

The Whistling Room

By William Hope Hodgson

Carnacki shook a friendly fist at me as I entered late. Then he opened the door into the dining room and ushered the four of us—Jessop, Arkright, Taylor, and me—in to dinner.

We dined well, as usual, and equally as usual Carnacki was pretty silent during the meal. At the end we took our wine and cigars to our accustomed positions, and Carnacki—having got himself comfortable in his big chair—began without any preliminary:

“I have just got back from Ireland again,” he said. “And I thought you chaps would be interested to hear my news. Besides, I fancy I shall see the thing clearer after I have told it all out straight. I must tell you this, though, at the beginning: Up to the present moment I have been utterly and completely stumped. I have tumbled upon one of the most peculiar cases of haunting—or devilment of some sort—that I have come against. Now listen.

“I have been spending the last few weeks at Iastrae Castle, about twenty miles northeast of Galway. I got a letter about a month ago from a Mr. Sid K. Tassoc, who it seemed had bought the place lately and moved in, only to find that he had got a very peculiar piece of property.

“When I reached there he met me at the station and drove me up to the castle. I found that he was ‘pigging it’ there with his young brother and another American, who seemed to be half servant and half companion. It appears that all the servants had left the place, in a body as you might say, and now they were managing among themselves, assisted by some day help.

“The three of them got together a scratch feed, and Tassoc told me all about the trouble whilst we were at table. It is most extraordinary and different from anything that I have had to do with, though that Buzzing Case was very queer, too.

“Tassoc began right in the middle of his story. ‘We’ve got a room in this shanty,’ he said, ‘which has got a most infernal whistling in it, sort of haunting it. The thing starts anytime, you never know when, and it goes on until it frightens you. It’s not ordinary whistling, and it isn’t the wind. Wait till you hear it.’

“‘We’re all carrying guns,’ said the boy, and slapped his coat pocket.

“‘As bad as that?’ I said. The older brother nodded. ‘I may be soft,’ he replied, but wait till you’ve heard it. Sometimes I think it’s some infernal thing, and the next moment I’m just as sure that someone’s playing a trick on us.’

“‘Why?’ I asked. ‘What is to be gained?’

“‘You mean,’ he said, ‘that people usually have some good reason for playing tricks as elaborate as this. Well, I’ll tell you. There’s a lady in this province, by the name of Miss Donnehue, who’s going to be my wife, this day two months. She’s more beautiful than they make them, and so far as I can see, I’ve just stuck my head into an Irish hornet’s nest. There’s about a score of hot young Irishmen been courting her these two years gone, and now that I’ve come along and cut them out, they feel raw against me. Do you begin to understand the possibilities?’

“‘Yes,’ I said. Perhaps I do in a vague sort of way, but I don’t see how all this affects the room.’

“‘Like this,’ he said. ‘When I’d fixed it up with Miss Donnehue, I looked out for a place and bought this one. Afterward I told her, one evening during dinner, that I’d decided to tie up here. And then she asked me whether I wasn’t afraid of the whistling room. I told her it must have

been thrown in gratis, as I'd heard nothing about it. There were some of her men friends present, and I saw a smile go round. I found out after a bit of questioning that several people have bought this place during the last twenty-odd years. And it was always on the market again, after a trial.

“ ‘Well, the chaps started to bait me a bit and offered to take bets after dinner that I'd not stay six months in this shanty. I looked once or twice at Miss Donnehue, but I could see that she didn't take it as a joke at all. Partly, I think, because there was a bit of a sneer in the way the men were tackling me, and partly because she really believed there was something in this yarn of the whistling room.

“ ‘However, after dinner I did what I could to even things up with the others. I nailed all their bets and screwed them down good and safe. I guess some of them are going to be hard hit, unless I lose, which I don't mean to. Well, there you have practically the whole yarn.’

“ ‘Not quite,’ I told him. ‘All I know is that you have bought a castle with a room in it that is in some way queer and that you've been doing some betting. Also, I know that your servants have got frightened and run away. Tell me something about the whistling.’

“ ‘Oh, that!’ said Tassoc. ‘That started the second night we were in. I'd had a good look round the room in the daytime, as you can understand, for the talk up at Arlestrae—Miss Donnehue's place—had me wonder a bit. But it seems just as usual as some of the other rooms in the old wing, only perhaps a bit more lonesome feeling. But that may be only because of the talk about it, you know.

