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Dr. Edmonds' Patient

A Tale of a Haunted House.

By CLARISSA MACKIE

A severe thunderstorm was raging when the telephone bell tinkled softly. Dr. Edmonds' man, Josiah, roused himself from slumber on the office sofa and reached apprehensively for the receiver.

"I don't like techin' telephones no ways when de lightning's kyooting around," muttered Josiah. "Hello, dar!" he called timidly. "Ya-as, sah, dis am de doctor's—ya-as, sah. He'll come right away."

Josiah hung up the receiver and went up to the doctor's bedroom on the second floor. The doctor came out—a tall, lithe, red bearded man, rubbing his eyes sleepily.

"What is it, Josiah?" he yawned.

"Mr. Dixon got another bad spell?"

Josiah's eyes rolled affrightedly.

"No, sah; it was a call from de Gedney place."

"Gedney place! You've made a mistake. It's been unoccupied for years."

"Dat's what he said. Tell de doctor he's needed at once at de Gedney place on de Hollow road."

"Humph!" muttered the physician.

"Well, you better go out and harness Daisy and get out my raincoat."

It was a dreary ride to the Gedney place.

Josiah, huddled in one corner of the buggy, was shaking with fear of the approaching ordeal. Dr. Edmonds was puzzling over the strange summons. To his knowledge the Gedney place had been unoccupied for the past ten years. As a family the Gedneys had died out, all save one son, the black sheep of his generation. William Gedney was serving a life sentence in prison, convicted of killing a man in a quarrel. The plea was self defense, and Gedney had escaped with his life.

The village people had gossiped ever since the last funeral at the place ten years ago. It was said that the spirit of the murdered man, Tom Collins, haunted the rooms of the fine old mansion on the Hollow road. Lights had flickered there at midnight, and men straggling home between midnight and dawn had declared that a man's dim form restlessly paced the pine grove that was growing up around the neglected house. But little credence was given to such tales.

"Here we am, doctor," quavered Josiah. "I'll jest git out and open de gate."

The long unused gate creaked open, and the doctor turned into it trusting more to Daisy's instinct than to anything he could see. Josiah did not return to the buggy. He tramped beside the doctor, muttering charms under his breath.

They were in the protection of the front porch now. Dr. Edmonds brought out his electric torch and found the doorbell. He pulled it vigorously, and a resonant peal rang through the house.

There was no answer.

Again and again the doctor rang, and at last he impatiently turned the door-

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knob. To his amazement it responded to his pressure.

The door was unlocked!

They entered complete darkness.

"Hello, there!" shouted the doctor, standing at the foot of the great staircase that wound up into darkness.

"Anybody here?"

In the silence that followed they distinctly heard the distant striking of the town clock in the valley below.

It struck the hour of midnight, and on the heels of the last stroke there came a sound in the Gedney house.

It was a cry, a moaning cry, that sent a shudder through the doctor's strong frame.

Josiah almost sank to the floor.

"De ghos'!" he gibbered.

Dr. Edmonds recovered his nerve; poked Josiah in the ribs with the automatic pistol he always carried at night and brought the darky to his senses.

"Some one is upstairs," he said sternly. "Some one who is hurt and needs me. Understand! Take my bag and follow me. If you try to run away, remember, I'm a dead shot!"

Josiah mutely fell into step behind the doctor as they mounted the stairs. He would have been more terrified than ever if he had remotely guessed why the doctor had handed him the medicine case. It was that both his own hands might be free to grapple with any danger that menaced them in the deserted house.

The cry had come down from the upper regions of the house. They searched the second floor and found it untenanted save by spiders and scuttling mice. Here, as in the lower rooms, the furniture was covered with dust.

Now the moaning cry was repeated. It came from the third story under the mansard roof.

They reached the narrow upper hall, went down its carpeted length to the southwest chamber. The door was ajar. The doctor pushed it open and raked it with the light of his torch.

The light revealed several startling facts.

There was a narrow cot on the carpeted floor, a pine bureau littered with bottles and dishes and crusts of bread, and a battered tin coffeepot stood on an oil stove. There were heavy blankets hung before the three windows,

and besides one or two rocking chairs there was a pile of books from the library downstairs and a man's blackened pipe on the deal table.

Like lightning the doctor's keen eye searched the room and then went back to the space in front of the cot. A man's body lay there inert.

"Hold this torch," commanded the doctor, and, bending down, he lifted the man's emaciated form to the cot. The ragged coat fell back, revealing a glimpse of a broadly striped garment underneath.

It did not need this betraying glimpse of the convict stripes for the physician to recognize in the man William Gedney!

The room revealed that it had long been the habitation of some recluse. Who was it? Hardly Gedney, for he was still in prison.

The doctor made a brief examination and found that the man had been stabbed in the right shoulder. An ugly wound, but not necessarily dangerous.

Josiah, relieved at this practical laying of the Gedney ghost, waited upon his master with unusual intelligence. He heated water on the oil stove, found a lamp and lighted it and held it, together with the torch, while the doctor skillfully washed and dressed the wound. When it was bound and a pillow placed under the injured man's back the doctor administered a strong stimulant and presently William Gedney opened his wild, dark eyes and searched the physician's countenance.

"Edmonds!" he gasped. "You? How did you come here?"

"A telephone message," said the doctor quickly. "And you, William, you have escaped?"

Gedney nodded wearily. "Sit down, and I will tell you all," he said.

His story was brief and to the point. He declared that he had been innocent of the crime charged against him. Although there had been a fight and a shot had been fired, he swore that he had not held the weapon. His companions had scattered, leaving him with the body of Tom Collins—to be the scapegoat.

Circumstantial evidence was against him, and to save his client Gedney's lawyer had pleaded self defense; hence

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