight, and we went into the next cellar, where we repeated the experiment.

“Then, in the third cellar, a tremendous, pitch-dark place, something extraordinary and horrible manifested itself. I had stationed Miss Hisgins in the centre of the place, with her father and Parsket holding the background, as before. When all was ready, and just as I pressed the trigger of the ‘flash’, there came in the cellar that dreadful, gobbling neighing, that I had heard out in the park. It seemed to come from somewhere above the girl; and in the glare of the sudden light, I saw that she was staring tensely upward at no visible thing. And then in the succeeding comparative darkness, I was shouting to the Captain and Parsket to run Miss Hisgins out into the daylight.

“This was done, instantly; and I shut and locked the door, afterwards making the First and the Eighth Signs of the Saaamaaa Ritual opposite to each post, and connecting them across the threshold with a triple line. In the meanwhile, Parsket and Captain Hisgins carried the girl to her mother, and left her there, in a half-fainting condition; whilst I stayed on guard outside of the cellar door, feeling pretty horrible, for I knew that there was some disgusting thing inside; and along with this feeling there was a sense of half-ashamedness, rather miserable you know, because I had exposed Miss Hisgins to this danger.

“I had got the Captain’s shot-gun, and when he and Parsket came down again, they were each carrying guns and lanterns. I could not possibly tell you the utter relief of spirit and body that came to me, when I heard them coming; but just try to imagine what it was like, standing outside of that cellar. Can you?

“I remember noticing, just before I went to unlock the door, how white and ghastly Parsket looked and the old Captain was grey-looking; and I wondered whether my face was like theirs. And this, you know, had its own distinct effect upon my nerves; for it seemed to bring the beastliness of the thing bash down on me in a fresh way. I know it was only sheer will power that carried me up to the door and made me turn the key.

“I paused one little moment, and then with a nervy jerk, sent the door wide open, and held my lantern over my head. Parsket and the Captain came one on each side of me, and held up their lanterns; but the place was absolutely empty. Of course, I did not trust to a casual look of this kind; but spent several hours, with the help of the two others in sounding every square foot of the floor, ceiling, and walls. Yet, in the end, I had to admit that the place itself was absolutely normal; and so in the end we came away none the wiser. But I sealed the door, and outside, opposite each door-post, I made the First and Last Signs of the Saaamaaa Ritual, joining them, as before, with a triple line. Can you imagine what it was like, searching that cellar?

“When we got upstairs, I inquired very anxiously how Miss Hisgins was, and the girl came out herself to tell me that she was all right and that I was not to trouble about her, or blame myself, as I told her I had been doing. I felt happier then, and went off to dress for dinner; and after that was done with, Parsket and I went off to one of the bathrooms to develop the negatives that I had been taking. Yet none of the plates had anything to tell me, until we came to the one that was taken in the cellar. Parsket was developing, and I had taken a batch of the fixed plates out into the lamplight to examine them.

“I had just gone carefully through the lot, when I heard a shout from Parsket, and when I ran to him, he was looking at a partly-developed negative, which he was holding up to the red lamp. It showed the girl plainly, looking upward, as I had seen her; but the thing that astonished me, was the shadow of an enormous hoof, right above her, as if it were coming down upon her out of the shadows. And, you know, I had run her bang into that danger. That was the thought that was chief in my mind.

“As soon as the developing was complete, I fixed the plate, and examined it carefully in a good light. There was no doubt about it at all; the thing above Miss Hisgins was an enormous, shadowy hoof. Yet I was no nearer to coming to any definite knowledge; and the only thing I could do was to warn Parsket to say nothing about it to the girl; for it would only increase her fright; but I showed the thing to her father, for I considered it right that he should know.

“That night, we took the same precautions for Miss Hisgins’ safety, as on the two previous nights; and Parsket kept me company; yet the dawn came in without anything unusual having happened, and I went off to bed.

“When I got down to lunch, I learnt that Beaumont had wired to say that he would be in soon after four; also that a message had been sent to the Rector. And it was generally plain that the ladies of the house were in a tremendous fluster.

“Beaumont’s train was late, and he did not get home until five, but even then the Rector had not put in an appearance; and the butler came in to say that the coachman had returned without him, as he had been called away unexpectedly. Twice more during the evening the carriage was sent down; but the clergyman had not returned; and we had to delay the marriage until the next day.

“That night, I arranged the Defence round the girl’s bed, and the Captain and his wife sat up with her, as before. Beaumont, as I expected, insisted on keeping watch with me, and he seemed in a curiously frightened mood; not for himself, you know; but for Miss Hisgins. He had a horrible feeling, he told me, that there would be a final, dreadful attempt on his sweetheart, that night. This, of course, I told him was nothing but nerves; yet, really, it made me feel very anxious; for I have seen too much, not to know that under such circumstances, a premonitory conviction of impending danger, is not necessarily to be put down entirely to nerves. In fact, Beaumont was so simply and earnestly convinced that the night would bring some extraordinary manifestation, that I got Parsket to rig up a long cord from the wire of the butler’s bell, to come along the passage handy. To the butler himself, I gave directions not to undress and to give the same order to two of the footmen. If I rang, he was to come instantly, with the footmen, carrying lanterns; and the lanterns were to be kept ready lit all night. If, for any reason, the bell did not ring, and I blew my whistle, he was to take that as a signal in the place of the bell.

“After I had arranged all these minor details, I drew a pentacle about Beaumont, and warned him very particularly to stay within it, whatever happened. And when this was done, there was nothing to do but wait, and pray that the night would go as quietly as the night before.

“We scarcely talked at all, and by about one a.m. we were all very tense and nervous; so that, at last, Parsket got up and began to walk up and down the corridor, to steady himself a bit. Presently, I slipped off my pumps, and joined him and we walked up and down, whispering occasionally, for something over an hour, until in turning I caught my foot in the bell-cord, and went down on my face; but without hurting myself or making a noise.

“When I got up, Parsket nudged me.

“‘Did you notice that the bell never rang?’ he whispered.

“‘Jove!’ I said, ‘you’re right.’

“‘Wait a minute,’ he answered. ‘I’ll bet it’s only a kink somewhere in the cord.’ He left his gun, and slipped along the passage, and taking the top lamp, tiptoed away into the house, carrying Beaumont’s revolver ready in his right hand. He was a plucky chap, as I think you will admit.

“Suddenly, Beaumont motioned to me for absolute quiet. Directly afterwards, I heard the thing for which he listened — the sound of a horse galloping, out in the night. I think that I may say, I fairly shivered. The sound died away, and left a horrible,

desolate, eerie feeling, in the air, you know. I put my hand out to the bell-cord, hoping that Parsket had got it clear. Then I waited, glancing before and behind. Perhaps two minutes passed, full of what seemed like an almost unearthly quiet. And then, suddenly, down the corridor, at the lighted end, there sounded the clumping of a great hoof; and instantly the lamp was thrown down with a tremendous crash, and we were in the dark. I tugged hard on the cord, and blew the whistle; then I raised my snap-shot, and fired the flashlight. The corridor blazed into brilliant light; but there was nothing; and then the darkness fell like thunder. I heard the Captain at the bedroom door, and shouted to him to bring out a lamp, quick; but instead, something started to kick the door, and I heard the Captain shouting within the bedroom, and then the screaming of the women. I had a sudden horrible fear that the monster had got into the bedroom; but in the same instant, from up the corridor, there came abruptly the vile, gobbling neighing that we had heard in the park and the cellar. I blew the whistle again, and groped blindly for the bell-cord, shouting to Beaumont to stay in the pentacle, whatever happened. I yelled again to the Captain to bring out a lamp, and there came a smashing sound against the bedroom door. Then I had my matches in my hand, to get some light before that incredible, unseen Monster was upon us.

“The match scraped on the box, and flared up, dully; and in the same instant, I heard a faint sound behind me. I whipped round, in a kind of mad terror, and saw something, in the light of the match — a monstrous horse-head, close to Beaumont.

“‘Look out, Beaumont!’ I shouted in a sort of scream. ‘It’s behind you!’

“The match went out, abruptly, and instantly there came the huge bang of Parsket’s double-barrel (both barrels at once), fired (evidently single-handed by Beaumont) close to my ear, as it seemed. I caught a momentary glimpse of the great head, in the flash, and of an enormous hoof amid the belch of fire and smoke, seeming to be descending upon Beaumont. In the same instant, I fired three chambers of my revolver. There was the sound of a dull blow, and then that horrible, gobbling neigh, broke out close to me. I fired twice at the sound. Immediately afterwards, something struck me, and I was knocked backwards. I got on to my knees, and shouted for help, at the top of my voice. I heard the women screaming behind the closed door of the bedroom, and was dully aware that the door was being smashed from the inside; and directly afterwards I knew that Beaumont was struggling with some hideous thing, near to me. For an instant, I held back, stupidly, paralysed with funk; and then, blindly, and in a sort of rigid chill of goose-flesh, I went to help him, shouting his name. I can tell you, I did not feel much of a hero. There came a little, choking scream, out of the darkness; and at that, I jumped forward into the dark. I gripped a vast, furry ear. Then something struck me another great blow, knocking me sick. I hit back, weak and blind, and gripped with my other hand at the incredible thing. Abruptly, I was dimly aware of a tremendous crash behind me, and a great burst of light. There were other lights in the passage, and a noise of feet and shouting. My hand-grips were torn from the thing they held; I shut my eyes stupidly, and heard a loud yell above me; and then a heavy blow, like a butcher chopping meat; and something fell upon me.

“I was helped to my knees by the Captain and the butler. On the floor lay an enormous horse-head, out of which protruded a man’s trunk and legs. On the wrists were fixed great hoofs. It was the monster. The Captain cut something with the sword that he held in his hand, and stooped and lifted off the mask; for that is what it was. I saw the face then of the man who had worn it. It was Parsket. He had a bad

wound across the forehead, where the Captain's sword had hit through the mask. I looked bewilderedly from him to Beaumont, who was sitting up, leaning against the wall of the corridor. Then I stared at Parsket, again.

"By Jove!" I said at last, and then I was quiet; for I was so ashamed for the man. You can understand, can't you. And he was opening his eyes. And, you know, I had grown so to like the man.

"And then, you know, just as Parsket was getting back his wits, and looking from one to the other of us, and beginning to remember, there happened a strange and incredible thing. For from the end of the corridor, there sounded, suddenly, the clamping of a great hoof. I looked that way, and then instantly at Parsket, and saw a horrible fear in his face and eyes. He wrenched himself round, weakly, and stared in mad terror up the corridor to where the sound had been; and the rest of us stared, all in a frozen group. I remember hearing vaguely, half sobs and whispers from Miss Hisgins' bedroom, all the while that I stared, frightenedly, up the corridor.

"The silence lasted several seconds; and then, abruptly, there came again the clumping of the great hoof, away up at the end of the corridor. And immediately afterward, the clungk, clunck — clungk, clunck, of mighty hoofs coming down the passage, towards us.

"Even then, you know, most of us thought it was some mechanism of Parsket's still at work; and we were in the queerest mixture of fright and doubt. I think everyone looked at Parsket. And suddenly the Captain shouted out:—

"Stop this damned fooling at once. Haven't you done enough!"

"For my part, you know, I was frightened; for I had a sense that there was something horrible and wrong. And then Parsket managed to gasp out:—

"It's not me! My God! It's not me! My God! It's not me."