“ ‘The whistling started about ten o'clock on the second night, as I said. Tom and I were in the library when we heard an awfully queer whistling coming along the east corridor—the room is in the east wing, you know.

“ ‘“That's that blessed ghost!” I said to Tom, and we collared the lamps off the table and went up to have a look. I tell you, even as we dug along the corridor, it took me a bit in the throat, it was so beastly queer. It was a sort of tune in a way, but more as if a devil or some rotten thing were laughing at you and going to get round at your back. That's how it makes you feel.

“ ‘When we got to the door we didn't wait, but rushed it open, and then, I tell you, the sound of the thing fairly hit me in the face. Tom said he got it the same way—sort of felt stunned and bewildered. We looked all round and soon got so nervous we just cleared out, and I locked the door.

“ ‘We came down here and had a stiff drink each. Then we felt better and began to feel we'd been nicely had. So we took sticks and went out into the grounds, thinking after all it must be some of these confounded Irishmen working the ghost trick on us. But there was nothing stirring.

“ ‘We went back into the house and walked over it and then paid another visit to the room. But we simply couldn't stand it. We fairly ran out and locked the door again. I don't know how to put it into words, but I had a feeling of being up against something that was rottenly dangerous. You know! We've carried our guns ever since.

“ ‘Of course, we had a real turnout of the room next day, and the whole house place, and we even hunted round the grounds, but there was nothing queer. And now I don't know what to think, except That the sensible part of me tells me that it's some plan of these wild Irishmen to try to take a rise out of me.’

“ ‘Done anything since?’ I asked him.

“ ‘Yes,’ he said. ‘Watched outside the door of the room at night and chased round the grounds and sounded the walls and floor of the room. We've done everything we could think of, and it's beginning to get on our nerves, so we sent for you.’

“By this time we had finished eating. As we rose from the table, Tassoc suddenly called out, ‘Ssh! Listen!’

“We were instantly silent, listening. Then I heard it, an extraordinary hooning whistle, monstrous and inhuman, coming from far away through corridors to my right.

“ ‘By Heaven,’ said Tassoc, ‘and it’s scarcely dark yet! Collar those candles, both of you, and come along.’

“In a few moments we were all out of the door and racing up the stairs. Tassoc turned into a long corridor, and we followed, shielding our candles as we ran. The sound seemed to fill all the passage as we drew near, until I had the feeling that the whole air throbbled under the power of sortie wanton, immense force—a sense of an actual taint, as you might say, of monstrosity all about us.

“Tassoc unlocked the door then, giving it a push with his foot, jumped back, and drew his revolver. As the door flew open the sound beat out at us with an effect impossible to explain to one who has not heard it—with a certain horrible personal note in it, as if in the darkness you could picture the room rocking and creaking in mad, vile glee to its own filthy piping and whistling and hooning, and yet all the time aware of you in particular. To stand there and listen was to be stunned by realization. It was as if someone showed you the mouth of a vast pit suddenly and said, ‘That’s Hell,’ and you *knew* that they had spoken the truth. Do you get it, even a little bit?

“I stepped a pace into the room, held the candle over my head, and looked quickly round. Tassoc and his brother joined me, and the man came up at the back. We all held our candles high. I was deafened with the shrill, piping boon of the whistling, and then, clear in my ear, something seemed to be saying to me: ‘Get out of here—quick! Quick! Quick!’

“As you chaps know, I never neglect that sort of thing. Sometimes it may be nothing but nerves, but, as you will remember, it was just such a warning that saved me in the Grey Dog Case and in the Yellow Finger Experiments, as well as other times. Well, I turned sharp round to the others. ‘Out!’ I said. ‘For the love of Heaven, *out, quick!*’ And in an instant I had them into the passage.

“There came an extraordinary yelling scream into the hideous whistling and then, like a clap of thunder, an utter silence. I slammed the door and locked it. Then, taking the key, I looked round at the others. They were pretty white, and I imagine I must have looked that way, too. And there we stood a moment, silent.

“ ‘Come down out of this and have some whisky,’ said Tassoc at last, in a voice he tried to make ordinary; and he led the way. I was the back man, and I knew we all kept looking over our shoulders. When we got downstairs, Tassoc passed the bottle round. He took a drink himself and slapped his glass onto the table, then sat down with a thud.

