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## Choked To Death By Law!

### CAROLINE SHIPP,

#### A YOUNG COLORED WOMAN, IS HANGED BY THE NECK IN THE PRESENCE OF 3,000 SPECTATORS,

#### Men, Women, and Children, White and Colored, Till Dead, Dead, Dead!

Friday, the twenty-second day of January, 1892, was full of scenes which thousands of people in Gaston county will remember to their dying day. It is a day from which these thousands will date events the remainder of their lives. For on this day, a helpless human being wrapped in the black terrors of a murderer's death dangled from the end of a rope before their eyes and there swung in mid air choking, choking, till dead, dead, dead! And these same thousands will be forever haunted by the memory that they were there—for what?—only to witness with their own eyes this awful soul sickening spectacle! The day opened cold and cloudy. The ground was damp, the roads were muddy. The cold, heavy clouds lay in dark and mottled patches here, or in long irregular lines there, or again in smooth unbroken surfaces against the sky, so obscuring the sky that not a single golden line of sunlight found its way through them to earth during the solemn day. Men dropped their work, women left off their housekeeping, children could hardly be controlled. Early in the morning, from every part of the county, horse back, mule-back, on foot, on crutches, in buggy, hack, and wagon they thronged to the scene of execution.

#### THE SCAFFOLD.

The scaffold was set up in an open field one mile from the jail. It was on the county's property and stood about a hundred yards from the open grave in the potter's field. Being near the head of a bottom, with the ground rising on three sides, the gallows stood in full view from the semicircular hills about it. Arranged in ranks on this ground many thousands of spectators could have viewed the execution. It is three hours before the execution, but people are gathering in hundreds. It is surprising how many white women were present. Some sit in vehicles, some view the grave digger at his work, some view the death-trap, and discuss its arrangement. There it stands in its solitude. Two upright posts about sixteen feet high and six feet apart, with a cross beam at the top, make up the frame work. Little more than six feet from the ground is the platform, supported between the posts by a fixed timber nailed to the post on one side and by a single wooden pin through the post on the other side. Pull out the loosely fitting pin and down comes the platform. This pin is drawn from the outside. It goes through a plank and then on through the post, projecting through far enough to support one end of the platform. The outer end of the pin is made too large to go through the plank, which is tied up and down to the post. The lower end of this strip of plank has a rope on it with which it is tied to the post securely. At the proper time, the deputy will unfasten this lower end and jerk the plank outward by means of the rope tied to it. The upper end of the plank is against the post and sliding off the lower end draws the platform from the post and thus drops the victim.

#### AT THE JAIL.

In front of the jail there is a great crowd of horses, vehicles, men, women and children. The crowd seems to be patient. The people have been surging through the streets or standing on cold muddy ground all the morning. Eleven o'clock has passed, and five is coming on. The Gaston men, tired of dreary waiting, are in ranks and drill in the court are across the street. Twelve o'clock is here and the deputy has not said that everything is ready. It is an hour yet. The reporters go scurrying off to the telegraph office to be sure that they will have no trouble in getting quick connection with their papers. They return and allowed to visit the cell of the condemned woman. She says she is ready, stands in a long white gown with figures embroidered over it. She firms her innocence, and declares she is not afraid to die. "I did

not poison my baby, and I am not afraid to die. Mack Farrar poisoned my baby." These same statements she made to a reporter two days before her death, to another on the afternoon before her death, and to both of them with two ministers the morning before her death, and declared them to the world as her last words from the scaffold a few minutes before her death. Her story of the crime in detail, with a history of her condemnation will be given in its proper place further on. The reporters came down and find the crowds in front of the jail still impatient. It is one o'clock and they have but a few minutes to wait, for the execution must take place before two.

#### SHE COMES!

At six minutes past one, the ponderous door of the Dallas jail swung back on its hinges, and the condemned woman in charge of Deputy Van Sellars met the gaze of the impatient throng. She wore a light calico bonnet with small black flowers stamped on it, and was arrayed in a long black gown of some light fabric. From the gathered folds of the dark gown, a cold white gleam fell out upon the eyes of the spectators. It was a gleam from the steel manacles upon her wrists. A wagon driven by two little white boys stands ready. It contains a plain coffin with a flat top. The coffin is wrapped in black cloth. She is escorted into the wagon by Deputy Sellars into which she easily climbs. Without visible trepidation she sits down on her coffin. The deputy sits beside her. The two colored ministers are also in the same wagon with her. In less than an hour and a half this friendly colored woman will be in eternity. The wagon moves forward, the drum rolls, and then begins

#### THE MARCH TO DEATH.

Sheriff M. H. Shuford in front of the condemned woman's wagon rides on an iron gray horse. Following the wagon come vehicles and a long cavalcade of horsemen. Flanking the procession of vehicles and horsemen, are the Gaston Riflemen with bayoneted rifles. They are marching in two single files, one on either side. Their bright bayonets and rifles gleam with chilling coldness on this dreary clouded day. Capt. W. F. Holland commands; and his youthful son John, the boy drummer, beats the measures of the solemn death march. Outside of the Riflemen are hundreds of men, women, and children following in the procession as it moves out toward the fatal field.