"And then, you know, it seemed to come home to everyone in an instant that there was really some dreadful thing coming down the passage. There was a mad rush up the passage, and even old Captain Hisgins gave back with the butler and the footmen. Beaumont fainted outright, as I found afterwards; for he had been badly mauled. I just flattened back against the wall, kneeling, as I was, too stupid and dazed even to run. And almost in the same instant the ponderous hoof-falls sounded close to me, and seeming to shake the solid floor, as they passed. Abruptly the great sounds ceased, and I knew in a sort of sick fashion that the thing had halted opposite to the open door of the girl's bedroom. And then, you know, I was aware that Parsket was standing rocking in the doorway, with his arms spread across, so as to fill the doorway with his body. Parsket showed extraordinarily pale, and the blood was running down his face from the wound in his forehead; and then I noticed that he seemed to be looking at something in the passage with a peculiar, desperate, fixed gaze. But, there was really nothing to be seen. And suddenly the clungk, clunck — clungk, clunck, recommenced, and passed onward down the passage. And in the same moment, Parsket pitched forward out of the doorway on to his face.

"There were shouts from the huddle of men down the passage, and the two footmen and the butler simply ran, carrying their lanterns, but the Captain went against the side-wall with his back and put the lamp he was carrying over his head. The dull tread of the Horse went past him, and left him unharmed; and I heard the monstrous hoof-falls going away and away through the quiet house; and after that a dead silence.

“Then the Captain moved, and came towards us, very slow and shaky, and with an extraordinarily grey face.

“I crept towards Parsket, and the Captain came to help me. We turned him over; and, you know, I knew in a moment that he was dead; but you can imagine what a feeling it sent through me.

“I looked at the Captain and suddenly he said:

“That— That— That—, and I know that he was trying to tell me that Parsket had stood between his daughter and whatever it was that had gone down the passage. I stood up, and steadied him; though I was not very steady myself. And suddenly, his face began to work, and he went down on to his knees by Parsket and cried like some shaken child. And then, you know, I knew that the women were in the doorway of the bedroom and I turned away and left him to them, whilst I went over to Beaumont.

“That is practically the whole story; and the only thing that is left to me is to try to explain some of the puzzling parts, here and there.

“Perhaps you have seen that Parsket was in love with Miss Hisgins; and this fact is the key to a good deal that was extraordinary. He was doubtless responsible for some portions of the ‘haunting’; in fact I think for nearly everything; but, you know, I can prove nothing, and what I have to tell you is chiefly the result of deduction.

“In the first place, it is obvious that Parsket’s intention was to frighten Beaumont away; and when he found that he could not do this, I think he grew so desperate that he really intended to kill him. I hate to say this; but the facts force me to think so.

“It is quite certain that Parsket was the person who broke Beaumont’s arm. He knew all the details of the so-called ‘Horse Legend,’ and got the idea to work upon the old story, for his own end. He evidently had some method of slipping in and out of the house, probably through one of the many French windows, or possibly he had a key to one or two of the garden doors; and when he was supposed to be away, he was really coming down, on the quiet, and hiding somewhere in the neighbourhood.

“The incident of the kiss in the dark hall, I put down to sheer nervous imaginings on the part of Beaumont and Miss Hisgins; yet, I must say that the sound of the horse outside of the front door, is a little difficult to explain away. But I am still inclined to keep to my first idea on this point, that there was nothing really unnatural about it.

“The hoof-sounds in the billiard-room and down the passage, were done by Parsket, from the floor below, by pumping against the panelled ceiling with a block of wood tied to one of the window-hooks. I proved this, by an examination, which showed the dints in the woodwork.

“The sounds of the horse galloping round the house, was also done by Parsket, who must have had a horse tied up in the plantation, near by, unless, indeed, he made the sounds himself; but I do not see how he could have gone fast enough to produce the illusion, you see?

“The gobbling neighing in the park was a ventriloquial achievement on the part of Parsket; and the attack out there on Beaumont was also by him; so that when I thought he was in his bedroom, he must have been outside all the time, and joined me after I ran out of the front door. This is probable, I mean that Parsket was the cause, for if it had been something more serious, he would certainly have given up his foolishness, knowing that there was no longer any need for it. I cannot imagine how

he escaped being shot, both then, and in the last mad action, of which I have just told you. He was enormously without fear of any kind for himself, as you can see.

“The time when Parsket was with us, when we thought we heard the Horse galloping round the house, we must have been deceived. No one was very sure, except, of course, Parsket, who would naturally encourage the belief.

“The neighing in the cellar, is where I consider there came the first suspicion into Parsket’s mind that there was something more at work than his sham-haunting. The neighing was done by him, in the same way that he did it in the park; when I remember how ghastly he looked, I feel sure that the sounds must have had some infernal quality added to them, which frightened the man himself. Yet, later, he would persuade himself that he had been getting fanciful. Of course, I must not forget that the effect upon Miss Hisgins must have made him feel pretty miserable.

“Then, about the clergyman being called away, we found afterwards that it was a bogus errand, or rather, call; and it is obvious that Parsket was at the bottom of this, so as to get a few more hours in which to achieve his end; and what that was, a very little imagination will show you; for he had found that Beaumont would not be frightened away. You see what I mean?

“Then, there is no doubt at all but that Parsket left the cord to the butler’s bell in a tangle, or hitched somewhere, so as to give him an excuse to slip away naturally to clear it. This also gave him the opportunity to remove one of the passage lamps. Then he had only to smash the other, and the passage was in utter darkness, for him to make the attempt on Beaumont.

“In the same way, it was he who locked the door of the bedroom, and took the key (it was in his pocket). This prevented the Captain from bringing a light, and coming to the rescue. But Captain Hisgins broke down the door, with the heavy fender-curb; and it was his smashing the door that had sounded so confusing and frightening in the darkness of the passage.

“The photograph of the monstrous hoof above Miss Hisgins in the cellar, is one of the things that I am less sure about. It might have been faked by Parsket, whilst I was out of the room, and this would have been easy enough, to anyone who knew how. But, you know, it does not look like a fake. Yet, there is as much evidence of probability that it was faked, as against; and the thing is too vague for an examination to help to a definite decision; so that I will express no opinion, one way or the other. It is certainly a horrible photograph.

“And now I come to that last, dreadful thing. There has been no further manifestation of anything abnormal; so that there is an extraordinary uncertainty in my conclusions. If we had not heard those last sounds, and if Parsket had not shown that enormous sense of fear, the whole of this case could be explained away in the way in which I have shown. And, in fact, as you have seen, I am of the opinion that almost all of it can be cleared up; but I see no way of going past the thing we heard at the last, and the fear that Parsket showed.

“His death — No, that proves nothing. At the inquest it was described somewhat untechnically as due to heart-spasm. That is normal enough, and leaves us quite in the dark as to whether he died because he stood between the girl and some incredible monster.

“The look on Parsket’s face, and the thing he called out, when he heard the great hoof-sounds coming down the passage, seem to show that he had the sudden

realisation of what before then may have been nothing more than a horrible suspicion. And his fear and appreciation of some tremendous danger approaching was probably more keenly real even than mine. And then he did the one fine, great thing!”

“And the cause?” I said. “What caused it?”

Carnacki shook his head.

“God knows,” he answered, with a peculiar sincere reverence. “If that thing was what it seemed to be, one might suggest an explanation, which would not offend one’s reason, but which may be utterly wrong. Yet I have thought, though it would take a long lecture on Thought Induction to get you to appreciate my reasons, that Parsket had produced what I might term a kind of ‘induced haunting,’ a kind of induced simulation of his mental conceptions, due to his desperate thoughts and broodings. It is impossible to make it clearer, in a few words.”

“But the old story!” I said. “Why may not there have been something in that?”

“There may have been something in it,” said Carnacki, quietly. “But I do not think it had anything to do with this. I have not clearly thought out my reasons, yet; but later I may be able to tell you why I think so.”

“And the marriage? And the cellar — was there anything found there?” asked Taylor.

“Yes, the marriage was performed that day, in spite of the tragedy,” Carnacki told us. “It was the wisest thing to do — considering the things that I cannot explain. Yes, I had the floor of that big cellar up; for I had a feeling I might find something there to give me some light. But there was nothing.

“You know, the whole thing is tremendous and extraordinary. I shall never forget the look on Parsket’s face. And afterwards the disgusting sounds of those great hoofs going away through the quiet house.”

Carnacki stood up:

“Out you go!” he said in friendly fashion, using the recognised formula.

And we went presently out into the quiet of the Embankment, and so to our homes.

The Searcher of the End House

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It was still evening, as I remember, and the four of us, Jessop, Arkright, Taylor and I, looked disappointedly at Carnacki where he sat silent in his great chair.

We had come in response to the usual card of invitation which — as you know — we have come to consider as a sure prelude to a good story; and now, after telling us the short incident of the Three Straw Platters, he had lapsed into a contented silence, and the night not half gone, as I have hinted.

However, as it chanced, some pitying fate jogged Carnacki's elbow, or his memory, and he began again in his queer level way:—

“This ‘Straw Platters’ business reminds me of the ‘Searcher’ case, which I have sometimes thought might interest you. It was some time ago, in fact a deuce of a long time ago, that the thing happened; and my experience of what I might term ‘curious’ things was very small at that time.

“I was living with my Mother, when it occurred, in a small house just outside of Appledorn, on the South Coast. The house was the last of a row of detached cottages-villas, each house standing in its own garden; and very dainty little places they were, very old, and most of them smothered in roses; and all with those quaint old leaded windows, and doors of genuine oak. You must just try to picture them for the sake of their complete niceness.

“Now I must remind you at the beginning, that my Mother and I had lived in that little house for two years; and in the whole of that time there had not been a single peculiar happening to worry us.

“And then, something happened.

“It was about two o'clock one morning, as I was finishing some letters, that I heard the door of my Mother's bedroom open, and she came to the top of the stairs, and knocked on the banisters.

“‘All right, dear,’ I called; for I supposed that she was merely reminding me that I should have been in bed long ago; then I heard her go back to her room, and I hurried my work, for fear that she should lie awake, until she had heard me safe up to my room.

“When I was finished, I lit my candle, put out the lamp, and went upstairs. As I came opposite to the door of my Mother's room, I saw that it was open and called goodnight to her, very softly, and asked whether I should close the door. As there was no answer, I knew that she had dropped off to sleep again, and I closed the door very gently, and turned into my room, just across the passage. As I did so, I experienced a momentary, half-aware sense of a faint, peculiar, disagreeable odour in the passage; but it was not until the following night that I realised that I had noticed a smell that offended me. You follow me? I mean, it is so often like that — one suddenly knows about a thing that really recorded itself on one's consciousness, perhaps a year before.

“The next morning at breakfast, I mentioned casually to my Mother that she had ‘dropped-off,’ and that I had shut her door for her. To my surprise, she assured me

that she had never been out of her room. I reminded her about the two raps that she had given upon the banister; but she was still certain that I must be mistaken; and in the end I teased her, saying she had got so accustomed to my bad habit of sitting up late, that she had come to call me in her sleep. Of course, she denied this, and I let the matter drop; but I was more than a little puzzled, and did not know whether to believe my own explanation, or to take the mother's, which was to put the noises down to the mice, and the open door to the fact that she couldn't have properly latched it when she went to bed. I suppose, away in the subconscious part of me, I had a stirring of less reasonable thoughts; but certainly, I had no real uneasiness at that time.

"The next night there came a further development. About two-thirty a.m., I heard my Mother's door open, just as on the previous night, and immediately afterward she rapped sharply, on the banister, as it seemed to me. I stopped my work and called up to her that I would not be long. As she made no reply, and I did not hear her go back to bed, I had a quick sense of wonder whether she might not be doing it in her sleep, after all, just as I had said.

"With the thought, I stood up, and taking the lamp from the table, began to go towards the door, which was open into the passage. It was then I got a sudden nasty sort of thrill; for it came to me, all at once, that my Mother never knocked, when I sat up too late; she always called. You will understand I was not really frightened in any way; only vaguely uneasy, and pretty sure that she must really be doing the thing in her sleep.

