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A Spook Farm

A Wrong Is Righted by Means

By CLARISSA MACKIE Copyright by American Press Asso-ciation, 1911.

When my law partner, Jack Rogers returned from lunch I was agog with excitement.

"Guess what has happened, Jack," I crowed. "No need to guess. Something in

the detective line has turned up," grinned my partner as he tossed his hat on its accustomed peg and sat down in his chair. "How did you find out?" I asked,

chagrined. "You always look especially foxy, old man, and nothing, not even a dead

client, with prospects of rich pickings from the"-"Oh, keep still!" I growled. "You

talk like a bird of prey."
"I am—we are birds of prey. This detective side line of yours, Hal, or hobby, or whatever you call it, will run us out of our legitimate course of business if you don't slacken up a bit." "Have you any important case on

your mind?" I asked sardonically, Rogers felt tentatively of his head. "Nothing doing, I must confess, Hal. I know there's something on your mind. There's a look about you that says we must catch the two-something for somewhere—and it's 1:45 now." He glanced at his watch.

"The train leaves at 2:03. I'll tell you about it on the way up." After we were comfortably seated

in the smoker of the train and were headed up the bank of the Hudson river I deemed it expedient to un-bosom myself lest in the telling of the story we might reach our destination before I had completed it.

That noon while I sat alone in the office I had received a call from a

She was a little old woman, sharp featured and white haired, with hard, cold blue eyes and a thin lipped mouth that seemed made for secrets. was garbed in shabby black and car-ried a rusty satchel filled to bursting

that she watched carefully.

I learned that her name was Sarah Penny and that she lived on a small farm near Poughkeepsie. She said she was a widow and, besides owning her farm, possessed a tiny income on which she lived. She also said that for two weeks past she had been haunted by a spectral farm that seemed to adjoin her own. She related that night after night when the moon was high in the heavens she had seen low lying farm buildings where in broad daylight nothing appeared but a grassy meadow dotted with ancient fruit trees. On dark nights the visitation appeared as a luminous glowing out-

line of buildings.

Mrs. Penny's old face seemed to become more wrinkled and careworn as she imparted these facts to me and when she had concluded, saying that she had visited me with the intention of making her will and had suddenly determined to confide her fears of the "spook farm," as she called it, hoping I might be able to explain away this horror in her solitary life.

1 had promised to come up there to

look the situation in the face, and I declared my intention of bringing my partner with me. So now that we were on the way I related all these facts to Jack Rogers, and together we tried to piece out some fabric of logical explanation of the phenomenon.

"Derry!" yelled the brakeman, throwing open the door, and as that was the nearest station to the spook farm we got off and watched the train wind out of sight among the hills. A station agent was puttering around a couple of empty egg crates, and I approached

"Which road shall I take to reach Mrs. Pennsy's farm?" I inquired.
"One to the right," and he disappeared quickly, as if fearful of further cate-

chism. It led away from the river and then doubled back again, and this performance it repeated over and over until Jack announced that he felt as twisted as a spiral bed spring.
"I don't wonder your old lady sees
things," he complained as he rounded

another turn. "I feel all wound up just like a clock."

"I guess you can run down now." I said, for just then the trees and dense growth along the road thinned, and we could see the gray shingles of a weather beaten house just beyond.

Before we reached the house, which stood in a grove of gloomy cedars, we met a how with an empty noil and hor. met a boy with an empty pail and ber-



"Son," said my partner kindly, "can you tell us where the Widow Penny lives?"

The boy turned a grimy little finger toward the weatherbeaten house. "In re," he half whispered.

"Do you know her?" pursued Jack arelessly displaying a silver quarter.

The boy nodded. "I'm afraid of her," he said with more spirit. "She's a miser; that's what my mother says." "Who lives next door to Mrs. Pen-

my?" I asked him as he clutched the sil-"Nobody lives there. It's all grass and apple trees. The house burned down before I was born." And he

scampered away and disappeared in the wooded road. "Huh!" ejaculated my partner. And in silence we approached the home of Mrs. Sarah Penny.

The shutters were all closed, and the place appeared deserted. The ground was quite flat here and a wide creek meandered through the rank grass back of the house, and the adjacent low lying ground appeared damp and marshy.

"Nice, malarious spot," I remarked as we walked around a weed grown path to the back door.

