

The Arcana of the Alleys A Tale of Carnacki, the Ghost-Finder

by
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“And that, gentlemen, is the tale that I call ‘The Fragmentary Gate’. Now,” Carnacki said, rising from his chair and presumably making ready to evict us from his den, as was his custom. His attention, however, was caught by the clock upon the mantel and he paused, wearing an expression of mild surprise. “Eh? Not even ten yet?”

It was true that the story was shorter than those Carnacki typically related to us, but that Carnacki himself was surprised by this seemed unusual. The man was nothing if not detail-oriented and being taken aback by his own oversight must have meant he had weighty issues on his mind indeed. From long association, however, I knew that if Carnacki wanted to speak of whatever was bothering him, he would only do so when he was good and ready—not a moment before and not at anyone’s impetus but his own.

Our host sat back down in his overstuffed armchair and fiddled with his pipe beneath the gaze of his four guests: Arkright, Jessop, Taylor and myself, Dodgson. I had known Carnacki long enough to recognize that he was stalling for time. It was a reasonable assumption that Carnacki was hesitant for the evening to end early and I didn’t blame him; after all, the good food and drink, the fine company and rousing stories our host told were some of the greatest pleasures of my life. The sentiment was shared by our friends and I was sure by Thomas Carnacki, as well. Despite knowing many people, he counted few outside of this room as dear friends; he had told us so more than once.

Being Carnacki’s close friends, it should have been understood that if our host wanted us to stay longer, he need only say so, but the moment dragged on.

At last, I rose from my chair by the fire. “Well, Carnacki, if that is the end of the tale, perhaps we should all be on our way?”

Arkright hesitantly stood as well, sharing looks with Jessop and Taylor, both of whom remained seated.

“Sit down, Dodgson, Arkright,” Carnacki said, putting a match to his freshly-packed pipe. “I’ve said nothing about ending the evening, have I?”

Arkright returned to his seat instantly and I, more slowly, sank back down into mine while allowing myself the hint of a smile. “Of course, Carnacki. We simply didn’t wish to wear out our welcome.”

“Ha!” he barked. “Since when has that stopped you before?”

“I’ve merely been trying to come up with a story both new to you lot and short enough to get you to your beds at a reasonable hour,” he continued around a puff from his pipe. “It’s taken me a moment, but I believe I have one that fits the bill perfectly.”

Carnacki’s gaze swept over us, the glow from the fireplace and the more-muted one from his pipe giving a devilish cast to his features. “You know my work takes me across the length and breadth of the British Isles, across the Irish Sea and occasionally even to the continent, but there’s one series of adventures that took me even further afield. I’ve said little of my time in America, for the whole is a tale I’m not ready to tell even after these many years, but there’s one episode I’d like to share with you. So if you’re ready, gentlemen, fill your pipes or your glasses as need be and lend me your ears.”

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