"I went quickly up the stairs, and when I had come to the top, my Mother was not there; but her door was open. I had a bewildered sense though believing she must have gone quietly back to bed, without my hearing her. I entered her room and found her sleeping quietly and naturally; for the vague sense of trouble in me was sufficiently strong to make me go over to look at her.

"When I was sure that she was perfectly right in every way, I was still a little bothered; but much more inclined to think my suspicion correct and that she had got quietly back into bed in her sleep, without knowing what she had been doing. This was the most reasonable thing to think, as you must see.

"And then it came to me, suddenly, that vague, queer, mildewy smell in the room; and it was in that instant I became aware that I had smelt the same strange, uncertain smell the night before in the passage.

"I was definitely uneasy now, and began to search my Mother's room, though with no aim or clear thought of anything, except to assure myself that there was nothing in the room. All the time, you know, I never expected really to find anything; only my uneasiness had to be reassured.

"In the middle of my search my Mother woke up, and of course I had to explain. I told her about her door opening, and the knocks on the banister, and that I had come up and found her asleep. I said nothing about the smell, which was not very distinct; but told her that the thing happening twice had made me a bit nervous, and possibly fanciful, and I thought I would take a look round, just to feel satisfied.

"I have thought since then that the reason I made no mention of the smell, was not only that I did not want to frighten my Mother, for I was scarcely that way myself; but because I had only a vague half-knowledge that I associated the smell with fancies too indefinite and peculiar to bear talking about. You will understand that I

am able now to analyse and put the thing into words; but then I did not even know my chief reason for saying nothing; let alone appreciate its possible significance.

“It was my Mother, after all, who put part of my vague sensations into words:—

“‘What a disagreeable smell!’ she exclaimed, and was silent a moment, looking at me. Then:— ‘You feel that there’s something wrong?’ still looking at me, very quietly but with a little, nervous note of questioning expectancy.

“‘I don’t know,’ I said. ‘I can’t understand it, unless you’ve really been walking about in your sleep.’

“‘The smell,’ she said.

“‘Yes,’ I replied. ‘That’s what puzzles me too. I’ll have a walk through the house; but I don’t suppose it’s anything.’

“I lit her candle, and taking the lamp, I went through the two other bedrooms, and afterwards all over the house, including the three underground cellars, which was a little trying to the nerves, seeing that I was more nervous than I would admit.

“Then I went back to my Mother and told her that there was really nothing to bother about; and, you know, in the end, we talked ourselves into believing that it was nothing. My Mother would not agree that she might have been sleep-walking; but she was ready to put the door opening down to the fault of the latch, which certainly snicked very lightly. As for the knocks, they might be the old warped woodwork of the house cracking a bit, or a mouse rattling a piece of loose plaster. The smell was more difficult to explain; but finally we agreed that it might easily be the queer night-smell of the moist earth, coming in through the window of my Mother’s room, from the back garden, or — for that matter — from the little church-yard beyond the big wall at the bottom of the garden.

“And so we quietened down, and finally I went to bed, and to sleep.

“I think this is certainly a good lesson on the way in which we humans can delude ourselves; for there was not one of these explanations that my reason could really accept. Try to imagine yourselves in the same circumstances, and you will see how absurd our attempts to explain the happenings really were.

“In the morning, when I came down to breakfast, we talked it all over again, and whilst we agreed that it was strange, we also agreed that we had begun to imagine queer things in the backs of our minds, which now we felt half ashamed to admit. This is very strange when you come to look into it; but very human.

“And then that night again my Mother’s door was slammed once more just after midnight. I caught up the lamp, and when I reached her door, I found it shut. I opened it quickly and went in, to find my Mother lying with her eyes open, and rather nervous; having been waked by the bang of the door. But what upset me more than anything, was the fact that there was a disgusting smell in the passage and in her room.

“Whilst I was asking her whether she was all right, a door slammed twice downstairs; and you can imagine how it made me feel. My Mother and I looked at one another; and then I lit her candle, and taking the poker from the fender, went downstairs with the lamp, beginning to feel really nervous. The cumulative effect of so many queer happenings was getting hold of me; and all the apparently reasonable explanations seemed futile.

“The horrible smell seemed to be very strong in the downstairs passage; also in the front room and the cellars; but chiefly in the passage. I made a very thorough search of the house, and when I had finished, I knew that all the lower windows and doors were properly shut and fastened, and that there was no living thing in the house, beyond our two selves. Then I went upstairs again to my Mother’s room, and we talked the thing over for an hour or more, and in the end came to the conclusion that we might, after all, be reading too much into a number of little things; but, you know, inside of us, we did not believe this.

“Later, when we had talked ourselves into a more comfortable state of mind, I said good night, and went off to bed; and presently managed to get to sleep.

“In the early hours of the morning, whilst it was still dark, I was waked by a loud noise. I sat up in bed, and listened. And from downstairs, I heard:— bang, bang, bang, one door after another being slammed; at least, that is the impression the sounds gave me.

“I jumped out of bed, with the tingle and shiver of sudden fright on me; and at the same moment, as I lit my candle, my door was pushed slowly open; I had left it unlatched, so as not to feel that my Mother was quite shut off from me.

“‘Who’s there?’ I shouted out, in a voice about twice as deep as my natural one, and with a queer breathlessness, that sudden fright so often gives one. ‘Who’s there?’

“Then I heard my Mother saying:—

“‘It’s me, Thomas. Whatever is happening downstairs?’

“She was in the room by this, and I saw that she had her bedroom poker in one hand, and her candle in the other. I could have smiled at her, if it had not been for the extraordinary sounds downstairs.

“I got into my slippers, and reached down an old sword-bayonet from the wall; then I picked up my candle, and begged my Mother not to come; but I knew it would be little use, if she had made up her mind; and she had, with the result that she acted as a sort of rearguard for me, during our search. I know, in some ways, I was very glad to have her with me, as you will understand.

“By this time, the door-slamming had ceased, and there seemed, probably because of the contrast, to be an appalling silence in the house. However, I led the way, holding my candle high, and keeping the sword-bayonet very handy. Downstairs we found all the doors wide open; although the outer doors and the windows were closed all right. I began to wonder whether the noises had been made by the doors after all. Of one thing only we were sure, and that was, there was no living thing in the house, besides ourselves, while everywhere throughout the house, there was the taint of that disgusting odour.

“Of course it was absurd to try to make-believe any longer. There was something strange about the house; and as soon as it was daylight, I set my Mother to packing; and soon after breakfast I saw her off by train.

“Then I set to work to try to clear up the mystery. I went first to the landlord, and told him all the circumstances. From him, I found that twelve or fifteen years back, the house had got rather a curious name from three or four tenants; with the result that it had remained empty for a long while; in the end he had let it at a low rent to a Captain Tobias, on the one condition that he should hold his tongue, if he saw anything peculiar. The landlord’s idea — as he told me frankly — was to free the

house from these tales of ‘something queer,’ by keeping a tenant in it, and then to sell it for the best price he could get.

“However, when Captain Tobias left, after a ten years’ tenancy, there was no longer any ‘talk’ about the house; so when I offered to take it on a five years’ lease, he had jumped at the offer. This was the whole story; so he gave me to understand. When I pressed him for details of the supposed peculiar happenings in the house, all those years back, he said the tenants had talked about a woman who always moved about the house at night. Some tenants never saw anything; but others would not stay out the first month’s tenancy.

“One thing the landlord was particular to point out, that no tenant had ever complained about knockings, or doors slamming. As for the smell, he seemed positively indignant about it; but why, I don’t suppose he knew himself, except that he probably had some vague feeling that it was an indirect accusation on my part that the drains were not right.

“In the end, I suggested he should come down and spend the night with me. He agreed at once, especially as I told him I intended to keep the whole business quiet, and try to get to the bottom of the curious affair; for he was anxious to keep the rumour of the haunting from getting about.

“About three o’clock that afternoon, he came down, and we made a thorough search of the house, which, however, revealed nothing unusual. Afterwards, the landlord made one or two tests, which showed him that the drainage was in perfect order; after that we made our preparations for sitting up all night.

“First, we borrowed two policemen’s dark lanterns from the station near by, where the superintendent and I were friendly; and as soon as it was really dusk, the landlord went up to his house for his gun. I had the sword-bayonet I have told you about; and when the landlord got back, we sat talking in my study until nearly midnight.

“Then we lit the lanterns and went upstairs. We placed the lanterns, gun and bayonet handy on the table; then I shut and sealed the bedroom doors; afterwards we took our seats, and turned off the lights.

“From then, until two o’clock, nothing happened; but a little after two, as I found by holding my watch near to the faint glow of the closed lanterns, I had a time of quite extraordinary nervousness; and I bent towards the landlord, and whispered to him that I had a queer feeling that something was about to happen, and to be ready with his lantern; at the same time I reached out towards mine. In the very instant I made this movement, the darkness which filled the passage seemed to become suddenly of a dull violet colour; not, as if a light had been shone; but as if the natural blackness of the night had changed colour. And then, coming through this violet night, through this violet-coloured gloom, came a little naked Child, running. In an extraordinary way, the Child seemed not to be distinct from the surrounding gloom; but almost as if it were a concentration of that extraordinary atmosphere; as if that gloomy colour which had changed the night, came from the child. It seems impossible to make clear to you; but try to understand it.

“The Child went past me, running, with the natural movement of the legs of a chubby human child, but in an absolute and inconceivable silence. It was a very small Child, and must have passed under the table; but I saw the Child through the table, as if it had been only a slightly darker shadow than the coloured gloom. In the same instant,

I saw that a fluctuating shimmer of violet light outlined the metal of the gun-barrels and the blade of the sword-bayonet, making them seem like faint shapes of glimmering light, floating unsupported where the table-top should have shown solid.

“Now, curiously, as I saw these things, I was subconsciously aware that I heard the anxious breathing of the landlord, quite clear and laboured, close to my elbow, where he waited nervously, with his hands on the lantern. I realised in that moment that he saw nothing; but waited in the darkness for my warning to come true.

“Even as I took heed of these minor things, I saw the Child jump to one side, and hide behind some half-seen object, that was certainly nothing belonging to the passage. I stared, intently, with a most extraordinary thrill of expectant wonder, with fright making goose-flesh of my back. And even as I stared, I solved for myself the less important problem of what the two black clouds were that hung over a part of the table. I think it is very curious and interesting, that double working of the mind, often so much more apparent during times of stress. The two clouds came from two faintly shining shapes, which I knew must be the metal of the lanterns; and the things that looked black to the sight with which I was then seeing, could be nothing else but what to normal human sight is known as light. This phenomenon I have always remembered. I have twice seen a somewhat similar thing; in the ‘Dark Light’ case and in that trouble of Maaetheson’s, which you know about.

“Even as I understood this matter of the lights, I was looking to my left, to understand why the Child was hiding. And suddenly, I heard the landlord shout out:— ‘The Woman!’ But I saw nothing. I had a disagreeable sense that something repugnant was near me, and I was aware in the same moment that the landlord was gripping my arm in a hard, frightened grip. Then I was looking back to where the Child had hidden. I saw the Child peeping out from behind its hiding-place, seeming to be looking up the passage; but whether in fear I could not tell. Then it came out, and ran headlong away, through the place where should have been the wall of my Mother’s bedroom; but the Sense with which I was seeing these things, showed me the wall only as a vague, upright shadow, unsubstantial. And immediately the Child was lost to me, in the dull violet gloom. At the same time, I felt the landlord press back against me, as if something passed close to him; and he called out again, a hoarse sort of cry:— ‘The Woman! The Woman!’ and turned the shade clumsily from off his lantern. But I had seen no Woman; and the passage showed empty, as he shone the beam of his light jerkily to and fro; but chiefly in the direction of the doorway of my Mother’s room.