“That’s a lovely thing to have in the house with you, isn’t it!’ he said. And directly afterward, What on earth made you hustle us all out like that, Carnacki?’

“ ‘Something seemed to be telling me to get out, *quick,*’ I said. ‘Sounds a bit silly—superstitious, I know—but when you are meddling with this sort of thing, you’ve got to take notice of queer fancies and risk being laughed at.’

“I told him about the Grey Dog business, and he nodded a lot to that. ‘Of course,’ I said, ‘this may be nothing more than those would-be rivals of yours playing some funny game, but personally, though I’m going to keep an open mind, I feel that there is something beastly and dangerous about this thing.’

“We talked for a while longer, and then Tassoc suggested billiards, which we played in a pretty halfhearted fashion, all the time cocking an ear to the door for sounds. But none came, so later, after coffee, he suggested early bed and a thorough overhaul of the room in the morning.

“My bedroom was in the newer part of the castle, and the door opened into the picture gallery. At the east end of the gallery was the entrance to the corridor of the east wing; this was shut off from the gallery by two old and heavy oak doors which looked rather odd and quaint beside the more modern doors of the various rooms.

“When I reached my room, I did not go to bed but began to unpack my instrument trunk. I intended to take one or two preliminary steps at once in my investigation of the extraordinary whistling.

“Presently, when the castle had settled into quietness, I slipped out of my room and across to the entrance of the great corridor. I opened one of the low, squat doors and threw the beam of my pocket searchlight down the passage. It was empty, and I went through the doorway and closed the oak behind me. Then along the great passageway, throwing my light before and behind and keeping my revolver handy.

“I had hung a ‘protection belt’ of garlic round my neck, and the smell of it seemed to fill the corridor and give me assurance; for, as you all know, it is a wonderful protection against the more usual Aeiirii forms of semimaterialization by which I supposed the whistling might be produced, though, at that period of my investigation, I was still quite prepared to find it due to some perfectly natural cause. It is astonishing the enormous number of cases that prove to have nothing abnormal in them.

“In addition to wearing the necklet, I had plugged my ears loosely with garlic, and, as I did not intend to stay more than a few minutes in the room, I hoped to be safe.

“When I reached the door and put my hand into my pocket for the key, I had a sudden feeling of sickening funk. But I was not going to back out if I could help it. I unlocked the door and turned the handle. Then I gave the door a sharp push with my foot, as Tassoc had done, and drew my revolver, though I did not expect to have any use for it, really.

“I shone the searchlight all round the room and then stepped inside with a disgustingly horrible feeling of walking slap into a waiting danger. I stood a few seconds, expectant, and nothing happened, and the empty room showed bare from corner to corner. And then, you know, I realized that the room was full of purposeful silence, just as sickening as any of the filthy noises the things have power to make. Do you remember what I told you about the Silent Garden business? Well, this room had just that same *malevolent* silence—the beastly quietness of the thing that is looking at you and is not seeable itself and thinks that it has got you. Oh, I recognized it instantly, and I slipped the top off my lantern so as to have light over the *whole* room.

“Then I set to working like fury and keeping my glance all about me. I sealed the two windows with lengths of human hair, right across, and sealed them at every frame. As I worked, a queer, scarcely perceptible tenseness stole into the air of the place, and the silence seemed, if you can understand me, to grow more solid. I knew then that I had no business there without full protection, for I was practically certain that this was no mere Aeiirii development, but one of the worse forms, such as the Saiitii—like that Grunting Man Case; you remember.

“I finished the windows and hurried over to the great fireplace. This is a huge affair and has a queer gallows-iron, I think they are called, projecting from the back of the arch. I sealed the opening with seven human hairs—the seventh crossing the six others.

“Then, just as I was making an end, a low, mocking whistle grew in the room. A cold, nervous prickling went up my spine and round my forehead from the back. The hideous sound filled the room with an extraordinary, grotesque parody of human whistling, too gigantic to be human—as if something gargantuan and monstrous made the sounds softly. As I stood there a last moment, pressing down the final seal, I had little doubt but that I had come across one of those rare and horrible cases of the *inanimate* reproducing the functions of the *animate*. I made a grab for my lamp and went quickly to the door, looking over my shoulder and listening for the thing that I expected. It came just as I got my hand upon the handle— a squeal of incredible, malevolent anger, piercing through the low hooning of the whistling. I dashed out, slamming the door and locking it behind me.

