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*** START OF THE PROJECT GUTENBERG EBOOK THE SPECTRE IN THE CART ***

THE SPECTRE IN THE CART

By Thomas Nelson Page

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I had not seen my friend Stokeman since we were at college together, and now naturally we fell to talking of old times. I remembered him as a hard-headed man without a particle of superstition, if such a thing be possible in a land where we are brought up on superstition, from the bottle. He was at that time full of life and of enjoyment of whatever it brought. I found now that his wild and almost reckless spirits had been tempered by the years which had passed as I should not have believed possible, and that gravity had taken place of the gaiety for which he was then noted.

He used to maintain, I remember, that there was no apparition or supernatural manifestation, or series of circumstances pointing to such a manifestation, however strongly substantiated they appeared to be, that could not be explained on purely natural grounds.

During our stay at college a somewhat notable instance of what was by many supposed to be a supernatural manifestation occurred in a deserted house on a remote plantation in an adjoining county.

It baffled all investigation, and got into the newspapers, recalling the Cock Lane ghost, and many more less celebrated apparitions. Parties were organized to investigate it, but were baffled. Stokeman, on a bet of a box of cigars, volunteered to go out alone and explode the fraud; and did so, not only putting the restless spirit to flight, but capturing it and dragging it into town as the physical and indisputable witness both of the truth of his theory and of his personal courage. The exploit gave him immense notoriety in our little world.

I was, therefore, no little surprised to hear him say seriously now that he had come to understand how people saw apparitions.

"I have seen them myself," he added, gravely.

"You do not mean it!" I sat bolt upright in my chair in my astonishment. I had myself, largely through his influence, become a sceptic in matters relating to the supernatural.

"Yes, I have seen ghosts. They not only have appeared to me, but were as real to my ocular vision as any other external physical object which I saw with my eyes.

"Of course, it was an hallucination. Tell me; I can explain it."

"I explained it myself," he said, dryly. "But it left me with a little less conceit and a little more sympathy

with the hallucinations of others not so gifted."

It was a fair hit.

"In the year—," he went on, after a brief period of reflection, "I was the State's Attorney for my native county, to which office I had been elected a few years after I left college, and the year we emancipated ourselves from carpet-bag rule, and I so remained until I was appointed to the bench. I had a personal acquaintance, pleasant or otherwise, with every man in the county. The district was a close one, and I could almost have given the census of the population. I knew every man who was for me and almost every one who was against me. There were few neutrals. In those times much hung on the elections. There was no borderland. Men were either warmly for you or hotly against you.

"We thought we were getting into smooth water, where the sailing was clear, when the storm suddenly appeared about to rise again. In the canvass of that year the election was closer than ever and the contest hotter.

"Among those who went over when the lines were thus sharply drawn was an old darky named Joel Turnell, who had been a slave of one of my nearest neighbors, Mr. Eaton, and whom I had known all my life as an easygoing, palavering old fellow with not much principle, but with kindly manners and a likable way. He had always claimed to be a supporter of mine, being one of the two or three negroes in the county who professed to vote with the whites.

"He had a besetting vice of pilfering, and I had once or twice defended him for stealing and gotten him off, and he appeared to be grateful to me. I always doubted him a little; for I believed he did not have force of character enough to stand up against his people, and he was a chronic liar. Still, he was always friendly with me, and used to claim the emoluments and privileges of such a relation. Now, however, on a sudden, in this campaign he became one of my bitterest opponents. I attributed it to the influence of a son of his, named Absalom, who had gone off from the county during the war when he was only a youth, and had stayed away for many years without anything being known of him, and had now returned unexpectedly. He threw himself into the fight. He claimed to have been in the army, and he appeared to have a deep-seated animosity against the whites, particularly against all those whom he had known in boyhood. He was a vicious-looking fellow, broad-shouldered and bow-legged, with a swagger in his gait. He had an ugly scar on the side of his throat, evidently made by a knife, though he told the negroes, I understood, that he had got it in the war, and was ready to fight again if he but got the chance. He had not been back long before he was in several rows, and as he was of brutal strength, he began to be much feared by the negroes. Whenever I heard of him it was in connection with some fight among his own people, or some effort to excite race animosity. When the canvass began he flung himself into it with fury, and I must say with marked effect.