“He was still clutching my arm, and had risen to his feet; and now, mechanically and almost slowly, I picked up my lantern and turned on the light. I shone it, a little dazedly, at the seals upon the doors; but none were broken; then I sent the light to and fro, up and down the passage; but there was nothing; and I turned to the landlord, who was saying something in a rather incoherent fashion. As my light passed over his face I noted, in a dull sort of way, that he was drenched with sweat.

“Then my wits became more handleable, and I began to catch the drift of his words:— ‘Did you see her? Did you see her?’ he was saying, over and over again; and then I found myself telling him, in quite a level voice, that I had not seen any Woman. He became more coherent then, and I found that he had seen a Woman come from the end of the passage, and go past us; but he could not describe her, except that she kept stopping and looking about her, and had even peered at the wall, close beside him, as if looking for something. But what seemed to trouble him most,

was that she had not seemed to see him, at all. He repeated this so often, that in the end I told him, in an absurd sort of way, that he ought to be very glad she had not. What did it all mean? was the question; somehow I was not so frightened, as utterly bewildered. I had seen less then, than since; but what I had seen, had made me feel adrift from my anchorage of reason.

“What did it mean? He had seen a Woman, searching for something. I had not seen this Woman. I had seen a Child, running away, and hiding from Something or Someone. He had not seen the Child, or the other things — only the Woman. And I had not seen her. What did it all mean?”

“I had said nothing to the landlord about the Child. I had been too bewildered, and I realised that it would be futile to attempt an explanation. He was already stupid with the thing he had seen; and not the kind of man to understand. All this went through my mind as we stood there, shining the lanterns to and fro. All the time, intermingled with a streak of practical reasoning, I was questioning myself, what did it all mean? What was the Woman searching for; what was the Child running from?”

“Suddenly, as I stood there, bewildered and nervous, making random answers to the landlord, a door was violently slammed, and directly I caught the horrible reek of which I have told you.

“‘There!’ I said to the landlord, and caught his arm, in my turn. ‘The smell! Do you smell it?’

“He looked at me so stupidly that in a sort of nervous anger I shook him.

“‘Yes,’ he said, in a queer voice, trying to shine the light from his shaking lantern at the stair-head.

“‘Come on!’ I said, and picked up my bayonet; and he came, carrying his gun awkwardly. I think he came, more because he was afraid to be left alone, than because he had any pluck left, poor beggar. I never sneer at that kind of funk, at least very seldom; for when it takes hold of you, it makes rags of your courage.

“I led the way downstairs, shining my light into the lower passage, and afterwards at the doors to see whether they were shut; for I had closed and latched them, placing a corner of a mat against each door, so I should know which had been opened.

“I saw at once that none of the doors had been opened; then I threw the beam of my light down alongside the stairway, in order to see the mat I had placed against the door at the top of the cellar stairs. I got a horrid thrill; for the mat was flat. I paused a couple of seconds, shining my light to and fro in the passage, and holding fast to my courage, I went down the stairs.

“As I came to the bottom step, I saw patches of wet all up and down the passage. I shone my lantern on them. It was the imprint of a wet foot on the oilcloth of the passage; not an ordinary footprint, but a queer, soft, flabby, spreading imprint, that gave me a feeling of extraordinary horror.

“Backward and forward I flashed the light over the impossible footprints and saw them everywhere. Suddenly I noticed that they led to each of the closed doors. I felt something touch my back, and glanced round swiftly, to find that the landlord had come close to me, almost pressing against me in his fear.

“‘It’s all right,’ I said, but in a rather breathless whisper, meaning to put a little courage into him; for I could feel that he was shaking through all his body. Even then

as I tried to get him steadied enough to be of some use, his gun went off with a tremendous bang. He jumped, and yelled with sheer terror; and I swore because of the shock.

“Give it to me, for God’s sake!” I said, and slipped the gun from his hand; and in the same instant there was a sound of running steps up the garden path, and immediately the flash of a bull’s-eye lantern upon the fanlight over the front door. Then the door was tried, and directly afterwards there came a thunderous knocking, which told me a policeman had heard the shot.

“I went to the door and opened it. Fortunately the constable knew me, and when I had beckoned him in, I was able to explain matters in a very short time. While doing this, Inspector Johnstone came up the path, having missed the officer, and seeing lights and the open door. I told him as briefly as possible what had occurred, but did not mention the Child or the Woman; for it would have seemed too fantastic for him to notice. I showed him the queer, wet footprints and how they went towards the closed doors. I explained quickly about the mats, and how that the one against the cellar door was flat, which showed that the door had been opened.

“The inspector nodded, and told the constable to guard the door at the top of the cellar stairs. He then asked the hall lamp to be lit, after which he took the policeman’s lantern, and led the way into the front room. He paused with the door wide open, and threw the light all round; then jumped into the room, and looked behind the door; there was no one there; but all over the polished oak floor, between the scattered rugs, went the marks of those horrible spreading footprints; and the room permeated with the horrible odour.

“The inspector searched the room carefully, and then went into the middle room, using the same precautions. There was nothing in the middle room, or in the kitchen and pantry; but everywhere went the wet footmarks through all the rooms, showing plainly wherever there was woodwork or oilcloth, and always there was the smell.

“The inspector ceased from his search of the rooms, and spent a minute in trying whether the mats would really fall flat when the doors were open, or merely ruckle up in a way as to appear they had been untouched; but in each case the mats fell flat, and remained so.

“Extraordinary!” I heard Johnstone mutter to himself. And then he went towards the cellar door. He had inquired at first whether there were windows to the cellar, and when he learned that there was no way out, except by the door, he had left this part of the search to the last.

“As Johnstone came up to the door, the policeman made a motion of salute, and said something in a low voice; and something in the tone made me flick my light across him. I saw then that the man was very white, and he looked strange and bewildered.

“What?” said Johnstone, impatiently. ‘Speak up!’

“A woman come along ‘ere, sir, and went through this ‘ere door,” said the constable, clearly, but with that curious monotonous intonation that is sometimes heard from an unintelligent man.

“Speak up!” shouted the inspector.

“A woman come along and went through this ‘ere door,” repeated the man, monotonously.

“The inspector caught the man by the shoulder, and deliberately sniffed his breath.

“No!” he said. And then sarcastically:— ‘I hope you held the door open politely for the lady.’

“The door weren’t opened, sir,” said the man, simply.

“Are you mad—” began Johnstone.

“No,” said the landlord’s voice from the back, speaking steadily enough. ‘I saw the Woman upstairs.’ It was evident that he had got back his control again.

“I’m afraid, Inspector Johnstone,” I said, ‘that there’s more in this than you think. I certainly saw some very extraordinary things upstairs.’

“The inspector seemed about to say something; but instead, he turned again to the door, and flashed his light down and round about the mat. I saw then that the strange, horrible footmarks came straight up to the cellar door; and the last print showed under the door; yet the policeman said the door had not been opened.

“And suddenly, without any intention, or realisation of what I was saying, I asked the landlord:

“What were the feet like?”

“I received no answer; for the inspector was ordering the constable to open the cellar door, and the man was not obeying. Johnstone repeated the order, and at last, in a queer automatic way, the man obeyed, and pushed the door open. The loathsome smell beat up at us, in a great wave of horror, and the inspector came backward a step.

‘My God!’ he said, and went forward again, and shone his light down the steps; but there was nothing visible, only that on each step showed the unnatural footprints.

“The inspector brought the beam of the light vividly on to the top step; and there, clear in the light, there was something small, moving. The inspector bent to look, and the policeman and I with him. Now I don’t want to disgust you; but the thing was a maggot. The policeman backed suddenly out of the doorway.

“The churchyard,” he said, ‘...at the back of the ‘ouse.’

“Silence!” said Johnstone, with a queer break in the word, and I knew that at last he was frightened. He put his lantern into the doorway, and shone it from step to step, following the footprints down into the darkness; then he stepped back from the open doorway, and we all gave back with him. He looked round, and I had a feeling that he was looking for a weapon of some kind.

“Your gun,” I said to the landlord, and he brought it from the front hall, and passed it over to the inspector, who took it and ejected the empty shell from the right barrel. He held out his hand for a live cartridge, which the landlord brought from his pocket. He loaded the gun and snapped the breach. He turned to the constable:—

“Come on,” he said, and moved towards the cellar doorway.

“I ain’t comin’, sir,” said the policeman, very white in the face.

“With a sudden blaze of passion, the inspector took the man by the scruff, and hove him bodily down into the darkness, and he went downward, screaming. The inspector followed him instantly, with his lantern and the gun; and I after the inspector, with the bayonet ready. Behind me I heard the landlord.

“At the bottom of the stairs the inspector was helping the policeman to his feet, where he stood swaying a moment, in a bewildered fashion; then the inspector went into the front cellar, and his man followed him in a stupid fashion; but evidently no longer with any thought of running away from the horror.

“We all crowded into the front cellar, flashing our lights to and fro. Inspector Johnstone was examining the floor, and I saw that the footmarks went all round the cellar, into all the corners, and across the floor. I thought suddenly of the Child that was running away from Something. Do you see the thing that I was seeing vaguely?

“We went out of the cellar in a body, for there was nothing to be found. In the next cellar, the footprints went everywhere in that queer erratic fashion, as of someone searching for something, or following some blind scent.

“In the third cellar the prints ended at the shallow well that had been the old water-supply of the little house. The well was full to the brim, and the water so clear that the pebbly bottom was plainly to be seen, as we shone the lights into the water. The search came to an abrupt end, and we stood about the well, looking at one another, in an absolute, horrible silence.

“Johnstone made another examination of the footprints; then he shone his light again into the clear shallow water, searching each inch of the plainly-seen bottom; but there was nothing there. The cellar was full of the dreadful smell; and everyone stood silent, except for the constant turning of the lamps to and fro around the cellar.

“The inspector looked up from his search of the well, and nodded quietly across at me, with his sudden acknowledgment that our belief was now his belief, the smell in the cellar seemed to grow more dreadful, and to be, as it were, a menace — the material expression that some monstrous thing was there with us, invisible.

“I think—‘ began the inspector, and shone his light towards the stairway; and at this the constable’s restraint went utterly, and he ran for the stairs, making a queer sound in his throat.

“The landlord followed, at a quick walk, and then the inspector and I. He waited a single instant for me, and we went up together, treading on the same steps, and with our lights held backwards. At the top, I slammed and locked the stair door, and wiped my forehead, and my hands were shaking.

“The inspector asked me to give his man a glass of whisky, and then he sent him out on his beat. He stayed a short while with the landlord and me, and it was arranged that he would join us the following night, and watch the well with us from midnight until daylight. Then he left us, just as the dawn was coming in. The landlord and I locked up the house, and went over to his place for a sleep.

“In the afternoon, the landlord and I returned to the house, to make arrangements for the night. He was very quiet, and I felt that he was to be relied on, now that he had been ‘salted,’ as it were, with his fright of the previous night.

“We opened all the doors and windows, and blew the house through very thoroughly; and in the meanwhile, we lit the lamps in the house, and took them down into the cellars, where we set them all about, so as to have light everywhere. Then we carried down three chairs and a table, and set them in the cellar where the well was sunk. After that, we stretched thin piano wire across the cellar, about nine inches from the floor, at such a height that it should catch anything moving about in the dark.

“When this was done, I went through the house with the landlord, and sealed every window and door in the place, excepting only the front-door and the door at the top of the cellar stairs.

