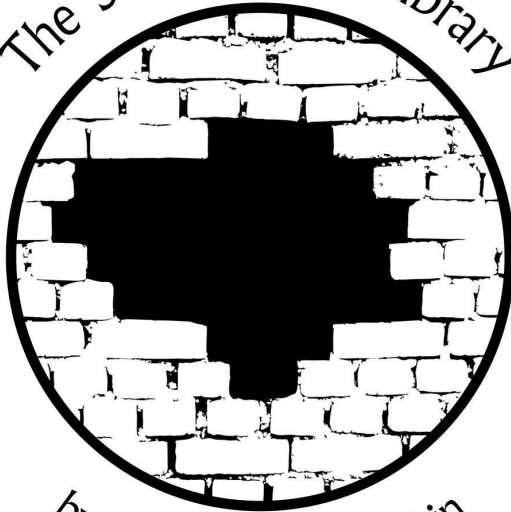


The Secret in the Library



by William Jeffrey Rankin

“ As I sat in the near-dark of the office, I was struck by how common sounds, just background noise during the day, seem much louder and to take on a much greater—and sometimes sinister—significance when one is alone in a large, old, and dark building at night. The noises were sudden, sharp, and full of portent.

The Secret in the Library
The Carnacki Casebook, Case No. 03

The Secret in the Library (Sample)

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Shaw laid a document upon the table. It consisted of a few pages and included a list of titles, passages, and other pertinent information. We passed it amongst ourselves, noting that the titles seemed unrelated: A medieval manuscript on astrology, a sixteenth century volume on weather, and an illuminated manuscript from the thirteenth century. But the passages recorded all contained references, sometimes direct and other times oblique, to a betrayal and evidence thereof on the premises.

“I didn’t know what to think of these odd incidents,” Shaw continued, “was it all some elaborate joke I wasn’t in on, or had a monomaniac somehow gained surreptitious access to the library? If the former, the joke was lost on me, and I didn’t see the point. If the latter, the perpetrator was ingenious in leaving absolutely no evidence behind beyond the volumes themselves. And was he a danger? I was determined, whatever the case, to discover who was doing this, and why, and so decided to spend a night in the library, in the small office at the far end of the restricted section. I was sure to discover who had been doing this, now on an almost nightly basis. The following night, I waited until the library had closed and all the staff had left. It must have been near 11:00 P.M. when I situated myself in the small office, leaving the door slightly ajar. The library was just as it is on any other night after closing: Most of the lights were off, those that were left on had been turned down, and the coal furnace maintained a low burn. As I sat in the near-dark of the office, I was struck by how common sounds, just background noise during the day, seem much louder and to take on a much greater—and sometimes sinister—significance when one is alone in a large, old, and dark building at night. The noises were sudden, sharp, and full of portent. I nearly got up from my seated position on the floor to investigate. However the noises seemed to come from some distance away and never persisted for long, so I maintained my position in the office.

At around 1:00 A.M., I took a small cup out of the case I’d brought and poured myself a little brandy from the flask in my jacket. This was somewhat of a tactical mistake as the late hour (following a busy day), my nerves, and the brandy all had the cumulative effect of causing me to doze off. I’m not sure how long I slept, but I awoke in a disoriented panic. There had been a loud noise nearby—I don’t believe I’d dreamt it—that reverberated throughout the library. I sat motionlessly for some time, my heart pounding, then braced myself and called out sternly, ‘Who’s there?’ The sound of my own voice, while breaking the spell of panic I’d felt, seemed to impose an even more threatening silence on my

surroundings. I glanced at the clock on the wall: It was 2:30 A.M. Getting up from the floor where I'd camped, I peered through the office door. In the low light I could see the restricted section and a desk at the end of one of the rows. An open book now lay upon the desk that had previously been untenanted. I cautiously opened the door and walked out to the desk to examine the book. It was a large, heavy tome on demonology, quite old and recently donated to the library. There was a black smudge marking one of the passages which read, in part, 'vengeance will be his.' That was enough for me, and I left the library as quickly as I could, making it home a short time later.

"Later that morning I spoke with Wilkinson, this time showing him the information I'd collected. I was about to tell him of my misadventure the night before when he gasped and seemed to experience a sort of shock: He went white as a sheet, began perspiring profusely, and grabbed clumsily at a nearby chair to sit down. I asked him if were all right, but he dismissed my concerns and the information I'd presented, stating it must all have been 'some sort of ridiculous prank.' I believe he left for the day shortly after our conversation. The following day he seemed his usual confident self. When I inquired whether he had any advice regarding how I should proceed, he ordered me to cease my investigation, stating that we both 'had more important things with which to occupy ourselves.' I was confused about this change of course, and decided to continue my investigation despite Wilkinson's order. At first, I was unsure how to proceed. But then I remembered Mr. Carnacki, and so contacted him for a consultation. As I told him when we first met, I believed someone was trying to convey a message, although as to how and why, I was baffled."