"His hostility appeared to be particularly directed against myself, and I heard of him in all parts of the district declaiming against me. The negroes who, for one or two elections, had appeared to have quieted down and become indifferent as to politics were suddenly revived. It looked as if the old scenes of the Reconstruction period, when the two sides were like hostile armies, might be witnessed again. Night meetings, or 'camp-fires,' were held all through the district, and from many of them came the report of Absalom Turnell's violent speeches stirring up the blacks and arraying them against the whites. Our side was equally aroused and the whole section was in a ferment. Our effort was to prevent any outbreak and tide over the crisis.

"Among my friends was a farmer named John Holloway, one of the best men in my county, and a neighbor and friend of mine from my boyhood. His farm, a snug little homestead of fifty or sixty acres, adjoined our plantation on one side; and on the other, that of the Eatons, to whom Joel Turnell and his son Absalom had belonged, and I remember that as a boy it was my greatest privilege and reward to go over on a Saturday and be allowed by John Holloway to help him plough, or cut his hay. He was a big, ruddy-faced, jolly boy, and even then used to tell me about being in love with Fanny Peel, who was the daughter of another farmer in the neighborhood, and a Sunday-school scholar of my mother's. I thought him the greatest man in the world. He had a fight once with Absalom Turnell when they were both youngsters, and, though Turnell was rather older and much the heavier, whipped him completely. Holloway was a good soldier and a good son, and when he came back from the war and won his wife, who was a belle among the young farmers, and settled down with her on his little place, which he proceeded to make a bower of roses and fruit-trees, there was not a man in the neighborhood who did not rejoice in his prosperity and wish him well. The Holloways had no children and, as is often the case in such instances, they appeared to be more to each other than are most husbands and wives. He always spoke of his wife as if the sun rose and set in her. No matter where he might be in the county, when night came he always rode home, saying that his wife would be expecting him. 'Don't keer whether she 's asleep or not,' he used to say to those who bantered him, 'she knows I 'm a-comin', and she always hears my click on the gate-latch, and is waitin' for me.'

"It came to be well understood throughout the county.

"'I believe you are hen-pecked,' said a man to him one night.

"'I believe I am, George,' laughed Hallo-way, 'and by Jings! I like it, too.'

"It was impossible to take offence at him, he was so good-natured. He would get out of his bed in the middle of the night, hitch up his horse and pull his bitterest enemy out of the mud. He had on an occasion ridden all night through a blizzard to get a doctor for the wife of a negro neighbor in a cabin near by who was suddenly taken ill. When someone expressed admiration for it, especially as it was known that the man had not long before been abusing Holloway to the provost-marshal, who at that time was in supreme command, he said:

"'Well, what 's that got to do with it? Wa 'n 't the man 's wife sick? I don't deserve no credit, though; if I had n't gone, my wife would n' 'a' let me come in her house.'

"He was an outspoken man, too, not afraid of the devil, and when he believed a thing he spoke it, no matter whom it hit. In this way John had been in trouble several times while we were under 'gun-rule'; and this, together with his personal character, had given him great influence in the county, and made him a power. He was one of my most ardent friends and supporters, and to him, perhaps, more than to any other two men in

the county, I owed my position.

"Absalom Turnell's rancorous speeches had stirred all the county, and the apprehension of the outbreak his violence was in danger of bringing might have caused trouble but for John Halloway's coolness and level-headedness. John offered to go around and follow Absalom up at his meetings. He could 'spike his guns,' he said.

"Some of his friends wanted to go with him. 'You 'd better not try that,' they argued. That fellow, Ab. Turnell 's got it in for you.' But he said no. The only condition on which he would go was that he should go alone.

"'They ain't any of 'em going to trouble me. I know 'em all and I git along with 'em first rate. I don't know as I know this fellow Ab.; he 's sort o' grown out o' my recollection; but I want to see. He knows me, I know. I got my hand on him once when he was a boy—about my age, and he ain't forgot that, I know. He was a blusterer; but he did n 't have real grit. He won't say nothin' to my face. But I must go alone. You all are too flighty.'