“Meanwhile, a local wire-smith was making something to my order; and when the landlord and I had finished tea at his house, we went down to see how the smith was getting on.

“We found the thing completed. It looked rather like a huge parrot’s cage, without any bottom, of very heavy gauge wire, and stood about seven feet high, and was four feet in diameter. Fortunately, I remembered to have it made longitudinally in two halves, or else we should never have got it through the doorways and down the cellar stairs.

“I told the wire-smith to bring the cage up to the house right away so that he could fit the two halves rigidly together. As we returned, I called in at an ironmongers, where I bought some thin hemp rope and an iron rack-pulley, like those used in Lancashire for hauling up the ceiling clothes-racks, which you will find in every cottage. I bought also a couple of pitchforks.

“‘We shan’t want to touch it,’ I said to the landlord; and he nodded, rather white all at once.

“As soon as the cage arrived and been fitted together in the cellar, I sent away the smith; and the landlord and I suspended it over the well, into which it fitted easily. After a lot of trouble, we managed to hang it so perfectly central from the rope over the iron pulley, that when hoisted to the ceiling, and dropped, it went every time plunk into the well, like a candle-extinguisher. When we had it finally arranged, I hoisted it up once more, to the ready position, and made the rope fast to a heavy wooden pillar, which stood in the middle of the cellar.

“By ten o’clock, I had everything arranged, with the two pitchforks and the two police lanterns; also some whisky and sandwiches. Underneath the table I had several buckets full of disinfectant.

“A little after eleven o’clock, there was a knock at the front door, and when I went, I found that Inspector Johnstone had arrived, and brought with him one of his plain-clothes men. You will understand how pleased I was to see there would be this addition to our watch; for he looked a tough, nerveless man, brainy and collected; and one I should have picked to help us with the horrible job I felt pretty sure we should have to do that night.

“When the inspector and the detective had entered, I shut and locked the front door; then, while the inspector held the light, I sealed the door carefully with tape and wax. At the head of the cellar stairs, I shut and locked that door also, and sealed it in the same way.

“As we entered the cellar, I warned Johnstone and his man to be careful not to fall over the wires; and then, as I saw his surprise at my arrangements, I began to explain my ideas and intentions, to all of which he listened with strong approval. I was pleased to see also that the detective was nodding his head, as I talked, in a way that showed he appreciated all my precautions.

“As he put his lantern down, the inspector picked up one of the pitchforks, and balanced it in his hand; then looked at me, and nodded.

“‘The best thing,’ he said. ‘I only wish you’d got two more.’

“Then we all took our seats, the detective getting a washing-stool from the corner of the cellar. From then, until a quarter to twelve, we talked quietly, whilst we made a light supper of whisky and sandwiches; after which we cleared everything off the table, excepting the lanterns and the pitch-forks. One of the latter, I handed to the inspector; the other I took myself, and then, having set my chair so as to be handy to the rope which lowered the cage into the well, I went round the cellar and put out every lamp.

“I groped my way to my chair, and arranged the pitchfork and the dark lantern ready to my hand; after which I suggested that everyone should keep an absolute silence throughout the watch. I asked, also, that no lantern should be turned on, until I gave the word.

“I put my watch on the table, where a faint glow from my lantern made me able to see the time. For an hour nothing happened and everyone kept an absolute silence, except for an occasional uneasy movement.

“About half-past one, however, I was conscious again of the same extraordinary and peculiar nervousness, which I had felt on the previous night. I put my hand out quickly, and eased the hitched rope from around the pillar. The inspector seemed aware of the movement; for I saw the faint light from his lantern, move a little, as if he had suddenly taken hold of it, in readiness.

“A minute later, I noticed there was a change in the colour of the night in the cellar, and it grew slowly violet-tinted upon my eyes. I glanced to and fro, quickly, in the new darkness, and even as I looked, I was conscious that the violet colour deepened. In the direction of the well, but seeming to be at a great distance, there was, as it were, a nucleus to the change; and the nucleus came swiftly towards us, appearing to come from a great space, almost in a single moment. It came near, and I saw again that it was a little naked Child, running, and seeming to be of the violet night in which it ran.

“The Child came with a natural running movement, exactly as I described it before; but in a silence so peculiarly intense, that it was as if it brought the silence with it. About half-way between the well and the table, the Child turned swiftly, and looked back at something invisible to me; and suddenly it went down into a crouching attitude, and seemed to be hiding behind something that showed vaguely; but there was nothing there, except the bare floor of the cellar; nothing, I mean, of our world.

“I could hear the breathing of the three other men, with a wonderful distinctness; and also the tick of my watch upon the table seemed to sound as loud and slow as the tick of an old grandfather’s clocks. Someway I knew that none of the others saw what I was seeing.

“Abruptly, the landlord, who was next to me, let out his breath with a little hissing sound; I knew then that something was visible to him. There came a creak from the table, and I had a feeling that the inspector was leaning forward, looking at something that I could not see. The landlord reached out his hand through the darkness, and fumbled a moment to catch my arm:—

“‘The Woman!’ he whispered, close to my ear. ‘Over by the well.’

“I stared hard in that direction; but saw nothing, except that the violet colour of the cellar seemed a little duller just there.

“I looked back quickly to the vague place where the Child was hiding. I saw that it was peering backward from its hiding-place. Suddenly it rose and ran straight for the middle of the table, which showed only as vague shadow half-way between my eyes and the unseen floor. As the Child ran under the table, the steel prongs of my pitchfork glimmered with a violet, fluctuating light. A little way off, there showed high up in the gloom, the vaguely shining outline of the other fork, so I knew the inspector had it raised in his hand, ready. There was no doubt but that he saw something. On the table, the metal of the five lanterns shone with the same strange glow; and about each lantern there was a little cloud of absolute blackness, where the phenomenon that is light to our natural eyes, came through the fittings; and in this complete blackness, the metal of each lantern showed plain, as might a cat’s-eye in a nest of black cotton-wool.

“Just beyond the table, the Child paused again, and stood, seeming to oscillate a little upon its feet, which gave the impression that it was lighter and vaguer than a thistle-down; and yet, in the same moment, another part of me seemed to know that it was to me, as something that might be beyond thick, invisible glass, and subject to conditions and forces that I was unable to comprehend.

“The Child was looking back again, and my gaze went the same way. I stared across the cellar, and saw the cage hanging clear in the violet light, every wire and tie outlined with its glimmering; above it there was a little space of gloom, and then the dull shining of the iron pulley which I had screwed into the ceiling.

“I stared in a bewildered way round the cellar; there were thin lines of vague fire crossing the floor in all directions; and suddenly I remembered the piano-wire that the landlord and I had stretched. But there was nothing else to be seen, except that near the table there were indistinct glimmerings of light, and at the far end the outline of a dull-glowing revolver, evidently in the detective’s pocket. I remember a sort of subconscious satisfaction, as I settled the point in a queer automatic fashion. On the table, near to me, there was a little shapeless collection of the light; and this I knew, after an instant’s consideration, to be the steel portions of my watch.

“I had looked several times at the Child, and round the cellar, whilst I was deciding these trifles; and had found it still in that attitude of hiding from something. But now, suddenly, it ran clear away into the distance, and was nothing more than a slightly deeper coloured nucleus far away in the strange coloured atmosphere.

“The landlord gave out a queer little cry, and twisted over against me, as if to avoid something. From the inspector there came a sharp breathing sound, as if he had been suddenly drenched with cold water. Then suddenly the violet colour went out of the night, and I was conscious of the nearness of something monstrous and repugnant.

“There was a tense silence, and the blackness of the cellar seemed absolute, with only the faint glow about each of the lanterns on the table. Then, in the darkness and the silence, there came a faint tinkle of water from the well, as if something were rising noiselessly out of it, and the water running back with a gentle tinkling. In the same instant, there came to me a sudden waft of the awful smell.

“I gave a sharp cry of warning to the inspector, and loosed the rope. There came instantly the sharp splash of the cage entering the water; and then, with a stiff, frightened movement I opened the shutter of my lantern, and shone the light at the cage, shouting to the others to do the same.

“As my light struck the cage, I saw that about two feet of it projected from the top of the well, and there was something protruding up out of the water, into the cage. I stared, with a feeling that I recognised the thing; and then, as the other lanterns were opened, I saw that it was a leg of mutton. The thing was held by a brawny fist and arm, that rose out of the water. I stood utterly bewildered, watching to see what was coming. In a moment there rose into view a great bearded face, that I felt for one quick instant was the face of a drowned man, long dead. Then the face opened at the mouth-part, and spluttered and coughed. Another big hand came into view, and wiped the water from the eyes, which blinked rapidly, and then fixed themselves into a stare at the lights.

“From the detective there came a sudden shout:—

“‘Captain Tobias!’ he shouted, and the inspector echoed him; and instantly they burst into loud roars of laughter.

“The inspector and the detective ran across the cellar to the cage; and I followed, still bewildered. The man in the cage was keeping the leg of mutton as far away from him, as possible, and holding his nose.

“‘Lift thig dam trap, quig!’ he shouted in a stifled voice; but the inspector and the detective simply doubled before him, and tried to hold their noses, while they laughed, and the light from their lanterns went dancing all over the place.

“‘Quig! Quig!’ said the man in the cage, still holding his nose, and trying to speak plainly.

“Then Johnstone and the detective stopped laughing, and lifted the cage. The man in the well threw the leg across the cellar, and turned swiftly to go down into the well; but the officers were too quick for him, and had him out in a twinkling. Whilst they held him, dripping upon the floor, the inspector jerked his thumb in the direction of the offending leg, and the landlord, having harpooned it with one of the pitchforks, ran it upstairs and so into the open air.

“Meanwhile, I had given the man from the well a stiff tot of whisky; for which he thanked me with a cheerful nod, and having emptied the glass at a draught, held out his hand for the bottle, which he finished, as if it had been so much water.

“As you will remember, it was a Captain Tobias who had been the previous tenant; and this was the very man, who had appeared from the well. In the course of the talk that followed, I learned the reason for Captain Tobias leaving the house; he had been wanted by the police for smuggling. He had undergone imprisonment; and had been released only a couple of weeks earlier.

“He had returned to find new tenants in his old home. He had entered the house through the well, the walls of which were not continued right to the bottom (this I will deal with later); and gone up by a little stairway in the cellar wall, which opened at the top through a panel beside my Mother’s bedroom. This panel was opened, by revolving the left doorpost of the bedroom door, with the result that the bedroom door always became unlatched, in the process of opening the panel.

“The captain complained, without any bitterness, that the panel had warped, and that each time he opened it, it made a cracking noise. This had been evidently what I mistook for raps. He would not give his reason for entering the house; but it was pretty obvious that he had hidden something, which he wanted to get. However, as he found it impossible to get into the house, without the risk of being caught, he

decided to try to drive us out, relying on the bad reputation of the house, and his own artistic efforts as a ghost. I must say he succeeded. He intended then to rent the house again, as before; and would then, of course have plenty of time to get whatever he had hidden. The house suited him admirably; for there was a passage — as he showed me afterwards — connecting the dummy well with the crypt of the church beyond the garden wall; and these, in turn, were connected with certain caves in the cliffs, which went down to the beach beyond the church.

“In the course of his talk Captain Tobias offered to take the house off my hands; and as this suited me perfectly, for I was about stalled with it, and the plan also suited the landlord, it was decided that no steps should be taken against him; and that the whole business should be hushed up.

“I asked the captain whether there was really anything queer about the house; whether he had ever seen anything. He said yes, that he had twice seen a Woman going about the house. We all looked at one another, when the captain said that. He told us she never bothered him, and that he had only seen her twice, and on each occasion it had followed a narrow escape from the Revenue people.

