



“ I believe we're ready. Bennett, Arkright, keep an eye on the pentacle, mind the rope doesn't get too slack, and be ready to render aid upon our return.”

"Right then," said Jessop, inspecting the cylinder of his revolver and snapping it closed, "let's fetch ourselves a cat!"

A Yuletide Horror
The Carnacki Casebook, Case No. 04

A Yuletide Horror (Sample)

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We sat in the common room of The Pig's Ear, and spirits were high. Christmas was a week away, and the sights, sounds, and smells of the room reflected it: Patrons, laden with packages, jockeying for a vacant table, a local troupe playing a selection of holiday favorites, an aromatic bowl of punch set upon the bar nearby, and laughter erupting at regular intervals from several of the parties present. The four of us had been early enough to secure a table close to the fire, and away from the entrance. Despite this, we occasionally felt a chill breeze with the comings and goings of the many celebrants. It remained a cheery scene, nonetheless, with each of us, in turn, relating our plans for the holiday. Jessop would be heading out the next day to Yorkshire to spend a week with family. Arkright was staying in London as he remained on call, and Bennett would be spending time with friends in Kent, before crossing the channel to the continent and then journeying to Romania in the New Year (her second trip in less than six months, I noted). I would be staying in London, and was in the midst of preparations for the week ahead, having scratched off a number of purchases Jessica wanted me to make before family arrived over the next few days. I was about to suggest to Arkright that he join us on Christmas Eve when another strong draft of cold air swirled through the common room. The draft persisted, and a voice shouted "In or out, guv'nor?" above the din. It was immediately joined by a chorus of patrons requesting the same. I turned from my position facing the fireplace to see the dark figure of a man silhouetted in the open doorway. His muffled head turned from left to right, as if he were searching for someone. He then entered the common room and proceeded to walk toward *our* table, staggering several times and steadying himself against the bar. We exchanged looks of concern and curiosity as the man came close, staggered once again, and fell across our table, his arms outspread. "Good Lord!" exclaimed Bennett, as we jumped from our chairs. Several of the patrons nearby laughed, believing the man had enjoyed more ale than was good for him, as Thompson—the proprietor of The Pig's Ear—made his way through the crowd toward us. Arkright pulled down the stricken man's muffler, revealing his identity. "Carnacki!" he exclaimed. Arkright and I took hold of his arms and gently settled him into an available chair. He seemed in a daze, only half aware of his surroundings. "Mr. Thompson," said Bennett over the renewed din, "a private room, and a glass of brandy!"

Thompson led the way through the crowd as Arkright and I supported Carnacki. We followed him up a short flight of stairs, around a corner, and finally into a smaller room, where a young lad tended to a fire. We removed Carnacki's

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overcoat, gently laying him upon a couch. Arkright examined him, searching for injuries, as Bennett brought a small snifter of brandy to his lips. "Is he injured?" I asked, but Arkright shook his head. "Neither injured nor drunk. He seems almost in a state of shock, and he's cold as well. Stoke the fire a bit!" I put more coal upon the fire as Arkright and Bennett continued their ministrations. Carnacki began to stir: His eyes fluttered open, he shivered, and he looked about in a confused manner.