"So Halloway went alone and followed Ab. up at his 'camp-fires,' and if report was true his mere presence served to curb Ab.'s fury, and take the fire out of his harangues. Even the negroes got to laughing and talking about it 'Ab. was jest like a dog when a man faced him,' they said; 'he could n' look him in the eye.'

"The night before the election there was a meeting at one of the worst places in the county, a country store at a point known as Burley's Fork, and Halloway went there, alone—and for the first time in the canvass thought it necessary to interfere. Absalom, stung by the taunts of some of his friends, and having stimulated himself with mean whiskey, launched out in a furious tirade against the whites generally, and me in particular; and called on the negroes to go to the polls next day prepared to 'wade in blood to their lips.' For himself, he said, he had 'drunk blood' before, both of white men and women, and he meant to drink it again. He whipped out and flourished a pistol in one hand and a knife in the other.

"His language exceeded belief, and the negroes, excited by his violence, were showing the effect on their emotions of his wild declamation, and were beginning to respond with shouts and cries when Halloway rose and walked forward. Absalom turned and started to meet him, yelling his fury and threats, and the audience were rising to their feet when they were stopped. It was described to me afterward.

"Halloway was in the midst of a powder magazine, absolutely alone, a single spark would have blown him to atoms and might have caused a catastrophe which would have brought untold evil. But he was as calm as a May morning. He walked through them, the man who told me said, as if he did not know there was a soul in a hundred miles of him, and as if Absalom were only something to be swept aside.

"'He wa' n't exac'ly laughin', or even smilin', said my informant, 'but he jest looked easy in his mine.'

"They were all waiting, he said, expecting Absalom to tear him to pieces on the spot; but as Halloway advanced, Absalom faltered and stopped. He could not stand his calm eye.

"'It was jest like a dog givin' way before a man who ain't afraid of him,' my man said. 'He breshed Absalom aside as if he had been a fly, and began to talk to us, and I never heard such a speech.'

"I got there just after it happened; for some report of what Absalom intended to do had reached me that night and I rode over hastily, fearing that I might arrive too late. When, however, I arrived at the place everything was quiet, Absalom had disappeared. Unable to face his downfall, he had gone off, taking old Joel with him. The tide of excitement had changed and the negroes, relieved at the relaxing of the tension, were laughing among themselves at their champion's defeat and disavowing any sympathy with his violence. They were all friendly with Halloway.

"'Dat man wa' n' nothin' but a' outside nigger, nohow,' they said. 'And he always was more mouth than anything else,' etc.

"'Good L—d! He say he want to drink blood!' declared one man to another, evidently for us to hear, as we mounted our horses.

"'Drink *whiskey!*' replied the other, dryly, and there was a laugh of derision.

"I rode home with Halloway.

"I shall never forget his serenity. As we passed along, the negroes were lining the roads on their way homeward, and were shouting and laughing among themselves; and the greetings they gave us as we passed were as civil and good-humored as if no unpleasantness had ever existed. A little after we set out, one man, who had been walking very fast just ahead of us, and had been keeping in advance all the time, came close to Halloway's stirrup and said something to him in an undertone. All I caught was, layin' up something against him.'

"'That 's all right, Dick; let him lay it up, and keep it laid up,' Halloway laughed.

"'Dat 's a bad feller!' the negro insisted, uneasily, his voice kept in an undertone. 'You got to watch him. I'se knowed him from a boy.'

"He added something else in a whisper which I did not catch.

"'All right; certainly not! Much obliged to you, Dick. I 'll keep my eyes open. Goodnight.'

"'Good-night, gent'men'; and the negro fell back and began to talk with the nearest of his companions effusively.

"'Who is that?' I asked, for the man had kept his hat over his eyes.

"'That 's Dick Winchester. You remember that old fellow 't used to belong to old Mr. Eaton—lived down in the pines back o' me, on the creek 't runs near my place. His wife died the year of the big snow.'

"It was not necessary for him to explain further. I remembered the negro for whom Hal-loway had ridden through the storm that night.

"I asked Halloway somewhat irrelevantly, if he carried a pistol. He said no, he had never done so.