Some one says "Look in that porch at that white woman laughing!" But the march to death went on and the solemn roll of the drum that measured the steps of the march also measured away the moments in the mortal life of every soul who heard it. Throb, throb, throb-throb-throb, went the drum, never stopping, never faltering; and the friendless colored woman who sits on her coffin hears its merciless roll tolling away one by one the few short moments that separate her from eternity.

A black horse, saddled, but without a rider, breaks loose and creates some confusion by dashing hither and thither on one side of the procession. But the death march moves on, and the solemn roll of the drum that measures the steps of the march also measures away the moments in the mortal life of every soul who hears it. Throb, throb, throb-throb-throb, goes the drum, never stopping, never faltering; and the friendless colored woman who sits on her coffin hears its merciless roll tolling away the few short moments that separate her from eternity.

A section of the procession is checked a few moments in order that a file of the military company may march through to the opposite side. But the death march moves on, and the solemn roll of the drum that measures the steps of the march also measures away the moments in the mortal life of every soul who hears it. Throb, throb, throb-throb-throb, goes the drum, never stopping, never faltering; and the friendless colored woman who sits on her coffin hears its merciless roll tolling away the few short moments that separate her from eternity.

sits on her coffin hears its merciless roll tolling away the few short moments that separate her from eternity. Some one summons the levity to make a flippant remark to a member of the military company about marching to Chili. But the death march moves on, and the solemn roll of the drum that measures the steps of the march also measures away the moments in the mortal life of every soul who hears it. Throb, throb, throb-throb-throb, goes the drum, never stopping, never faltering; and the friendless colored woman who sits on her coffin hears its merciless roll tolling away the last short moments that separate her from eternity.

#### ON THE SCAFFOLD.

At 1:35 the march is ended. The scaffold stands ready. Three thousand spectators concentrate their gaze upon the young colored woman in charge of the deputy now walking to the gallows. At 1:36 Sheriff M. H. Shuford, Deputy Van Sellars with the prisoner, Rev. L. C. Chamblin and Rev. B. F. Martin, two colored ministers, ascend the scaffold. The deputy and assistant are adjusting the rope to give the proper drop. At 1:38, O. F. Mason Esq., one of the lawyers for the defense, who has worked hard and faithfully, spending time and means to secure the commutation of the poor woman's sentence, went up the steps weeping freely, and taking the woman's hand said, "Good bye, Caroline, I have done the best I could for you." Sheriff Shuford also bade her good bye. "Give it five feet drop" called out Mr. Mason, "give it good drop." At 1:39 the prisoner, with the manacles still on her wrists, seemed to shiver as if cold. Her breath came occasionally in a sigh, and she was evidently suffering in spirit what no words can ever tell. But in a moment the chill passed off and from that time to the end she was perfectly composed. "Give it more drop," called out Mr. Mason to the man adjusting the rope, "give it good drop and break her neck," and with emotion he added, "I've dreamed for three nights that it was a butchered job and she choked to death; do it right, I don't want her to choke to death." When the rope was finally adjusted the end lacked about six inches of touching the platform on which the woman stood.

#### THEY SING AND PRAYER.

Rev. L. C. Chamblin, the preacher in charge of the M. E. Church at Gastonia, then announced that Caroline wished two stanzas of a favorite hymn sung. He repeated the stanzas. After repeating the stanzas, he with Rev. B. F. Martin, pastor of the Gethsemane A. M. E. Zion church of Charlotte, sang them:

Why do we mourn for dying friends,  
Or shake at death's alarms?  
'Tis but the voice that Jesus sends  
To call them to his arms.

Are we not tending upward, too,  
As fast as time can move?  
Nor should we wish the hours more slow,  
To keep us from our Love!

