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The Unquiet Grave: A Novel

Sharyn McCrumb

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From *New York Times* bestselling author Sharyn McCrumb comes a finely wrought novel set in nineteenth-century West Virginia, based on the true story of one of the strangest murder trials in American history—the case of the Greenbrier Ghost.

Lakin, West Virginia, 1930
Following a suicide attempt and consigned to a segregated insane asylum, attorney James P. D. Gardner finds himself under the care of Dr. James Boozer. Fresh out of medical school, Dr. Boozer is eager to try the new talking cure for insanity, and encourages his elderly patient to reminisce about his experiences as the first black attorney to practice law in nineteenth-century West Virginia. Gardner's most memorable case was the one in which he helped to defend a white man on trial for the murder of his young bride—a case that the prosecution based on the testimony of a ghost.

Greenbrier, West Virginia, 1897
Beautiful, willful Zona Heaster has always lived in the mountains of West Virginia. Despite her mother’s misgivings, Zona marries Erasmus Trout Shue, the handsome blacksmith who has recently come to Greenbrier County. After weeks of silence from the newlyweds, riders come to the Heasters’ place to tell them that Zona has died from a fall, attributed to a recent illness. Mary Jane is determined to get justice for her daughter. A month after the funeral, she informs the county prosecutor that Zona’s ghost appeared to her, saying that she had been murdered. An autopsy, ordered by the reluctant prosecutor, confirms her claim.

The Greenbrier Ghost is renowned in American folklore, but Sharyn McCrumb is the first author to look beneath the legend to unearth the facts. Using a century of genealogical material and other historical documents, McCrumb reveals new information about the story and brings to life the personalities in the trial: the prosecutor, a former Confederate cavalryman; the defense attorney, a pro-Union bridgeburner, who nevertheless had owned slaves; and the mother of the murdered woman, who doggedly sticks to her ghost story—all seen through the eyes of a young black lawyer on the cusp of a new century, with his own tragedies yet to come.

With its unique blend of masterful research and mesmerizing folklore, illuminating the story’s fascinating and complex characters, *The Unquiet Grave* confirms Sharyn McCrumb’s place among the finest Southern writers at work today.

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