"'Fact is, I 'm afraid of killin' somebody. And I don't want to do that, I know. Never could bear to shoot my gun even durin' o' the war, though I shot her 'bout as often as any of 'em, I reckon—always used to shut my eyes right tight whenever I pulled the trigger. I reckon I was a mighty pore soldier,' he laughed. I had heard

that he was one of the best in the army.

"'Besides, I always feel sort o' cowardly if I 've got a pistol on. Looks like I was afraid of somebody—an' I ain't. I 've noticed if two fellows have pistols on and git to fightin', mighty apt to one git hurt, maybe both. Sort o' like two dogs growling—long as don't but one of 'em growl it's all right. If don't but one have a pistol, t' other feller always has the advantage and sort o' comes out top, while the man with the pistol looks mean.'

"I remember how he looked in the dim moonlight as he drawled his quaint philosophy.

"'I 'm a man o' peace, Mr. Johnny, and I learnt that from your mother—I learnt a heap o' things from her,' he added, presently, after a little period of reflection. 'She was the lady as used always to have a kind word for me when I was a boy. That 's a heap to a boy. I used to think she was an angel. You think it 's *you* I'm a fightin' for in this canvass? 'T ain't. I like you well enough, but I ain't never forgot your mother, and her kindness to my old people durin' the war when I was away. She give me this handkerchief for a weddin' present when I was married after the war—said 't was all she had to give, and my wife thinks the world and all of it; won't let me have it 'cept as a favor; but this mornin' she told me to take it—said 'twould bring me luck.' He took a big bandana out of his pocket and held it up in the moonlight. I remembered it as one of my father's.

"'She 'll make me give it up to-morrow night when I git home,' he chuckled.

"We had turned into a road through the plantations, and had just come to the fork where Halloway's road turned off toward his place.

"'I lays a heap to your mother's door—purty much all this, I reckon.' His eye swept the moon-bathed scene before him. 'But for her I might n't 'a got *her*. And ain't a' man in the world got a happier home, or as good a wife.' He waved his hand toward the little homestead that was sleeping in the moonlight on the slope the other side of the stream, a picture of peace.

"His path went down a little slope, and mine kept along the side of the hill until it entered the woods. A great sycamore tree grew right in the fork, with its long, hoary arms extending over both roads, making a broad mass of shadow in the white moonlight.

"The next day was the day of election. Hal-loway was at one poll and I was at another; so I did not see him that day. But he sent me word that evening that he had carried his poll, and I rode home knowing that we should have peace.

"I was awakened next morning by the news that both Halloway and his wife had been murdered the night before. I at once galloped over to his place, and was one of the first to get there. It was a horrible sight. Halloway had evidently been waylaid and killed by a blow of an axe just as he was entering his yard gate, and then the door of the house had been broken open and his wife had been killed, after which Halloway 's body had been dragged into the house, and the house had been fired with the intention of making it appear that the house had burned by accident. But by one of those inscrutable fatalities, the fire, after burning half of two walls, had gone out.

"It was a terrible sight, and the room looked like a shambles. Halloway had plainly been caught unawares while leaning over his gate. The back of his head had been crushed in with the eye of an axe, and he had died instantly. The pleasant thought which was in his mind at the instant—perhaps, of the greeting that always awaited him on the click of his latch; perhaps, of his success that day; perhaps, of my mother's kindness to him when he was a boy—was yet on his face, stamped there indelibly by the blow that killed him. There he lay, face upward, as the murderer had thrown him after bringing him in, stretched out his full length on the floor, with his quiet face upturned! looking in that throng of excited, awe-stricken men, just what he had said he was: a man of peace. His wife, on the other hand, wore a terrified look on her face. There had been a terrible struggle. She had lived to taste the bitterness of death, before it took her."

Stokeman, with a little shiver, put his hand over his eyes as though to shut out the vision that recurred to him. After a long breath he began again.

"In a short time there was a great crowd there, white and black. The general mind flew at once to Absalom Turnell. The negroes present were as earnest in their denunciation as the whites; perhaps, more so, for the whites were past threatening. I knew from the grim-ness that trouble was brewing, and I felt that if Absalom were caught and any evidence were found on him, no power on earth could save him. A party rode off in search of him, and went to old Joel's house. Neither Absalom nor Joel were there; they had not been home since the election, one of the women said.

