

# The Gateway of the Monster

By William Hope Hodgson

In response to Carnacki's usual card of invitation to have dinner and listen to a story, I arrived promptly at 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.

"No," 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 will call Anderson, asking for an appointment. I arranged a time and when he turned up I found that he wished me to look into, and see whether I could not clear up, a long-standing and 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 up to the house late in the afternoon and discovered 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 elderly 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 when 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 shivered with fright, listening; for a time 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 make sure, 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.

“Peters, the 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 could be no danger and then he could accompany me himself.

“Of course, I told him not to bother. I explained that I should do no more than look around a bit and perhaps fix 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 Peters followed with his bunch of keys. He unlocked the door, but would not come inside with me. He was evidently in quite a fright and renewed his request that I would put off my examination until daylight. Of course I laughed at him, 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 *bebe* 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 apologized, but made it very dear that I did not realize the danger of the room; and I could see, generally, that he was getting into a really 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 fret my nerves and the ‘feel’ of the room was bad enough already, without making things any nastier.

“For a time further, I worked, stretching ribbons across a little above the floor and sealing them so that the merest touch would break the seals, 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 dock 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, Peters,' 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, though, as you can imagine. Near the entrance 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, Peters!' 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 Peters 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.

"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 myself in 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 the 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 funk'd it, simply funk'd 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 the safety of the day comes. 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'd an old pair of carpet slippers on.

“ ‘Hub, Peters!’ 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.’

“ ‘Peters,’ 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 visiting-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 said, ‘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 Peters, 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 Peters 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, which made me feel more my own man. Then to the Grey Room again, and with Peters’ 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 unusual. I can assure you I began to realize 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, Peters 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. You see, if the door 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 insure 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 darkroom 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 of 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, red 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.

"Suddenly, my lamp was put out, and I could not see a yard before me. I realized 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, quite *near* to 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. Can you understand? I felt that there was something the other side of my 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 imagine, when you come to think of it!

"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 until it was almost 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 grabbed together 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 gone 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 Peters, with my coffee. When I had drunk it we both walked 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 visiting-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 the seals, only to find that not one had been broken.

"Then I turned and looked at old Peters 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 Peters 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 Peters 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 himself and me 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 entered and locked and sealed myself in and set-to 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 a certain 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 fourteenth century. At first, naturally, I imagined it was just an expression of the superstition of his time, and it was not until long after my first reading 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 Noving 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 of a certain number of vibrations in vacuum, he lost his position—almost as if it cut him off from the Immaterial.

“That made me think, and led eventually to 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 an abnatural 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 realized suddenly that the dusk was upon me, for the window was grey and unfriendly. Then I stared round at the big, empty room, over the double-barrier of electric and candle light, and had an abrupt, extraordinary sense of weirdness thrust upon me—in the air, you know, it seemed; 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 the action of 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 material thing. 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 into the room.

“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 heaped and 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! 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, prickling all over my head, 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 dull thudding of the blood beating in my head. Yet immediately afterwards I heard again the slurring sound of the bedclothes being dragged off the bed. In the midst of my nervous tension I remembered the camera and reached out 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 abominable unnaturalness of the thing that had just been done before me!

“Suddenly, 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 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 in the door was slammed with a terrific crash that filled the whole room a sort of hollow thunder. I jumped like a frightened child. There seemed such a power behind the noise, as if 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 on my knees, 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 who 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 realized that I was safe, and then I got myself together in the middle of the pentacles, feeling horribly done 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. 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 wide 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, I began to have 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-materialized 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 ah-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 as much fear almost, as 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 the 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. Peters 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 through the woodwork 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 of the probe 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 most intimately connected with the history of the haunting. This ring had been 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 one evening, 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 then no one has spent a night in the Grey Room until I did so. The ring had been lost so long that its very existence 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, if I may so phrase my idea. It was a queer thought, I know, and possibly was not my own, but one of those mental nudgings from the Outside.

“You see, the wind had come from that part of the room where the ring lay. I pondered the thought a lot. 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. 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 Peters 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 last 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 I had a queer knowledge 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 hit me in the face. It was flowing up from the floor close to me. I stared 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 realized 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 realize 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 couple of moments 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, but 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 the 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, in that moment, 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 grew steadier.

“I got a little sleep later, but woke when Peters 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 further 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 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 grayish 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 Peters nearly fainted when he knew that I meant to, but by the third night he seemed to realize 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.