

THE DANCING GHOST

Five miles south of Harper in the peaceful rolling hills of northwestern Gillespie County is a property which formerly belonged to two bachelor brothers, the Notts, who had come to the area from the Carolinas after the Civil War. They brought with them two black women, former slaves, whom the brothers claimed had requested to be kept in the family's service after the war.

To whatever extent that claim may or may not have been true, one of the women became pregnant, and the rumor was that one of the brothers was the father. Before long, the woman was found hanging from a tree at the ranch. After a brief deliberation, a jury agreed with the Nott brothers' story—that the woman had committed suicide.

Certainly people talked. They argued over whether the man or the woman was the more to be shamed, and they speculated over the truth of the story and the justice of the trial. Meanwhile, every night, the ghost of the woman came out and danced, danced at midnight, right beneath the large oak from which she was found hanging. That's what Ellie Stevens said, and she saw her many times.

The woman's dancing was a jubilation, she said, a dance of victory—rejoicing, perhaps, that she was able to save her child from being born into shame and scorn.

And perhaps she's dancing still.

Campion, William James. "Negro Ghosts," *The Lore and Legend of the Texas Hill Country: A Thesis presented to the faculty of the Department of English, University of Texas at El Paso*, August 1968, pp. 91-92.

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