"As a law officer of the county I was to a certain extent in charge at Halloway's and in looking around for all the clues to be found, I came on a splinter of 'light-wood' not as large or as long as one's little finger, stuck in a crack in the floor near the bed: a piece of a stick of 'fat-pine,' such as negroes often carry about, and use as tapers. One end had been burned; but the other end was clean and was jagged just as it had been broken off. There was a small scorched place on the planks on either side, and it was evident that this was one of the splinters that had been used in firing the house. I called a couple of the coolest, most level-headed men present and quietly showed them the spot, and they took the splinter out and I put it in my pocket.

"By one of those fortuitous chances which so often happen in every lawyer's experience, and appear inexplicable, Old Joel Turnell walked up to the house just as we came out. He was as sympathetic as possible, appeared outraged at the crime, professed the highest regard for Halloway, and the deepest sorrow at his death. The sentiment of the crowd was rather one of sympathy with him, that he should have such a son as Absalom.

"I took the old man aside to have a talk with him, to find out where his son was and where he had been the night before. He was equally vehement in his declarations of his son's innocence, and of professions of regard for Halloway. And suddenly to my astonishment he declared that his son had spent the night with him and had gone away after sunrise.

"Then happened one of those fatuous things that have led to the detection of so many negroes and can almost be counted on in their prosecution. Joel took a handkerchief out of his pocket and wiped his face, and as he did so I recognized the very handkerchief Halloway had shown me the night before. With the

handkerchief, Joel drew out several splinters of light-wood, one of which had been broken off from a longer piece. I picked it up and it fitted exactly into the piece that had been stuck in the crack in the floor. At first, I could scarcely believe my own senses. Of course, it became my duty to have Joel arrested immediately. But I was afraid to have it done there, the crowd was so deeply incensed. So I called the two men to whom I had shown the light-wood splinter, told them the story, and they promised to get him away and arrest him quietly and take him safely to jail, which they did.

"Even then we did not exactly believe that the old man had any active complicity in the crime, and I was blamed for arresting the innocent old father and letting the guilty son escape. The son, however, was arrested shortly afterward.

"The circumstances from which the crime arose gave the case something of a political aspect, and the prisoners had the best counsel to be procured, both at our local bar and in the capital. The evidence was almost entirely circumstantial, and when I came to work it up I found, as often occurs, that although the case was plain enough on the outside, there were many difficulties in the way of fitting all the circumstances to prove the guilt of the accused and to make out every link in the chain. Particularly was this so in the prosecution of the young man, who was supposed to be the chief criminal, and in whose case there was a strong effort to prove an alibi.

"As I worked, I found to my surprise that the guilt of the old man, though based wholly on circumstantial evidence, was established more clearly than that of his son—not indeed, as to the murders, but as to the arson, which served just as well to convict on. The handkerchief, which Joel had not been able to resist the temptation to steal, and the splinter of light-wood in his pocket, which fitted exactly into that found in the house, together with other circumstances, proved his guilt conclusively. But although there was an equal moral certainty of the guilt of the young man, it was not so easy to establish it by law.

"Old Dick Winchester was found dead one morning and the alibi was almost completely proved, and only failed by the incredibility of the witnesses for the defence. Old Joel persistently declared that Absalom was innocent, and but for a confession by Absalom of certain facts intended to shift the suspicion from himself to his father, I do not know how his case might have turned out.

"I believed him to be the instigator as well as the perpetrator of the crime.

"I threw myself into the contest, and prosecuted with all the vigor I was capable of. And I finally secured the conviction of both men. But it was after a hard fight. They were the only instances in which, representing the Commonwealth, I was ever conscious of strong personal feeling, and of a sense of personal triumph. The memory of my last ride with Hal-loway, and of the things he had said to me; the circumstances under which he and his wife were killed; the knowledge that in some sort it was on my account; and the bitter attacks made on me personally;(for in some quarters I was depicted as a bloodthirsty ruffian, and it was charged that I was for political reasons prosecuting men whom I personally knew to be innocent), all combined to spur me to my utmost effort. And when the verdicts were rendered, I was conscious of a sense of personal triumph so fierce as to shock me.

"Not that I did not absolutely believe in the guilt of both prisoners; for I considered that I had demonstrated it, and so did the jurors who tried them.

