

# 'Ghosts' Haunt Scenes Of Rural Tragedy In Slashings Country

**Dudgeon Neighbors Shun  
Homestead Tract, Where Al-  
leged Murder Was Committed.**

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White Cloud, Mich., June 6.—A partridge wings away in bullet-like flight. A startled pheasant scurries off into the brush. Deer often wander from the woods from the woods to graze at the edge of the clearings.

Such is the locale of the Dudgeon farm and the neighboring Terwilliger barn in which the victim of Newaygo county's—in fact, western Michigan's—most sensational crime was found hanging.

## Haunt of Wild Things.

For 30 miles north to Baldwin only an occasional break appears in what was once a mighty forest. There are a few scattered and isolated clearings, the forlorn hopes for better things in life of impoverished settlers.

For 30 miles the terrain stretches away—a haunt of wild things, a desolation of sand and stumps and second growth—just a waste.

In the midst of a virile growth of young trees, half hidden as if there were mortification in its memories and a reluctance to bare them to light, was the Dudgeon home until fire of mysterious origin razed it three nights ago.

Disreputably it stood, a rectangular two-story frame building of rough pine boards and a ragged tar paper covering that wind and weather have shredded and torn away in many places, exposing gaps in the planking and decay in the interior. Two square rooms downstairs, two upstairs to which access is gained by a narrow stairway that could not closer approach the perpendicular, and still be a stairway, divided the inside.

## Is Dismal Spot.

Darkened by the low-hanging boughs from the surrounding trees, the rooms were as dismal as the outside. A breeze rattling the loose and rotting boards of the walls stirred conjecture as to how the place could be made habitable, a place of domestic cheer, when the gales and snows of winter battered at the doors and closed to travel the rutty dirt road that snakily winds away to the nearest town. Nobody had lived there for two years, since the Dudgeons went to prison. It has lived its life as

It is whispered that the Dudgeon home fire may have been set by neighbors fearful that they might come back to live there.

## Father-in-Law Dies.

The Hodells lived a score or so miles away near the village of Grant. Romie was an itinerant sort, who gained his living by hiring himself and his stump pulling machine to farmers who wanted to clear acreage. It was on his travels that he became acquainted with the Dudgeons and finally married Meda in 1921.

It was in February of 1922 that David Hodell, who had been living with Romie and Meda, died. He was aged and his death caused little comment at the time. In May, the death of Romie occurred.

He was found hanging in the Terwilliger barn. But strangely, his feet were resting on the floor of the loft. His knees were flexed. An autopsy discovered his neck not broken, but revealed that the back of his head had been mashed.

## Death Notes Found.

Then two notes, ostensibly written by Romie Hodell, were found in an unused stove. They indicated suicide. They read as follows.

Medy: When you read this I will be no more. Don't look for me as you will never find me until it is too late. You know I told you I would rather be dead than see you go wrong. One who loves you, Doc.

"Dearest Medy: I cannot write words to the effect that I want to but tell my mother not to feel bad for me or you either. I left a note in my book for you, but my emotion has changed since then so I am writing you this. Please don't marry Carl Salors, my last request. One who gives his life for you, Doc."

## Tells Murder Story.

But the countryside, already holding the Dudgeons in disrepute, refused to accept the suicide theory as the complete story of the death of Hodell. A score or more in mob spirit one day several months later seized upon Lee Dudgeon and Herman, his brother. A noose was tightened around Lee's neck. Later he showed the marks to others.

He told a story of murder. He said Robert Bennett, a hired man, had killed Hodell and had compelled himself and his brother, Herman, to help take the body to the Terwilliger barn.

State police came to White Cloud and investigated. They