“Captain Tobias was an observant man; he had seen how I had placed the mats against the doors; and after entering the rooms, and walking all about them, so as to leave the foot-marks of an old pair of wet woollen slippers everywhere, he had deliberately put the mats back as he found them.

“The maggot which had dropped from his disgusting leg of mutton had been an accident, and beyond even his horrific planning. He was hugely delighted to learn how it had affected us.

“The mouldy smell I had noticed was from the little closed stairway, when the captain opened the panel. The door-slamming was also another of his contributions.

“I come now to the end of the captain’s ghost-play; and to the difficulty of trying to explain the other peculiar things. In the first place, it is obvious that there was something genuinely strange in the house; which made itself manifest as a Woman. Many people had seen this Woman, under differing circumstances, so it is impossible to put the thing down to fancy; at the same time it must seem extraordinary that I should have lived two years in the house, and see nothing, whilst the policeman saw the Woman, before he had been there twenty minutes; the landlord, the detective, and the inspector all saw her.

“I can only suppose that fear was in every case the key, as I might say, which opened the senses to the presence of the Woman. The policeman was a highly-strung man, and when he became frightened, was able to see the Woman. The same reasoning applies all round. I saw nothing, until I became really frightened; then I saw, not the Woman; but a Child, running away from Something or Someone. However, I will touch on that later. In short, until a very strong degree of fear was present, no one was affected by the Force which made itself evident, as a Woman. My theory explains why some tenants were never aware of anything strange in the house, whilst others left immediately. The more sensitive they were, the less would be the degree of fear necessary to make them aware of the Force present in the house.

“The peculiar shining of all the metal objects in the cellar, had been visible only to me. The cause, naturally, I do not know; neither do I know why I, alone, was able to see the shining.”

“The Child,” I asked. “Can you explain that part at all? Why you didn’t see the Woman, and why they didn’t see the Child. Was it merely the same Force, appearing differently to different people?”

“No,” said Carnacki. “I can’t explain that. But I am quite sure that the Woman and the Child were not only two complete and different entities; but even they were not in quite the same planes of Existence.

“To give you a root-idea, however, it is held in the Sigsand MS. that a child ‘still-born’ is ‘snatched bayck bye thee Hagg.’ This is crude; but may yet contain an elemental truth. Yet, before I attempt to make this clearer, let me tell you a thought that has often been mine. It may be that physical birth is but a secondary process; and that prior to the possibility, the Mother-Spirit searches for, until it finds, the small Element — the primal Ego or Child’s soul. It may be that a certain waywardness would cause such to strive to evade capture by the Mother-Spirit. It may have been such a thing as this, that I saw. I have always tried to think so; but it is impossible to ignore the sense of repulsion that I felt when the unseen Woman went past me. This repulsion carries forward the idea suggested in the Sigsand MS., that a stillborn child is thus, because its ego or spirit has been snatched back by the ‘Hagg.’ In other words, by certain of the Monstrosities of the Outer Circle. The thought is inconceivably terrible, and probably the more so because it is so fragmentary. It leaves us with the conception of a child’s soul adrift halfway between two lives, and running through by-ways of Eternity from Something incredible and inconceivable (because not understood) to our senses.

“The thing is beyond further discussion; for it is futile to attempt to discuss a thing, to any purpose, of which one has a knowledge so fragmentary as this. There is one thought, which is often mine. Perhaps there is a Mother Spirit—“

“And the well?” said Arkright. “How did the captain get in from the other side?”

“As I said before,” answered Carnacki. “The side walls of the well did not reach to the bottom, so that you had only to dip down into the water, and come up again on the other side of the wall, under the cellar floor, and so climb into the passage. Of course, the water was the same height on both sides of the walls. Don’t ask me who made the well-entrance or the little stairway; for I don’t know. The house was very old, as I have told you; and that sort of thing was useful in the wild old days.”

“And the Child,” I said, coming back to the thing which chiefly interested me. “You would say that the birth must have occurred in that house; and in this way, one might suppose the house to have become en rapport, if I can use the word in that way, with the Forces that produced the tragedy?”

“Yes,” replied Carnacki. “That is, supposing we take the suggestion of the Sigsand MS., to account for the phenomenon.”

“There may be other houses—“ I began.

“There are,” said Carnacki; and stood up.

“Out you go,” he said genially, using the recognised formula. And in five minutes we were on the Embankment, going thoughtfully to our various homes.

The Thing Invisible

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Carnacki had just returned to Cheyne Walk, Chelsea. I was aware of this interesting fact by reason of the curtly worded postcard which I was re-reading, and by which I was requested to present myself at No. 472, not later than seven o'clock on that same evening.

Mr. Carnacki had, as I and the others of his strictly limited circle of friends knew, been away in Kent for the past three weeks; but, beyond that, we had no knowledge. Carnacki was always secretive, and generally curt, and spoke only when he was ready to speak. When this stage arrived, I and his three other friends, Jessop, Arkright, and Taylor, would receive a card or a wire, asking us to call. Not one of us ever willingly missed; for after a thoroughly sensible little dinner, Carnacki would snuggle down into his big armchair, and begin to talk. And what talks they were! Stories, true in every word, yet full of weird and extraordinary incidents that held one silent and awed until he had made an end of speaking. And afterwards, we four would shake him silently by the hand and stumble out into the dark streets, fearful even of our own shadows, and so with haste to our homes.

Upon this particular night I was the first to arrive, and found Carnacki sitting, quietly smoking over a paper. He stood up; shook me firmly by the hand; pointed to a chair and sat down again, never having uttered a word. A man such a mixture of curtness and courtesy I never met.

For my part I said nothing. I knew the man too well to bother him with questions or the weather, and so took a seat and a cigarette. Presently the three others turned up, and after that we spent a comfortable and busy hour at dinner.

Dinner over, Carnacki snuggled himself down luxuriously into his great chair, filled his pipe, and puffed for awhile, his gaze directed on the fire. The rest of us made ourselves comfortable, each after his own particular manner. A minute later Carnacki began to speak, ignoring any preliminary remarks, and going straight to the subject of the story we knew he had to tell.

"I've just come back from Sir Alfred Jarnock's place at Burtontree, in South Kent," he began, without removing his gaze from the fire. "Most extraordinary things have been happening there lately, and Mr. George Jarnock, the eldest son, wired me to come over and see if I could help to clear things up a bit. I went. When I got there I found that they've an old chapel with a fine reputation for being haunted. They've been rather proud of this, I could see, until, suddenly, quite lately, the ghost has started being dangerous — deadly dangerous, too — the butler being nearly stabbed to death in the chapel with a queer old dagger. It's this dagger that's supposed to haunt the chapel. At least, there has always been an old yarn in the family that this dagger would attack any enemy who should dare to venture into the chapel after night-fall. But, of course, it's all been taken as most ghost-tales are. Yet, now, it would seem that there must be something in the old story about it being able to act on its own, or in the hand of some invisible thing. At least, that's how it seemed to everyone when I arrived and began to look into things a bit.

"Of course, the first thing I did was to make sure that there was no obvious human agency in the matter, and this I found to be a simpler thing than I had anticipated;

for the butler was stabbed when there were other people in the chapel and the place lighted up. Stabbed there right before the onlookers, and no one could tell how it had been done, not even the man himself. And the force used must have been prodigious, for he was driven back into the body of the chapel as though he had been kicked by a horse. Fortunately, his injury was not mortal, and when I got there he was sufficiently recovered to be able to talk to me. Yet I got little from him to help me to any sane conclusion. He had just gone up the chancel to extinguish the candles on the altar when he was attacked. He had seen nothing, heard nothing — just been stricken down with tremendous power and hurled down the aisle.

“I felt very much mystified, but kept my mind open until I had examined the chapel. This I found to be small and extremely old. It is very massively built, and entered through only one door, which leads out of the castle itself; and the key of which is kept by Sir Jarnock himself, the butler having no duplicate. The shape of the chapel is oblong, and the altar is railed off after the usual fashion. There are two tombs in the body of the place; but none in the chancel, which is bare, except for the tall candlesticks, and the chancel rail, beyond which is the undraped altar of solid marble, upon which stand two candlesticks, one at each end. Above the altar hangs the ‘waeful dagger,’ as it has been called through the past five hundred years. I reached up and took it down to examine it. The blade is ten inches long, two inches broad at the base, and tapering to a sharp point. It is double-edged. The sheath is rather curious for having a cross-piece, which, taken in conjunction with the fact that the sheath itself is continued three parts the way up the hilt of the dagger, gives it the appearance of a cross. That this is not unintentional is shown by an engraving of the Christ crucified upon one side. Upon the other, in Latin, is the inscription: ‘Vengeance is Mine, I will Repay.’ A quaint and rather terrible conjunction of ideas. Upon the blade of the dagger itself is graven in old English capitals: ‘I Watch. I Strike.’ On the butt of the hilt there is carved deeply a pentacle.

“There; you have a pretty accurate description of the weapon that for five hundred years or more has had the reputation of being able, either of its own accord, or in the hand of some thing invisible, to strike murderously any enemy of the Jarnock family who may chance to enter the old chapel after dark. And what is to the point, I can tell you that before I left I had pretty good reason to think that there was more in the old story than any sane man would care to credit.

“However, as is my way, I was treating everything with an open mind, and I continued my investigation of the chapel, sounding and examining walls and floor, not omitting the two ancient tombs, and by evening had come to the conclusion that the only means of ingress and egress was through the doorway into the castle, the door of which is kept always locked. That is, I mean to say, that this was the only entrance practicable for material beings. Although, even had I discovered some other opening, secret or otherwise, it would have helped but little to solve the mystery; for the butler, you must remember, had been struck down before the eyes of most of the family and many of the servants, and a short questioning of each of these showed me that no visible thing could have come near to the man without having been seen by one or more of those present.

“And this was the mystery to which I had been called in to find a sane and normal solution!

“From Tommie, the second son, a bright boy of about fifteen, I got some further details. He had seen the butler struck, or, to be more correct, had seen the butler at

the moment he was struck. He told me that if a horse had kicked the man he couldn't have been thrown further, or with more force. It was just as he was going in to put out the candles on the altar. The dagger had been driven right through him, the point appearing behind the left shoulder; and the doctor who had been called immediately had been put to it to remove the weapon, so forcibly had it penetrated the scapula. This latter information I got from the doctor himself, who, along with the rest, was completely and absolutely mystified; as indeed I was myself, for it seemed that there was nothing for it but to accept the fact that some unseen thing — some creature of the invisible world — had actually done a human being nearly to death. And more was to follow. I was, with my own eyes, to see a miracle happen in this so-called prosaic century of ours. Yes, with my own eyes! I was, as it were, to have proof of the supernatural forced upon me!

“That night I proposed to Sir Jarnock (a little, wizened, nervous old man) that I should spend the night in the chapel and keep a constant watch upon the dagger, but to this he would not listen for a moment, informing me that it had been his habit each night, since he inherited the place, to lock up the chapel door so that none might foolishly or heedlessly run the risk of the peril of the dagger. At that, I must say, I stared at him moment, thinking him a bit of an old woman; but when he went on to point out how too well his precautions had been justified by the attack upon the butler I had nothing to say. Yet it seemed a strange thing for a man in this twentieth century to be listening seriously to such talk.

“One thing there was, however, that I pointed out to Sir Jarnock, in reply to his story of the care he had used through all these years to lock the ghost in by itself at nights, so that it could have no chance to work hurt on any, and that was that the dagger had not been used upon an enemy of the family, but upon an old and tried servant. Moreover, that the attack had not been made in the dark, but when the chapel was lighted up.