"The day of execution was set. An appeal was at once taken in both cases and a stay was granted, and I had to sustain the verdicts in the upper court. The fact that the evidence was entirely circumstantial had aroused great interest, and every lawyer in the State had his theory. The upper court affirmed in both cases and appeals were taken to the highest court, and again stay of execution was granted.

"The prisoners' counsel had moved to have the prisoners transferred to another county, which I opposed. I was sure that the people of my county would observe the law. They had resisted the first fierce impulse, and were now waiting patiently for justice to take its course. Months passed, and the stay of execution had to be renewed. The road to Halloway's grew up and I understood that the house had fallen in, though I never went that way again. Still the court hung fire as to its conclusion.

"The day set for the execution approached for the third time without the court having rendered its decision.

"On the day before that set for the execution, the court gave its decision. It refused to interfere in the case of old Joel, but reversed and set aside the verdict in that of the younger man. Of a series of over one hundred bills of exception taken by his counsel as a 'drag-net,' one held; and owing to the admission of a single question by a juror, the judgment was set aside in Absalom's case and a new trial was ordered.

"Being anxious lest the excitement might increase, I felt it my duty to stay at the county-seat that night, and as I could not sleep I spent the time going over the records of the two cases; which, like most causes, developed new points every time they were read.

"Everything was perfectly quiet all night, though the village was filling up with people from the country to see the execution, which at that time was still public. I determined next morning to go to my home in the country and get a good rest, of which I began to feel the need. I was detained, however, and it was well along in the forenoon before I mounted my horse and rode slowly out of town through a back street. The lane kept away from the main road except at one point just outside of town, where it crossed it at right angles.

"It was a beautiful spring day—a day in which it is a pleasure merely to live, and as I rode along through the quiet lane under the leafy trees I could not help my mind wandering and dwelling on the things that were happening. I am not sure, indeed, that I was not dozing; for I reached the highway without knowing just where I was.

"I was recalled to myself by a rush of boys up the street before me, with a crowd streaming along behind them. It was the head of the procession. The sheriff and his men were riding, with set faces, in front and on both sides of a slowly moving vehicle; a common horse-cart in which in the midst of his guards, and dressed in his Sunday clothes, with a clean white shirt on, seated on his pine coffin, was old Joel. I unconsciously gazed at him, and at the instant he looked up and saw me. Our eyes met as naturally as if he had expected to find me there, and he gave me as natural and as friendly a bow—not a particle reproachful; but a little timid, as though he did not quite know whether I would speak to him.

"It gave me a tremendous shock. I had a sudden sinking of the heart, and nearly fell from my horse.

"I turned and rode away; but I could not shake off the feeling. I tried to reassure myself with the reflection that he had committed a terrible crime. It did not compose me. What insisted on coming to my mind was the eagerness with which I had prosecuted him and the joy I had felt at my success.

"Of course, I know now it was simply that I was overworked and needed rest; but at that time the trouble was serious.

"It haunted me all day, and that night I could not sleep. For many days afterwards, it clung to me, and I found myself unable to forget it, or to sleep as I had been used to do.

"The new trial of Absalom came on in time, and the fight was had all over again. It was longer than before, as every man in our county had an opinion, and a jury had to be brought from another county. But again the verdict was the same. And again an appeal was taken; was refused by the next higher court; and allowed by the highest; this time because a talesman had said he had expressed an opinion, but had not formed one. In time the appeal was heard once more, and after much delay, due to the number of cases on the docket and the immense labor of studying carefully so huge a record, it was decided. It was again reversed, on the technicality mentioned, and a new trial was ordered.

"That same day the court adjourned for the term.

"Having a bed-room adjoining my office, I spent that night in town. I did not go to sleep until late, and had not been asleep long when I was awakened by the continual repetition of a monotonous sound. At first I thought I was dreaming, but as I aroused it came to me distinctly: the sound of blows in the distance struck regularly. I awaked fully. The noise was in the direction of the jail. I dressed hastily and went down on the street. I stepped into the arms of a half-dozen masked men who quietly laid me on my back, blindfolded me and bound me so that I could not move. I threatened and struggled; but to no purpose, and finally gave it up and tried expostulation. They told me that they intended no harm to me; but that I was their prisoner and they meant to keep me. They had come for their man, they said, and they meant to have him. They were perfectly quiet and acted with the precision of old soldiers.