"Might raise a good crop of spooks here," said Jack, pausing and looking over toward the adjacent property. "The kid was right; there must have been a farmhouse there one day. See the sunken rectangles of turf where the buildings once stood? You can even get an idea of how the yard must have looked in those days. There's a snowball bush and a clump of lilacs and other flowering shrubs, and those apple trees in the background must be the remains of the orchard."

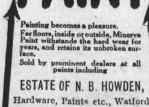
I followed the direction of his noint-



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ing inger and saw that he spoke the truth. We were speculating upon the location of the different buildings when I heard a slight sound and, turning, saw Mrs. Penny peering sharply from

a kitchen window "Here we are, Mrs. Penny," I said cheerfully, introducing my partner.
"Mr. Rogers and I propose to sit up tonight and lay all these spooks of yours."

She fingered her spectacles rather nervously and then removed them and rapped the table smartly with them, eyeing me keenly.
"This is no joke, young man," she

said gravely.
"Indeed, madam," I replied warmly,

"we do not consider it as such. I spoke lightly because I wanted to allay "Your own fears may need quieting

after you have seen them." "People, you mean?" asked Jack. "They were once," she answered

dully. "You mean you have really seen

"Yes; the whole family. They're all dead now.' "You can recognize them from your

window?" he asked incredulously. She nodded an affirmative and then sat in moody silence while Jack and I conferred together. The result of this interview was that my partner and I wandered about the spook ridden field next door until Mrs. Penny summoned us to supper. We ate without referring to the object of our visit. In fact a great depression seemed to have settled upon the three of us. The air was heavy and damp, but the sun set brilliantly, and in the east a splendid full moon was rising.

"You can sit in the side porch if you want to," said Sarah Penny. "1 shall be in the sitting room here waiting for it to come."

Jack and I both shuddered as she departed. We whispered to each other and marveled that any sensible ghost would care to return to such a gloomy, God forsaken spot as this. We lighted cigars and tried not to admit that an eerie sensation was creeping over us when Mrs. Penny's shrill old voice broke excitedly on the air.

"They are here—it has come!" We lifted reluctant eyes and gazed upon the spook farm. There was a fascination about the weird scene that drew us to the dividing fence.

There had arisen before our unbelieving eyes white misty buildingsfarmhouse with adjacent wings, dairy barns-and here and there were forms of people, white wraiths with beckon ing arms. It was a windless night, and the moon shone brightly.

Sarah Penny's voice again broke the stillness, this time hoarse with fear. She was at my elbow. "Do you see it?" she whispered.

?" she whispered.
"Yes," I answered, "but"—
"Does he see it too?"
"Yes, but"— "Then it is so!" she moaned. And I saw that she was holding her black

bag under her arm. "I must give up the papers, and perhaps they will go There was an instant of intense si-

lence, and then I turned my back on the spook farm and said quickly: "Yes, you must give up the papers, Mrs. Penny, and right the wrong. You

leading her into the house, quite broken in spirit.

"Yes, I will go away. I have a sister in the west, who wants me to come. I can sell this place—and—here are the deeds. I executed them years ago, but I hated to part with them. I have so little money!" she wailed pitifully, opening her black bag.

Little by little I wormed a confession out of her of how she had held a mortgage on the farm next door, which was owned by a German family. She had coveted the land, but the farmer had been industrious and paid his interest promptly. Then one night, sorely tempted, she had set fire to the buildings, and when they lay a heap of ashes on the ground she took the land for the amount of the mortgage, and the Germans were homeless and penniless. They had gone forth, helped by charity, to make a new start, and she had heard from some source that each one had died years ago. All this had happened fifty years before, and she had had a long time in which to repent of her crime.

The next morning when Jack and I went down on the early train we carried proper legal papers conveying the spook farm property, as well as the home of Mrs. Penny, to the heirs of the German farmer, Fritz Steber. And I may add here that in due course of time his children were found and their inheritance restored to them. Mrs. Penny, who possessed a comfortable fortune through her miserly habits, went west and was heard of no more. I never knew what became of the spook farm after that.

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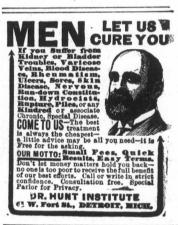
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