

The Horse of the Invisible

By William Hope Hodgson

I had that afternoon received an invitation from Carnacki.

When I reached his place I found him 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 little more than 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 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 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 already, an extraordinary story and though I have always known about it, I have never thought it to be anything more than an 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 entrusted 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 one account 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 thing 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 and the servants came running to know what was wrong. 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. Then, later, in the middle of the night the old Captain was waked 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 waked 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: “H’sh! what’s that?”

‘They both listened and then Beaumont heard it—the sound of a horse outside of 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 he 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 who had blown him that kiss. He knew that 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 sneek 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 finished 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 time 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 the 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, 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 saw we must have been walking 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 which we had just occupied. 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 stairway. 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 realized 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 vet would not stop me from being able to work my flashlight.

‘Then I ran back to Beaumont. He held out his 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 afterwards 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 realized 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 pulsing in my throat and temples deafened me.

‘I dare say we waited quite half a minute and then came the further restless clumping of a great hoof. Immediately afterwards the sounds came right on as if some invisible thing passed through the closed door and the ponderous tread was upon us. We jumped, each of us, to our side of 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 was extraordinarily rigid and pringling and I was horribly breathless. I stood for a little time like this, my head turned so that I could 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 off the flashlight. Immediately afterwards, 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 the 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 bedroom 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, feeling as he did, 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 in some ways 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 staved outside. Poor devil!

'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 afterwards I heard someone stir within the bedroom. 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 one of Harford's where the hand of the child kept materializing 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 just before 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. “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.

‘Away in the darkness there was a confused shouting and I caught the sounds of shooting, 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 light blazed out momentarily, showing me the leaves of a big tree close at hand, quivering in the night breeze, but I saw 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 game-keepers, racing hard up the drive with their lanterns and 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 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; a little behind him stood the old butler, a battle-axe from one of the arm-stands in the hail 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 of the girl’s door. I asked him how he felt and then, so soon as the girl and her mother 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. It had got quite dark and 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 sounds 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 darkness and they started running. 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 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 shotgun. 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 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 onwards 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 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.

'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 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 shotgun 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 flash-light, 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, hut 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 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 the 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 door, ceiling and walls.

‘Yet, in the end I had to admit that the place itself was absolutely normal and so we came away. But t sealed the door and outside, opposite each door-post I made the First and Last Signs of the Saaamaaa Ritual and joined 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, Parsket and I took one of the bathrooms to develop the negatives that I had been taking. Yet none of the plates had

anything to tell us 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, I remember thinking then, and again, later.

‘Just then 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 was nearly sick with the naked fear I had on me. 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 then 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 him.

‘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, in a frozen group. I remember 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 at the end of the corridor. And immediately afterwards the clungk, clunk—clungk, clunk 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, I was now 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 to get away 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 door of the girl’s bedroom. And then 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 was 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, incredibly masterful gaze. But there was really nothing to be seen. And suddenly the clungk, clunk—clungk, clunk recommenced and passed onward down the passage. 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. Then the women came out of 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.

‘I am quite certain that it was Parsket who broke Beaumont’s arm. He knew all the details of the so-called “Horse Legend”, and he 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 bumping up 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 dents in the woodwork.

‘The sounds of the horse galloping round the house were possibly made also 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. In any case, I don’t feel perfect certainty on this point. I failed to find any hoof marks, as you remember.

‘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 almost 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 can not 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 apparent 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. I hate to think this, but I’m bound to. Anyway, it is obvious that the man was temporarily a bit off his normal balance. Love’s a queer disease!

‘Then, there is no doubt at all but that Parsket left the cord to the butler’s bell 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 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 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 thing of monstrosity.

‘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 realization 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. ‘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 recognized formula.

And we went presently out into the quiet of the Embankment, and so to our homes.