“I leant a little against the opposite wall of the corridor, feeling rather funny, for it had been a hideously narrow squeak . . . ‘thyr be noe sayfetic to be gained bye gayrds of holieness when the monyster hath pow’r to speak throe woode and stoene.’ So runs the passage in the Sigsand manuscript, and I proved it in that Nodding Door business. There is no protection against this particular form of monster, except possibly for a fractional period of time, for it can reproduce itself in or take to its purposes the very protective material which you may use and has power to ‘*forme wythine the pentycle,*’ though not immediately. There is, of course, the possibility of the Unknown Last Line of the Saaamaaa Ritual being uttered, but it is too uncertain to count upon, and the danger is too hideous, and even then it has no power to protect for more than ‘maybe fyve beats of the harte’ as the Sigsand has it.

“Inside of the room there was now a constant, meditative, hooning whistling, but presently this ceased, and the silence seemed worse, for there is such a sense of hidden mischief in a silence.

“After a little I sealed the door with crossed hairs and then cleared off down the great passage and so to bed.

“For a long time I lay awake but managed eventually to get some sleep. Yet about two o’clock I was waked by the hooning whistling of the room coming to me, even through the closed doors. The sound was tremendous and seemed to beat through the whole house with a presiding sense of terror. As if (I remember thinking) some monstrous giant had been holding mad carnival with itself at the end of that great passage.

“I got up and sat on the edge of the bed, wondering whether to go along and have a look at the seal, and suddenly there came a thump on my door, and Tassoc walked in, with his dressing gown over his pajamas.

“ ‘I thought it would have waked you, so I came along to have a talk,’ he said. ‘I *can’t* sleep. Beautiful! Isn’t it?’

“ ‘Extraordinary!’ I said, and tossed him my case.

“He lit a cigarette, and we sat and talked for about an hour, and all the time that noise went on down at the end of the big corridor.

“Suddenly Tassoc stood up.

“ ‘Let’s take our guns and go and examine the brute,’ he said, and turned toward the door.

“ ‘No!’ I said. ‘By Jove—NO! I can’t say anything definite yet, but I believe that the room is about as dangerous as it well can be.’

“ ‘Haunted—*really* haunted?’ he asked keenly and without any of his frequent banter.

“I told him, of course, that I could not say a definite yes or no to such a question, but that I hoped to be able to make a statement soon. Then I gave him a little lecture on the false rematerialization of the animate force through the inanimate-inert. He began then to understand

the particular way in which the room might be dangerous, if it were really the subject of a manifestation.

“About an hour later the whistling ceased quite suddenly, and Tassoc went off again to bed. I went back to mine, also, and eventually got another spell of sleep.

“In the morning I walked along to the room. I found the seals on the door intact. Then I went in. The window seals and the hair were all right, but the seventh hair across the great fireplace was broken. This set me thinking. I knew that it might very possibly have snapped, through my having tensioned it too highly; but then, again, it might have been broken by something else. Yet it was scarcely possible that a man, for instance, could have passed between the six unbroken hairs, for no one would ever have noticed them, entering the room that way, you see—but would have just walked through them, ignorant of their very existence.

“I removed the other hairs and the seals. Then I looked up the chimney. It went up straight, and I could see blue sky at the top. It was a big, open flue and free from any suggestion of hiding places or corners. Yet, of course, I did not trust to any such casual examination, and after breakfast I put on my overalls and climbed to the very top, sounding all the way, but I found nothing.

“Then I came down and went over the whole of the room, floor, ceiling, and walls, mapping them out in six-inch squares and sounding with both hammer and probe. But there was nothing unusual.

“Afterward I made a three-week search of the whole castle in the same thorough way but found nothing. I went even further then, for at night, when the whistling commenced, I made a microphone test. You see, if the whistling were mechanically produced, this test would have made evident to me the working of the machinery, if there were any such concealed within the walls. It certainly was an up-to-date method of examination, as you must allow.

