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The Witch's Heart  
The Carnacki Casebook, Case No. 07

**The Witch's Heart (Sample)**  
The Carnacki Casebook, Case No. 07  
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"This went on for, perhaps, a little under two hours. Evening was coming on, and I hadn't seen a soul. I was drifting with the current, and the sun was low at my back, when I finally spotted a group of several people on the southern bank, where it was rocky and relatively clear of trees. I initially took them for fisherman, they stood quite still, as if patiently awaiting a strike. But as I passed close by, their details became plain, and I could see they were not fishermen at all—they were... straw men, similar to the scarecrows you see set in the midst of fields. They were, however, lacking the typical accouterments: They weren't dressed in threadbare, castaway clothing, none of them had a pipe stuck where a mouth would be, and none had stones or corncobs placed in an effort to make a face. They were set in various positions, which seemed odd as well—one bending down, extending its arms as if it were trying to pick something up, another standing upright with its straw hands covering its face, and another lay upon the ground. It was all vaguely strange, and I wondered who on Earth would've made them, and why. I thought perhaps one of the local farmers, or their children, had made them, but I hadn't seen a single farmhouse since setting out."

"The river bent to the northeast and widened, and I caught sight of a small island in its midst. But for the trunks of a few fallen trees, its sandy banks were clear and flat. Several yards within its interior, a tree-covered hill rose precipitously, its height considerably greater than that of the surrounding land. The foliage on the hill itself was already thick with new leaves and other flora, and the whole island appeared as a emerald jewel amidst the dark water."

"As I paddled along the northern bank of the island, a campsite came into view. A small boat, similar to the one in which I sat, had been pulled onto the bank, a tent erected, and a fire ring set up with several large stones. 'Here he is,' I thought, relieved, 'the fishing must be good indeed!' I paddled to the bank and dragged my boat next to his."

"I called out to Gavin, hearing only the continual sound of the river, the sighing of the trees, and birdsong in reply. His fire had burnt out some time ago. I poked my head into his tent—inside was a sleeping bag, a backpack, and a few other odds and ends. Assuming he was fishing somewhere along the bank, I began walking along it to the northeast. I was eager to find him since it was becoming dark. As I reached the eastern side of the island, I spied a figure standing near the water. 'Turner, didn't you hear me calling?' I cried. But the figure didn't move, and as I grew closer I saw it was another straw man. I didn't know why, but at the time I felt a distinct chill—there was just something so damnably strange about the thing."

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"I still hadn't found him by the time I'd completed my circuit of the island, and it had grown quite dark. I now had no choice but to wait for him at the campsite, and planned to give him the devil when he finally turned up. He'd left plenty of tinder and wood, so I had a fire going in no time. Emily had packed me a few sandwiches, so I had a little to eat while I waited for his return. Ordinarily, this would've made for a pleasant evening, but as the night grew long and Turner didn't appear, I felt a growing sense of apprehension. He certainly wouldn't be fishing or exploring in the complete darkness. I called out to him again, but received no response. It was quite late, so I crawled into his tent and closed the fly. I'd set up a fire reflector with the many stones that were available, and the fire would burn for some time, so I'd have no difficulty staying warm. Despite the strange situation, I drifted off to sleep quickly."

"I awoke, gradually, to the sound of a voice outside the tent. It was whispering, and I couldn't make out what was being said. There was also a crunching sound as of someone walking over gravel. I laid there, listening, for several seconds, and wondered if someone, perhaps even Gavin, was playing a trick on me. It seemed unlikely, and I got out of the sleeping bag as quietly as I could and untied the tent fly. The fire had burned down to just a few embers and provided little light, but the night was clear and, in the starlight, I could make out the shape of a man several yards away near the river's edge."

"Turner!" I hissed from the tent. The shape didn't move. I retrieved an electric torch from my pack, turned it on, and shined its light on the shape standing outside. My heart skipped a beat, for another straw man stood outside my tent."