"All the time I could hear the blows at the jail as the mob pounded the iron door with sledges, and now and then a shout or cry from within.

"The blows were on the inner door, for the mob had quickly gained access to the outer corridor. They had come prepared and, stout as the door was, it could not resist long. Then one great roar went up and the blows ceased suddenly, and then one cry.

"In a little while I heard the regular tramp of men, and in a few minutes the column came up the street, marching like soldiers. There must have been five hundred of them. The prisoner was in the midst, bare-headed and walking between two mounted men, and was moaning and pleading and cursing by turns.

"I asked my captors if I might speak, and they gave me ten minutes. I stood up on the top step of the house, and for a few minutes I made what I consider to have been the best speech I ever made or shall make. I told them in closing that I should use all my powers to find out who they were, and if I could do so I should prosecute them, everyone, and try and have them hanged for murder.

"They heard me patiently, but without a word, and when I was through, one of the leaders made a short reply. They agreed with me about the law; but they felt that the way it was being used was such as to cause a failure of justice. They had waited patiently, and were apparently no nearer seeing justice executed than in the beginning. So they proposed to take the law into their own hands. The remedy was, to do away with all but proper defences and execute the law without unreasonable delay.

"It was the first mob I had ever seen, and I experienced a sensation of utter powerlessness and insignificance; just as in a storm at sea, a hurricane, or a conflagration. The individual disappeared before the irresistible force.

"An order was given and the column moved on silently.

"A question arose among my guards as to what should be done with me.

"They wished to pledge me to return to my rooms and take no steps until morning, but I would give no pledges. So they took me along with them.

"From the time they started there was not a word except the orders of the leader and his lieutenants and the occasional outcry of the prisoner, who prayed and cursed by turns.

"They passed out of the village and turned in at Holloway's place.

"Here the prisoner made his last struggle. The idea of being taken to Holloway's place appeared to terrify him to desperation. He might as well have struggled against the powers of the Infinite. He said he would confess everything if they would not take him there. They said they did not want his confession. He gave up, and from this time was quiet; and he soon began to croon a sort of hymn.

"The procession stopped at the big sycamore under which I had last parted from Holloway.

"I asked leave to speak again; but they said no. They asked the prisoner if he wanted to say anything. He said he wanted something to eat. The leader said he should have it; that it should never be said that any man—even he—had asked in vain for food in that county.

"Out of a haversack food was produced in plenty, and while the crowd waited, amidst profound silence the prisoner squatted down and ate up the entire plateful.

"Then the leader said he had just five minutes more to live and he had better pray.

"He began a sort of wild incoherent ramble; confessed that he had murdered Holloway and his wife, but laid the chief blame on his father, and begged them to tell his friends to meet him in heaven.

"I asked leave to go, and it was given me on condition that I would not return for twenty minutes. This I agreed to.

"I went to my home and aroused someone, and we returned. It was not much more than a half-hour since I had left, but the place was deserted. It was all as silent as the grave. There was no living creature there. Only

under the great sycamore, from one of its long, pale branches that stretched across the road, hung that dead thing with the toes turned a little in, just out of our reach, turning and swaying a little in the night wind.

"We had to climb to the limb to cut the body down.

"The outside newspapers made a good deal of the affair. I was charged with indifference, with cowardice, with venality. Some journals even declared that I had instigated the lynching and participated in it, and said that I ought to be hanged.

"I did not mind this much. It buoyed me up, and I went on with my work without stopping for a rest, as I had intended to do.

"I kept my word and ransacked the county for evidence against the lynchers. Many knew nothing about the matter; others pleaded their privilege and refused to testify on the ground of self-crimination.

"The election came on again, and almost before I knew it I was in the midst of the canvass.

"I held that election would be an indorsement of me, and defeat would be a censure. After all, it is the indorsement of those about our own home that we desire.

"The night before the election I spoke to a crowd at Burley's Fork. The place had changed since Halloway checked Absalom Turnell there. A large crowd was in attendance. I paid Halloway my personal tribute that night, and it met with a deep response. I denounced the lynching. There was a dead silence. I was sure that in my audience were many of the men who had been in the mob that night.