“Of course, I did not think that any of Tassoc’s rivals had fixed up any mechanical contrivance, but I thought it just possible that there had been some such thing for producing the whistling, made away back in the years, perhaps with the intention of giving the room a reputation that would insure its being free of inquisitive folk. You see what I mean? Well, of course, it was just possible, if this were the case, that someone knew the secret of the machinery and was utilizing the knowledge to play this devil of a prank on Tassoc. The microphone test of the walls would certainly have made this known to me, as I have said, but there was nothing of the sort in the castle, so I had practically no doubt that it was a genuine case of what is popularly termed ‘haunting.’

“All this time, every night and sometimes most of each night, the hooning whistling of the room was intolerable. It was as if an intelligence there knew that steps were being taken against it and piped and hooned in a sort of mad, mocking contempt. I tell you, it was as extraordinary as it was horrible. Time after time I went along—tiptoeing noiselessly on stockinged feet—to the sealed door (for I always kept the room sealed). I went at all hours of the night, and often the whistling inside would seem to change to a brutally jeering note, as though the half-animate monster saw rue plainly through the shut door. And all the time, as I would stand watching, the hooning of the whistling would seem to fill the whole corridor, so that I used to feel a precious lonely chap messing about there with one of Hell’s mysteries.

“And every morning I would enter the room and examine the different hairs and seals. You see, after the first week, I had stretched parallel hairs all along the walls of the room and along the ceiling, but over the floor, which was of polished stone, I had set out little colorless wafers,

sticky side up. Each wafer was numbered and then arranged after a definite plan, so that I should be able to trace the exact movements of any living thing that went across.

“You will see that no material being or creature could possibly have entered that room without leaving many signs to tell me about it. But nothing was ever disturbed, and I began to think that I should have to risk an attempt to stay a night in the room in the Electric Pentacle. Mind you, I *knew* that it would be a crazy thing to do, but I was getting stumped and ready to try anything.

“Once, about midnight, I did break the seal on the door and have a quick look in, but, I tell you, the whole room gave one mad yell and seemed to come toward me in a great billow of shadows, as if the walls had bellied in toward me. Of course, that must have been fancy. Anyway, the yell was sufficient, and I slammed the door and locked it behind me, feeling a bit weak down my spine. I wonder whether you know the feeling.

“And then, when I had got to that state of readiness for anything, I made what, at first, I thought was something of a discovery:

“ ’Twas about one in the morning, and I was walking slowly round the castle, keeping in the soft grass. I had come under the shadow of the east front, and far above me I heard the vile, hooning whistling of the room from up in the darkness of the unlit wing. Then suddenly, a little in front of me, I heard a man’s voice speaking low, but evidently in glee.

“ ‘By George, you chaps! I wouldn’t care to bring a wife home to that!’ it said, in the tone of the cultured Irish.

“Someone started to reply, but there came a sharp exclamation and then a rush, and I heard footsteps running in all directions. Evidently the men had spotted me.

“For a few seconds I stood there feeling an awful ass. After all, *they* were at the bottom of the haunting! Do you see what a big fool it made me seem? I had no doubt that they were some of Tassoc’s rivals, and here I had been feeling in every bone that I had hit a genuine case! And then, you know, there came the memory of hundreds of details that made me just as much in doubt again. Anyway, whether it was natural or abnatural, there was a great deal yet to be cleared up.

“I told Tassoc next morning what I had discovered, and through the whole of every night for five nights we kept a close watch round the east wing, but there was never a sign of anyone prowling about; and all this time, almost endlessly from evening to dawn, that grotesque whistling would boon incredibly, far above us in the darkness.

“On the morning after the fifth night, I received a wire from here which brought me borne by the next boat. I explained to Tassoc that I was simply bound to go away for a few days but told him to keep up the watch round the castle. One thing I was very careful to do was to make him absolutely promise never to go into the room between sunset and sunrise. I made it clear to him that we knew nothing definite yet, one way or the other, and if the room were what I had first thought it to be, it might be a lot better for him to die first rather than enter it after dark.

“When I got here and had finished my business I thought you chaps would be interested, and also I wanted to get it all spread out clear in my mind, so I rang you up. I am going over again tomorrow, and when I get back I ought to have something pretty extraordinary to tell you.

“By the way, there is a curious thing I forgot to tell you. I tried to get a phonographic record of the whistling, but it simply produced no impression on the wax at all. That is one of the things that has made me feel queer.

“Another extraordinary thing is that the microphone will not magnify the sound—will not even transmit it. Seems to take no account of it and acts as if it were nonexistent. I am absolutely and utterly stumped up to the present. I am a wee bit curious to see whether any of you dear clever heads can make daylight of it. *I* cannot—not yet.”