“To my remarks upon this point the old gentleman replied, in a somewhat troubled voice, that I was certainly right about the latter, but who could we say for certain was trustworthy in this world.

“Well anyway, Sir Jarnock, I replied, ‘you’ve no reason for suspecting your butler of being an enemy of the family?’ I spoke half-jestingly; but the old man answered me seriously enough that he had never found reason to mistrust Parker in any way. And then, with a little courteous movement, and pleading the fatigue of his years, he said good-night, and left me, having given me the impression of being a polite but rather superstitious old gentleman.

“That night, whilst I was undressing, an idea came to me. I had a feeling that if ever I were to make any progress in the case before me I should have to find some way of getting in and out of the chapel at any hour of the day or night that suited me. The idea that struck me was, on the morrow when the key should be handed to me, to take an impression, and have a duplicate made of it. This I could manage, and no one need ever be the wiser. I should be able then to enter the chapel after dark, and keep a watch over the ‘waeful dagger’ without affronting old Sir Jarnock by appearing to laugh at his long-continued precautions.

“On the morrow I got the key from the old gentleman and opened the chapel, he accompanying me. Then I went up to my room for my stand camera, and whilst I was up there I took the impression, returning the key to its owner when I came back with the camera. I fixed my camera up in the aisle, and took a photograph of the chancel;

then, saying I would leave my camera where it was, Sir Jarnock accompanying me and locking the door after us. He told me that any time I wanted to enter the chapel he would be pleased to let me have the key, but not after dark, for he was resolved that no other person should run the risk of the stroke of the enchanted dagger.

“I took my dark-slide into Burtontree, and left it with the local photographer, telling him to develop the one plate it contained, but take no print off it until he should hear from me. Then I enquired for a locksmith, and when I found one I gave him an order to get me a key made from the impression as quickly as the thing could be done, insisting that I would call for it that evening. This I did, and found it finished, much to my satisfaction.

“I returned to the castle in time for dinner, after which, making my excuses, I retired to my room. Here, from beneath my bed, where I had hidden them earlier in the evening, I drew out several fine pieces of plate armour that I had removed from the armoury. There was also a shirt of chain-mail, with a sort of quilted hood to go over the head. I buckled on the plate armour, and after that I drew on the chain-mail. I don’t know much about armour; but from what I’ve learned since, I must have put on parts of two suits. Anyway, I felt beastly. But I knew that the thing I was thinking of doing called for some sort of protection for my body, so I made the best of matters. Then I pulled on my dressing gown over the armour, and shoved my revolver into one of the side pockets, and my repeating flashlight into the other. My dark lantern I carried in my hand.

“I went out into the passage and closed and locked my bedroom door. Then I descended quietly to the chapel, praying no one would see me as I went. I reached the door, and tried my key. It fitted perfectly, and the next minute I was in the dark, silent chapel, and the door locked behind me.

“I don’t mind saying that I felt a bit queer. To stand there in the utter darkness, and not know but some invisible thing was coming for you, isn’t as nice as some of you might think. Yet it was no use funking, so I switched on the light of my lantern and made the tour of the place.

“I found nothing unusual. The dagger hung demurely in its place above the altar, and for the rest, all was still and cold and very quiet. Then I went down to where my camera stood, as I had left it. From the satchel that I had put beneath the tripod I took out a dark-slide, and inserted it in the camera, drawing the shutter. After that I uncapped the lens, pulled out my flashlight apparatus, and pressed the trigger. There was an intense, brilliant flash of light that made the whole of the interior of the chapel jump into sight and disappear as quickly. Then, in the light from my lantern, I inserted the shutter into the slide, and reversed it, so as to have a fresh plate ready to expose at any time.

“I shut off the light of my lantern then, and sat down in one of the pews beside my camera. I don’t know what I expected to happen, but I had an extraordinary feeling that something would. It was as though I knew.

“An hour passed — an hour of absolute silence. I was beastly cold, for the whole place was without any kind of heating pipes or furnace, as I’d noticed during my search; so that the inside of the chapel was about as cold as a blessed tomb. Also, in addition to the coldness about me, my feelings were not of the kind to warm one, as you can imagine. All at once I had a horrible feeling that something was a-move in the place. It wasn’t that I could hear anything; but I had a sort of intuitive knowledge that

something was stirring in the darkness. And I tell you, for a few moments I just sweated — cold sweat. Not a pleasant feeling, either.

“Suddenly I put my mailed arms up over my face. I wanted to hide it — I mean, to protect it. I had had a sudden horrible feeling that something was hovering over me in the dark — waiting. Talk about a man’s heart melting in his breast! Mine seemed to have gone to a puddle. I could have shouted, if I’d not been afraid of the noise. And then, abruptly, I heard something. Away up the aisle there sounded a dull clang of metal, as it might be the tread of a mailed heel upon the stone of the aisle. I sat, immovable, fighting with myself to keep from being a putrid coward. I still kept my face covered, but I was getting hold of the man part of me again. I made a mighty effort, and took my arms down from my face, holding it up in the darkness. I tell you, I realised then that the Thing, whatever it was, had better strike me dead than that I should let all my courage rot like that. But nothing touched me, and I got a bit calmer.

“I dare say a couple of minutes passed, and then, away up near the chancel, there came again that clang, as though of an armoured foot stepping cautiously. By Jove! but I can tell you, I felt myself stiffen all over. And then, suddenly, came the thought that the sound I had heard might be the rattle of the dagger above the altar. The idea of that insensate thing becoming animate, and attacking me, did not occur to me with any sense of reality. I thought rather of some invisible monster of the other world fumbling at it. I remembered the butler’s remark that it was like the kick of a horse, and with that I felt swiftly for my lantern. I found it on the seat beside me, and switched on the light. Then I flashed it up the aisle. I could see nothing to frighten me. To and fro I sent the jet of light darting, and saw nothing to fear. Before and behind me, up at the roof, and down at the floor, I shone the light. There was nothing visible that need have set my flesh thrilling as it did. I had been standing whilst I sent the light about the chapel, but now I pulled out my revolver, and then, with a tremendous effort of will, I switched off the light and sat down again in the darkness, once more to watch.

“It seemed to me that some half-hour or so must have passed like this, and no sound had broken the intense stillness of the chapel. As for my own feelings, they were much easier, which was foolish, for the thing that made the chapel dangerous couldn’t be seen, however much the light. And then, after I’d sat there, as I’ve said, waiting, with my revolver in my fist, and feeling more like myself, I thought I heard something. I listened extra hard, if that were possible, and presently I could almost swear I heard something move up near the top of the aisle, but so quiet that I couldn’t be sure. And then I thought I heard it again, and afterwards there was a horrible time of silence, and then it seemed to come again, nearer to me, as though a vast, soft tread was coming slowly down the aisle.

“I didn’t move, but just sat and stiffened, and listened, so that I fancied I heard the tread all about the chapel; and then I was just as sure I couldn’t hear it. And so some precious long minutes passed.

“After a little, though, I fancy I must have quietened down a bit, for I remember knowing that my shoulders just ached with the way they’d contracted with my hunching them rigid. Mind you, I was still in a pretty awful funk, but not with the feeling that any moment I might have to fight for my blessed soul. The worst of it was, though, I couldn’t hear very plainly for quite a time, with the blood beating in my ears; and this is a simply beastly feeling.

“I was sitting like this, and listening, body and soul, when suddenly I got that awful feeling again that something was moving the air of the place. The feeling got so awful that it made my head go tight all over, so that it actually pained. And I can tell you that’s a pretty rotten sensation, when it’s caused the way it was. But I kept my arms off my face, I’m glad to say. If I’d done that again I should simply have bunked out of the place; so I just sat and sweated, cold, and the ‘creep’ busy with my head and spine. And then, suddenly, once more I thought I heard the sound of that queer, soft tread — huge, somehow I thought of it — on the aisle; and this time it seemed a heap closer to me. Then there was an awful little time of quietness, with the feeling in it that something was hovering or bending over towards me from the aisle; and then, through the booming of the blood in my ears, there came a slight sound from the place where my camera stood — a disagreeable sort of slithering sound, and then a sharp tap. I’d had the lantern ready in my left hand, and now I snapped it on, desperately, and shone it straight above my head; for I’d a conviction that there was something there; but I saw nothing, and then I flashed the light at the camera, and along the aisle; but again there was nothing, and after that I sent it to and fro, all about the place, jerking it here and there, but there was nothing anywhere visible.

“I had stood up, the instant that I had seen that there was nothing in sight over me, and now forced myself to go up the aisle towards the altar. I would see, I thought, whether the dagger had been touched. As I went, I kept glancing round and about me, flashing the light to and fro all the time. But there was never for an instant anything unusual to be seen. Then I had reached the step that led up to the chancel rail, and the little gate. I threw the beam from the lantern upon the dagger. Yes, I thought, it’s all right. Abruptly, it seemed to me that there was something wanting, and I leaned forward over the little chancel gate, to peer, holding the light high. I was only too correct in my thought. The dagger had gone. Only the sheath hung there above the altar. In a sudden, frightened flash of imagination, I pictured the thing adrift in the chapel, moving here and there, as though of its own volition, for the Thing that wielded would be invisible to mortal eyes. I turned my head swiftly over to the left, glancing frightenedly behind me, and flashing the light to help my eyes. In the same instant I was struck a tremendous blow over the left breast and hurled backward from the chancel rail, down the aisle, my armour clanging loudly. I landed on my back, but scrambled up quickly, though half stunned, and began to run blindly down the aisle towards the door. I bowed my head as I ran, putting my mailed arms over my face. I plunged into my camera, hurling it among the pews. I crashed into the font and staggered back. Then I was at the exit. I fumbled madly for the key in the pocket of my dressing-gown. I found it, and scraped at the door feverishly for the keyhole. Behind me, for all I knew, threatened that incredible thing. I found the keyhole, turned the key, burst the door open, and was in the passage. I slammed the door and leant hard against it whilst I fumbled again with the key, this time to lock it. I succeeded, and reeled more than walked to my room.

“There I sat for a while, until my nerves had steadied somewhat. Then I commenced to strip off the armour. I saw then that both the chain mail and the plate had been pierced over the breast; And suddenly, it came home to me that the Thing had struck for my heart.

“Stripping rapidly, I found that the skin over the heart had just been pierced sufficiently to allow a few drops of blood to stain my shirt — nothing more. I thought of what would have happened if I had not worn the armour!

“I did not go to sleep that night at all, but sat upon the edge of my bed, thinking and thinking. In the morning, so soon as it was light, I made my way quietly down to the chapel. I opened the door, and peered in; but though the whole place was now flooded with the rays of the rising sun it took a tremendous effort of will before I could force myself to enter.

“After a minute’s hesitation, however, I plucked up sufficient courage. I went over to where I had overthrown my camera. The ground glass was smashed, but otherwise it did not seem to have suffered. I replaced it in the position in which it had been overnight; but the slide containing the flashlight photograph I removed and put in one of my side pockets, regretting that I had not taken a second one at the instant when I heard those strange sounds up near the chancel.

“Having tidied my photographic apparatus, I went up the aisle to recover my lantern and revolver, which had both been knocked from my hands when I was stabbed. The lantern was hopelessly bent, but the pistol seemed all right. These secured, I made considerable haste to get out of the place and lock the door. I can tell you that I felt less inclined than the night before to call Sir Alfred an old woman for his precautions regarding the chapel, and a sudden thought flashed into my mind whether he might not have knowledge of some previous tragedy concerned with the dagger that made him so particular to see that the chapel should not be entered at night.

“I returned to my room, washed, shaved, and dressed; then went downstairs and got the acting butler to give me some sandwiches and a cup of coffee.