"When I rode home quite a company started with me.

"The moon, which was on the wane, was, I remember, just rising as we set out. It was a soft night, rather cloudy, but not dark, for the sad moon shone a little now and then, looking wasted and red. The other men dropped off from time to time as we came to the several roads that led to their homes and at last I was riding alone. I was dead tired and after I was left by my companions sat loungingly on my horse. My mind ran on the last canvass and the strange tragedy that had ended it, with its train of consequences. I was not aware when my horse turned off from the main road into the by-lane that led through the Halloway place to my own home. My horse was the same I had ridden that night. I awaked suddenly to a realization of where I was, and regretted for a second that I had come by that road. The next moment I put the thought away as a piece of cowardice and rode on, my mind perfectly easy. My horse presently broke into a canter and I took a train of thought distinctly pleasant. I mention this to account for my inability to explain what followed. I was thinking of old times and of a holiday I had once spent at Halloway's when old Joel came through on his way to his wife's house. It was the first time I remembered ever seeing Joel. I was suddenly conscious of something white moving on the road before me. At the same second my horse suddenly wheeled with such violence as to break my stirrup-leather and almost throw me over his neck. I pulled him up and turned him back, and there before me, coming along the unused road up the hill from Halloway's, was old Joel, sitting in a cart, looking at me, and bowing to me politely just as he had done that morning on his way to the gallows; while dangling from the white limb of the sycamore, swaying softly in the wind, hung the corpse of Absalom. At first I thought it was an illusion and I rubbed my eyes. But there they were. Then I thought it was a delusion; and I reined in my horse and reasoned about it. But it was not; for I saw both men as plainly as I saw my stirrup-leather lying there in the middle of the road, and in the same way. My horse saw them too, and was so terrified that I could not keep him headed to them. Again and again I pulled him around and looked at the men and tried to reason about them; but every time I looked there they were, and my horse snorted and wheeled in terror. I could see the clothes they wore: the clean, white shirt and neat Sunday suit old Joel had on, and the striped, hickory shirt, torn on the shoulders, and the gray trousers that the lynched man wore—I could see the white rope wrapped around the limb and hanging down, and the knot at his throat; I remembered them perfectly. I could not get near the cart, for the road down to Halloway's, on which it moved steadily without ever approaching, was stopped up. But I rode right under the limb on which the other man hung, and there he was just above my head. I reasoned with myself, but in vain. There he still hung silent and limp, swinging gently in the night wind and turning a little back and forth at the end of the white rope.

"In sheer determination to fight it through I got off my horse and picked up my stirrup. He was trembling like a leaf. I remounted and rode back to the spot and looked again, confident that the spectres would now have disappeared. But there they were, old Joel, sitting in his cart, bowing to me civilly with timid, sad, friendly eyes, as much alive as I was, and the dead man, with his limp head and arms and his toes turned in, hanging in mid-air.

"I rode up under the dangling body and cut at it with my switch. At the motion my horse bolted. He ran fully a mile before I could pursue him in.

"The next morning I went to my stable to get my horse to ride to the polls. The man at the stable said:

"'He ain't fit to take out, sir. You must 'a gi'n him a mighty hard ride last night—he won't tetch a moufful; he 's been in a cold sweats all night.'

"Sure enough, he looked it.

"I took another horse and rode out by Halloway's to see the place by daylight.

"It was quiet enough now. The sycamore shaded the grass-grown track, and a branch, twisted and broken by some storm, hung by a strip of bark from the big bough that stretched across the road above my head, swaying, with limp leaves, a little in the wind; a dense dogwood bush in full bloom among the young pines, filled a fence-corner down the disused road where old Joel had bowed to me from his phantom cart the night before. But it was hard to believe that these were the things which had created such impressions on my mind—as hard to believe as that the quiet cottage peering out from amid the mass of peach-bloom on the other slope was one hour the home of such happiness, and the next the scene of such a tragedy." Once more he put his hand suddenly before his face as though to shut out something from his vision. "Yes, I have seen apparitions," he said, thoughtfully, "but I have seen what was worse."

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