He rose to his feet.

“Good night, all,” he said, and began to usher us out abruptly, but without offense, into the night.

A fortnight later he dropped us each a card, and you can imagine that I was not late this time. When we arrived, Carnacki took us straight in to dinner, and when we had finished and all made ourselves comfortable, he began again, where he had left off:

“Now, just listen quietly, for I have got something very queer to tell you. I got back late at night, and I had to walk up to the castle, as I had not warned them that I was coming. It was bright moonlight, so that the walk was rather a pleasure than otherwise. When I got there the whole place was in darkness, and I thought I would go round outside to see whether Tassoc or his brother was keeping watch. But I could not find them anywhere and concluded that they had got tired of it and gone off to bed.

“As I returned across the lawn that lies below the front of the east wing, I caught the hooning whistling of the room, coming down strangely clear through the stillness of the night. It had a peculiar note in it, I remember—low and constant, queerly meditative. I looked up at the window, bright in the moonlight, and got a sudden thought to bring a ladder from the stable yard and try to get a look into the room from the outside.

“With this notion I hunted round at the back of the castle among the straggle of the office and presently found a long, fairly light ladder, though it was heavy enough for one, goodness knows! I thought at first that I should never get it reared. I managed at last and let the ends rest very quietly against the wall a little below the sill of the larger window. Then, going silently, I went up the ladder. Presently I had my face above the sill and was looking in, alone with the moonlight.

“Of course, the queer whistling sounded louder up there, but it still conveyed that peculiar sense of something whistling quietly to itself—can you understand? Though, for all the meditative lowness of the note, the horrible, gargantuan quality was distinct—a mighty parody of the human, as if I stood there and listened to the whistling from the lips of a monster with a man’s soul.

“And then, you know, I saw something. The floor in the middle of the huge, empty room was puckered upward in the center into a strange, soft-looking mound, parted at the top into an ever changing hole that pulsated to that great, gentle hooning. At times, as I watched, I saw the heaving of the indented mound gap across with a queer, inward suction, as with the drawing of an enormous breath, then the thing would dilate and pout once more to the incredible melody. And suddenly as I stared, dumb, it came to me that the thing was living. I was looking at two enormous, blackened lips, blistered and brutal, there in the pale moonlight.

“Abruptly they bulged out to a vast pouting mound of force and sound, stiffened and swollen and massive. And a great sweat lay heavy on the vast upper lip. In the same moment of time, the whistling had burst into a mad screaming note that seemed to stun me, even where I stood outside of the window. And then, the following moment, I was staring blankly at the solid, undisturbed floor of the room—smooth, polished stone flooring from wall to wall. And there was an absolute silence.

“You can picture me staring into the quiet room and knowing what I knew. I felt like a sick, frightened child, and I wanted to slide *quietly* down the ladder and run away. But in that very instant I heard Tassoc’s voice calling to me from within the room for help! But I got such an awful dazed feeling, and I had a vague, bewildered notion that, after all, it was the Irishmen who had got him in there and were taking it out of him. And then the call came again, and I burst the

window and jumped in to help him. I had a confused idea that the call had come from within the shadow of the great fireplace, but there was no one there.

“ ‘Tassoc!’ I shouted, and my voice went empty-sounding round the great apartment, and then in a flash *I knew that Tassoc had never called*. I whirled round, sick with fear, toward the window, and, as I did so, a frightful, exultant whistling scream burst through the room. On my left the end wall had bellied in toward me in a pair of gargantuan lips, black and utterly monstrous, to within a yard of my face. I fumbled for a mad instant at my revolver, not for *it*, but for myself, for the danger was a thousand times worse than death. And then, suddenly, the Unknown Last Line of the Saaamaaa Ritual was whispered quite audibly in the room. Instantly the thing happened that I have known once before. There came a sense as of dust falling continually and monotonously, and I knew that my life hung uncertain and suspended for a flash, in a brief, reeling vertigo of unseeable things. Then *that* ended, and I knew that I might live. My soul and body blended again, and life and power came to me. I dashed furiously at the window and hurled myself out headforemost, for I can tell you that I had stopped being afraid of death. I crashed down onto the ladder and slithered, grabbing and grabbing, and so came, someway or other, alive to the bottom. And there I sat in the soft, wet grass, with the moonlight all about me, and far above, through the broken window of the room, there was a low whistling.