“A little later I was heading for Burtontree as hard as I could walk, for a sudden idea had come to me, which I was anxious to test. I reached the place a little before eight-thirty, and found the local photographer with his shutters still up. But I did not wait. I just knocked until he appeared with his coat off, evidently in the act of dealing with his breakfast. In a few words I made clear that I wanted the use of his dark room immediately, and this he placed at once at my disposal.

“I set to work immediately to develop, not the plate I had exposed, but the one that had been in the camera during all the time of waiting in the darkness. You see, the lens had been uncapped all that while, so that the whole chancel had been, as it were, under observation. You all know something of my experiments in lightless photography, that is “lightless“ so far as our human eyes are capable of appreciating light? It was X-ray work that started me in that direction, and now I had vague and indefinite hopes that, if anything immaterial had been moving in the chapel the camera might have recorded it.

“And so it was with the most intense and absorbing interest that I watched that plate under the action of the developer. Presently I saw a faint smudge of black appear, and after that others, vague and wavering in outline. I held the negative up to the red light. The marks appeared all over the plate, but had no definiteness, yet they were sufficient to make me very excited, and I put the thing back into the solution. For some minutes further I watched it, lifting it out once or twice to make a more careful scrutiny, but could not discover what the markings might represent, until, suddenly, it occurred to me that in one of two places they appeared to have the shape of a dagger, but so indefinite that I could not be sure. Yet the very idea made me, as you may imagine, feel thrilly. I carried development a little further, then put the negative into the hypo, and commenced work upon the other plate. It came up nicely, and very soon I had a decent negative that appeared similar in every respect — except for the difference of lighting — to the negative I had taken the previous day. This plate I

also fixed; then I washed the two quickly, and put them in methylated spirits for ten or fifteen minutes; after which I took them into the man's kitchen and dried them in the oven.

"Whilst the two plates were drying, the photographer and I made an enlargement from the negative I had taken by daylight. Then we did the same with the two that I had just developed, washing and mounting them as quickly as possible, for I was not troubling about the permanency of the prints. When this was done I took them out into the daylight and made a thorough examination of them, commencing with the one that seemed to show shadowy daggers in several places; but now that it was enlarged I could not be certain that I was not letting my imagination play too large a part in constructing weapons out of the indefinite outlines. And it was with a certain queer disappointment that I put the photograph down and took up the other two to compare.

"For a minute I looked from one to the other, but could distinguish no difference in the scene they portrayed. Then, abruptly, my interest was gripped, for there was a difference. In the second one the dagger was not in its sheath, though I had felt sure it was.

"After that I commenced to compare the two enlargements in a very different manner, using a pair of calipers and the most exacting scrutiny, and so, at last, came upon something that set me all tingling with excitement.

"I paid the photographer, put the three enlargements under my arm without waiting to have them wrapped up, and hurried back to the castle.

"I put the photographs in my room, then went down to see if I could find Sir Alfred, but Mr. George Jarnock, who met me, told me his father was too unwell to rise, and would prefer that no one entered the chapel unless he was about. He made an apologetic excuse that his father was inclined to be, perhaps, a little over-careful; but that, even before the 'thing' happened, his father had been just as particular, always keeping the key, and never allowing the door to be unlocked, except when the place was in use. And, as the young fellow told me, with something of a troubled smile, this attack upon the butler seemed to have justified his father's superstitious attitude towards the place.

"When the young man had left me I took my duplicate key and made for the door of the chapel, and presently had it locked behind me, whilst I carried out some intensely interesting and rather weird experiments. These proved successful to such an extent that I came out of the place in a perfect little fever of excitement. I inquired for Mr. George Jarnock, and was told that he was in the morning room.

"Come along,' I said, when I had rooted him out. 'I want you to give me a lift.'

"He was palpably very much puzzled, but came quickly and asking questions, to which, however, I shook my head, telling him to wait a few minutes.

"I led the way to the armoury. Here I directed him to take one side of a dummy dressed in full armour, whilst I took the other. He obeyed, though evidently vastly bewildered; and I led the way to the chapel door. When he saw that this was open he seemed even more astonished, but held himself in, waiting for me to explain. I locked the door of the chapel behind us, and then we carried the armoured dummy up the aisle to the gate of the chancel.

“Stand back!’ I shouted, as he made a sudden movement to open the gate. ‘Heavens, man! you mustn’t do that!’

“Do what?’ he asked, half frightened and half irritated by my manner and words.

“Stand to one side a moment, and watch!’ I said, and he obeyed. I took the dummy in my arms and turned it to face the altar so that it stood close to the gate. Then, standing well to one side, I pressed its back so that it leant forward a little upon the gate, which flew open. In the same instant it was struck a tremendous blow that hurled it into the aisle, rattling and clanging upon the stone floor.

“Good lord!’ said Jarnock in a frightened voice. ‘It’s the dagger! The thing’s been stabbed, same as Parker!’

“Yes,’ I replied, and saw him glance swiftly towards the doorway; but I’ll do him the justice to say he never budged an inch.

“Come and see how it was done,’ I said, and led the way back to the chancel rail. From the wall to the left of the altar I took down a long, curiously ornamented iron instrument, not unlike a short spear. The sharp end of this I inserted in a hole in the left-hand gate-post. I lifted hard, and a section of the post, from the floor upwards, bent inwards towards the chancel as though hinged at the bottom. Down it went, leaving the remaining part of the post standing. As the movable portion was bent lower, a section of the floor slid to one side, showing a long, shallow cavity, sufficient to enclose the post. I hove it down into the niche, and there was a sharp clang as some catch caught and held it. Then I went and wrenched the dagger from the dummy. I brought the old weapon and placed its hilt in a hole near the top of the post, where it fitted loosely, the point upwards. After that I went to the lever and gave another heave, and the post descended about a foot to the bottom of the cavity, catching there with another clang. I withdrew the lever, and the floor slid back covering post and dagger, and looking no different from the surrounding surface.

“Then I shut the gate, and we both stood well to one side. I took the spear-like lever and gave the gate a little push so that it opened. Instantly there was a loud thud, and something sang through the air, striking the bottom wall of the chapel. It was the dagger. I showed Jarnock then that the portion of the post had sprung back into its place, making the whole as thick as the one upon the right-hand side of the gate.

“There!’ I said, turning to the young man, and tapping the post. ‘There’s the invisible thing that uses the dagger, but who the deuce is the person who sets the trap?’ I looked at him keenly as I spoke.

“My father is the only one who has a key,’ he said. ‘So that I don’t see who could get in to meddle.’

“I looked at him again.

“Look here, Mr. Jarnock,” I said, perhaps a bit curter than I should, considering what I said. ‘Are you quite sure that Sir Alfred is quite balanced — mentally?’

“He looked at me, half frightenedly and flushing a little. ‘I — I don’t know,’ he said, after a slight pause.

“Tell the truth,’ I replied. ‘Haven’t you suspected his balance a bit at times? You needn’t be afraid to tell me.’

“Well, I’ll admit I’ve thought him a bit — a bit strange at times,’ he admitted: ‘but I’ve always tried to blind myself and others to it. You see, he’s my dad.’

“I nodded. ‘Quite right, too; and there’s no need, now, to make any scandal about this, but something must be done — in a quiet sort of way, you know. I should go and have a chat with your father, and tell him you’ve found out about this thing.’ And I touched the divided post.

“He seemed very grateful for my advice; and after shaking my hand very hard, took my key and let himself out of the chapel. He came back in about an hour rather pale, but otherwise quite collected. I was quite right in my surmise. It was old Sir Alfred who set the trap every night, having learnt from an old MS. of its existence and how it was worked, it having been used in the old days as a protection for the golden vessels of the altar, which were kept in a secret recess at the back. This recess Sir Alfred had utilised to store his wife’s jewellery. She had died some twelve years back, and young Jarnock averred that his father had never been the same since.

“I mentioned to him about my puzzlement regarding the trap having been set before the service, when the butler was struck; for, if I understood him aright, his father had been in the habit of setting the trap last thing every night and unsetting it each morning before anyone entered the chapel. He replied that his father, in a fit of temporary forgetfulness, must have set it too early, and hence the almost fatal tragedy.

“That is about all. I don’t think the old man is really insane. I believe it’s more a case of hypochondria through dwelling too much upon his wife’s death and being too much alone. Young Jarnock told me that his father would sometimes pray for hours at a time in the chapel.”

“But you’ve never told us just how you discovered the secret,” I said, speaking for the four of us.

“Oh, that!” replied Carnacki. “I found, on comparing the photos, that the photo taken in the daytime showed a thicker left-hand gate-post than the one taken by flashlight. That put me on to the track that there might be some mechanical dodge in the business and no ghost at all. I examined the post, and I soon found out the business then. It was simple enough, you know, once I hit the right track.

“By the way,” he continued, rising and going to the mantelpiece, “you may be interested to have a look at the ‘waeful dagger.’ Young Jarnock was kind enough to present it to me as a little memento of my adventure.” He handed it round to us; and whilst we examined it, filled and lit his pipe, warning us, between puffs, not to make the story he had told us public. “You see,” he said, “young Jarnock and I made the trap so that it couldn’t work, and I’ve got the dagger; so the whole thing can be hushed up, especially as the butler is on his feet again. But, all the same,” he concluded, with a grim little smile, “I fancy the chapel’ll never lose its reputation as a dangerous place — eh? Should be pretty safe now, I should think, to keep valuables in. As for the old man, I recommended that he should have a decent male attendant. Best thing in such cases, you know.”

“There’s two things, Carnacki, you haven’t explained yet,” I remarked. “What do you think caused the two clangey sounds when you were in the chapel in the dark? And do you think the soft treddy sounds were real, or only a fancy, with your being so tense?”

“Don’t just know, for certain, about the clangs,” he replied. “I’ve puzzled a bit about them. I can only think that the spring which worked the post must have ‘given’ a trifle. If it did, under such a tension, it would make a bit of a ringing noise. And a

little sound goes a long way in the middle of the night when you're thinking of 'ghostesses.' You can understand that — eh?"

"Yes," I assented. "And the other sounds?"

"Well, the same thing — I mean the extraordinary quietness — may help to explain these a bit. They may have been some usual enough sound that would never have been noticed under ordinary circumstances, or they may have been only fancy. It's just impossible to say. As for the slithery noise, I'm pretty sure, now, that the tripod leg of my camera must have slipped a little, and if it did, it may have jolted the cap off the base board, which would make a little tap when it struck the floor of the aisle. At least, that's how I've tried to explain it to myself."

"And the dagger being there in its place that night when first you entered the chapel?" I queried.

"It wasn't; I mistook the cross-hilted sheath for the complete weapon, you see."

I nodded.

Now, you chaps," he said "clear out, I want to get a sleep."

We rose, shook him by the hand, and passed out into the night, each to his separate home; and as we went, I doubt not that each pondered upon the strange story he had heard; for, truly, it is the true things that are strange. Very much so!

Other stories

William Hope Hodgson wrote three other tales of Carnacki, the ghost finder: *The Hog*, *The Haunted Jarvee* and *The Find*. These three stories weren't published until after Hodgson's death, so unlike the other six, they are still protected by copyright in the United Kingdom (and will be until 2040). I'm based in the United Kingdom, so unfortunately I'm unable to include the last three stories here.

Luckily, that doesn't mean you can't read them. Copyright law works a bit differently in the United States of America, and all nine Carnacki stories are in the public domain over there.

You can read *The Hog*, *The Haunted Jarvee* and *The Find* for free:

- in plaintext format at www.forgottenfutures.com/game/ff4
- in Kindle, .EPUB and .PDF editions at gothictexts.wordpress.com/2013/09/20/carnacki-the-ghost-finder-by-w-h-hodgson