

Noël
2020

CARNACKI'S CHRISTMAS CONUNDRUM



WILLIAM JEFFREY RANKIN

It's Christmas Eve, and Carnacki finds himself imprisoned beneath London. Worse than that, he's not alone. To free himself, he must confront the *Outside* agency responsible, or this Christmas will be his last!

Carnacki's Christmas Conundrum (Sample)

The Carnacki Casebook, Case No. 10

by William Jeffrey Rankin

Web: <http://carnacki.wjrankin.com>

Email: jeffrey.rankin@me.com

Copyright © 2020 William Jeffrey Rankin

No part of this document or the related files may be reproduced or transmitted in any form, by any means (electronic, photocopying, recording, or otherwise) without the prior written permission of the publisher.

Note: The record of a most unexpected Christmas in the year 1908. - Thomas Carnacki

Upon waking, the first thing I felt was the pounding in my head. The second was the intense cold that had nearly paralyzed my body. I lay upon a cold stone floor and, judging by the utter silence, I was indoors. The darkness was absolute, so it was impossible to tell. I felt about with my hands and could feel the regular surface and edges of stonework. I was inside some artificial structure, then. But where? And what had happened? For the moment, those questions had to wait as I needed to warm myself. With an involuntary groan, I raised myself to a sitting position. The pounding in my head intensified. I took several slow, deep breaths, and the hammering subsided after a moment. I began to shiver. "Good," I thought, for this meant that my body was reacting normally to the conditions under which it had been placed. As I felt about, my left hand touched something made of wood: a post or, more likely, a table leg as my hand reached the underside of a horizontal surface. Grabbing the table's edge, I somewhat clumsily pulled myself up. For at least a minute I stood there, hands upon the table, and tried to steady myself. It was as if I'd had too much to drink. That slight exertion had caused me to shiver even more violently, and I began to circle one arm in a windmill motion to help warm myself. In another moment I felt steady enough to run in place—I wondered how silly I would've looked had the darkness not been complete. It was worth it, for within a few minutes I'd warmed up sufficiently that my teeth had stopped chattering. I was still terribly cold, having apparently lost my heavy overcoat.

There were at least three objects resting upon the table's surface: a small box of matches—nearly empty, an oil lamp, and a thin slip of paper. It seemed unlikely the items were there by chance.

I opened the matchbox, took out a match, and struck it against the surface of the table. For a moment, my surroundings were revealed: the stone floor, the wooden table, a chair set close by, and the items on the table. The match burned poorly in the cold and damp of the room—I'd only have seconds to light the lamp. Fortunately, this was but the work of a moment, and the lamp burned steadily, if not brightly. I picked it up and shone it about the room. The chamber was of dark stone, dripping with moisture, some ten-foot square and with a stout wooden door providing the only exit.

I examined the slip of paper that lay upon the table. The writing seemed an unreadable and jumbled mess, and it took me a moment to understand why. Despite the fine hand, it was written entirely in reverse—as it would've appeared had it been seen in a mirror. I wondered who would do such a thing, and why. Extracting the pencil and little notebook I always have in my jacket, I transcribed the note. It read as follows:

A sample from *Carnacki's Christmas Conundrum* by William Jeffrey Rankin
<http://carnacki.wjrankin.com/stories/christmas-conundrum.html>

Greetings, Mr. Carnacki—I'm pleased you've recovered sufficiently to partake of my hospitality. You don't know me (although we did speak earlier tonight), but suffice it to say you made life for a former colleague of mine very difficult and, consequently, for me as well. I've therefore decided to repay you in kind. You'll be my guest—permanently, I'm afraid. But don't worry, you won't be alone. I've made certain of that.

F. W. B.

P.S. Merry Christmas!

I was flummoxed. The initials meant nothing to me, and I couldn't imagine who the colleague might be. I wondered, too, what the author of the note had meant by my not being alone. Whatever the case, I had no intention of remaining his guest, and immediately set about finding a way out of my predicament.