“I was not hurt, and I went to the front and knocked. When they let me in we had a long yarn over some good whisky—for I was shaken to pieces—and I explained things as much as I could. I told Tassoc that the room would have to come down and every fragment of it be burned in a blast furnace erected within a pentacle. He nodded. There was nothing to say. Then I went to bed.

“We turned a small army to the work, and within ten days that lovely thing had gone up in smoke, and what was left was calcined and clean.

“It was when the workmen were stripping the paneling that I got hold of a sound notion of the beginnings of that beastly development. Over the great fireplace, after the great oak panels had been torn down, I found that there was let into the masonry a scrollwork of stone with on it an old inscription in ancient Celtic: That here in this room was burned Dian Tiansay, Jester of King Alzof, who made the Song of Foolishness upon King Ernore of the Seventh Castle.

“When I got the translation clear I gave it to Tassoc. He was tremendously excited, for he knew the old tale and took me down to the library to look at an old parchment that gave the story in detail. Afterward I found that the incident was well known about the countryside, but always regarded more as a legend than as history. And no one seemed ever to have dreamt that the old east wing of Iastrae Castle was the remains of the ancient Seventh Castle.

“From the old parchment I gathered that there had been a pretty dirty job done, away back in the years. It seems that King Alzof and King Ernore had been enemies by birthright, as you might say truly, but that nothing more than a little raiding had occurred on either side for years until Dian Tiansay made the Song of Foolishness upon King Ernore and sang it before King Alzof, and so greatly was it appreciated that King Alzof gave the jester one of his ladies to wife.

“Presently all the people of the land had come to know the song, and so it came at last to King Ernore, who was so angered that he made war upon his old enemy and took and burned him and his castle; but Dian Tiansay, the jester, he brought with him to his own place, and, having torn his tongue out because of the song which he had made and sung, he imprisoned him in the room in the east wing (which was evidently used for unpleasant purposes), and the jester’s wife he kept for himself.

“But one night Dian Tiansay’s wife was not to be found, and in the morning they discovered her lying dead in her husband’s arms and him sitting whistling the Song of Foolishness, for he had no longer the power to sing it.

“Then they roasted Dian Tiansay in the great fireplace—probably from the selfsame gallows iron which I have already mentioned. And until he died, Dian Tiansay ‘ceased not to whistle’ the Song of Foolishness, which he could no longer sing. But afterward ‘in that room’ there was often heard at night the sound of something whistling, and there ‘grew a power in that room,’ so that none dared to sleep in it. And presently, it would seem, the King went to another castle, for the whistling troubled him.

“There you have it all. Of course, that is only a rough rendering of the translation from the parchment. It’s a bit quaint! Don’t you think so?”

“Yes,” I said, answering for the lot. “But how did the thing grow to such a tremendous manifestation?”

“One of those cases of continuity of thought producing a positive action upon the immediate surrounding material,” replied Carnacki. “The development must have been going forward through centuries, to have produced such a monstrosity. It was a true instance of the Saitii manifestation, best explained through likening it to a living spiritual fungus which involves the very structure of the ether fiber itself and, of course, in so doing, acquires an essential control over the material substance involved in it. It is impossible to make it plainer in a few words.”

“Then you believe that the room itself had become the material expression of the ancient jester—that his soul, rotted with hatred, had bred into a monster—eh?” I asked.

“Yes,” said Carnacki, nodding. “I think you’ve put my thought rather neatly. It is a queer coincidence that Miss Donnehue is supposed to be descended (so I heard since) from the same King Ernore. It makes one think some rather curious thoughts, doesn’t it? The marriage coming on, and the room waking to fresh life. If she had gone into that room, ever. . . eh? IT had waited a long time. Sins of the fathers. Yes, I’ve thought of that. They’re to be married next week, and I am to be best man, which is a thing I hate. And he won his bets, rather! Just think, *if* ever she had gone into that room—pretty horrible, eh?”

He nodded his head grimly, and we four nodded back. Then he rose and took us collectively to the door and presently thrust us forth in friendly fashion onto the Embankment and into the fresh night air.

“Good night,” we called back and went to our various homes.

If she had, eh? If she had—that is what I kept thinking.