#### THEY SING AND PRAYER.

Caroline began singing, but did not sing the stanzas through. Rev. B. F. Martin now offers the following prayer:

Almighty God, from whom we receive all good gifts: We thank thee for thy mercy, the Bible in which thou hast revealed thy will to us, and in Jesus Christ, thy Son, in whom thou hast vouchsafed salvation to all who will accept Him, Him whom Caroline hath accepted and whom she is now trusting. We wish to blend our praise and thanksgiving with the saints and angels now around thy throne, and pray thee to bless and strengthen Caroline in this hour of sore affliction. Give to her victorious faith. And O, may she realize thy presence. Thy rod and thy staff—may they comfort her. Do thou receive her spirit into thy presence, that she may, with thy saints redeemed from sin's power, praise thee forever. And us who are left behind do thou perfect in faith and life till we shall be called to join the glorified hosts in thy kingdom above. Grant these our prayers, for Jesus' sake. Amen.

Nearly all who were near enough to hear bowed their heads during the short but earnest supplication. The condemned woman bowed her head prayerfully for a sentence or two, but she then looks out upon the vast sea of spectators.

#### THE END IS NEAR.

At 1:54 the Sheriff again mounts the scaffold and with the assistance of his deputy completes the final details preparatory to taking the woman's life. The black hood is placed over the prisoner's head. Her light calico bonnet, the same worn when she was brought to jail, worn in court, and worn to her execution, she gave to the sheriff who afterwards took it home under his arm. The deputy unlocks the steel manacles, and as he places her hands behind her, an observer cannot fail to note how small they are. He binds them tight with a small cotton rope. Another piece of the same rope is bound outside the black robe, just above her knees. The noose is adjusted under her left ear.

#### GOOD BYE.

All have told her goodbye. The sheriff shakes her already fast-bound hand. Ministers, officers, all have come down, the useless timbers are cleared away, the deputy unties the rope at the bottom of the strip of plank, and all is still. A dark robed form stands in the chilly air alone. The woman must die the death, but she does not quake or tremble. Slightly stooping, she peers through the thin hood toward the deputy and in a clear voice, speaks the last words of her life to him, words that may possibly sound in his ears till his dying day—in a low clear voice she asked "Are you ready?" "Yes," said the deputy. Just at that moment a clean white handkerchief fluttered from her hand down to the platform beside her feet. Deputy Van Sellars gave the rope in his hand, an awful shock which drew the supporting pin,

and down came the platform and the hooded figure. With a soul sickening jerk the dark, hooded form was checked in mid air after a fall of about four feet. Not a muscle of the hanging woman moved, there was not a tremor, not a sound. The crowd surged toward the rope pen surrounding the scaffold. "Get back, get back!" exclaimed the Riflemen who formed a cordon just without the rope enclosure. And turning sharp around with their bayonets, they forced the crowd back. "It was a good job said one, her neck was broken at once, and I feel relieved!" All this occupies barely thirty seconds. Here a horrible sound of suppressed breathing escapes from the swinging body as it recovers from the sudden shock. Her neck had not been broken! The hooded face is turned upward to the sky, the noose is under her chin, the chest is heaving and struggling in a terrific effort of nature to supply the lungs with air. The powerful hand of the deputy lays its heavy clench on the noose and tightens it upon the woman's throat. Respiration is cut off, but the struggle of nature for air continues. The scene is sickening beyond endurance and the writer turns away and leaves.

#### DEAD AND BURIED.

Dr. ... made a post mortem examination. ...

... with Uncle Solomon Holland and Jinny, his wife. He [Solomon] hired me to work for him. ...

... On Tuesday morning, I had got to work for Mack Farrar. ...

... I told Mack Farrar that I was going to get some more work. ...

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His oath of office and his conscience, he said, forbade it. And the woman was hanged.

THE WOMAN'S STORY OF HER LIFE AND THE CRIME.

Between five and six o'clock on Thursday the day before her execution the writer was permitted to interview the condemned woman in her cell. She occupied the middle cell or cage of a row of three which stands between two windows. The light falls on the two cages at the ends, but is cut off by partitions from direct entrance to the middle cage. It is a cold day. The woman is cuddled up on a hard pallet, or mattress, on the floor to keep warm. There is no chair or stool to sit on. The woman sits up, but does not speak until she is spoken to. When addressed she spoke slowly and in the polite way common to most colored people. I then told her what I had come for, that her end was near, she ought to conceal nothing, that I wanted the truth of the crime for which she was to die, that I would print in the paper and the world would then read it as she told it. She said there was nothing she wanted to conceal and would tell the story as it happened. Of course, many facts were related in answer to direct and cross questions from me. These were brought out to make her story clearer. I give it in her own language as nearly as I can reproduce it from full notes. Nearly every word she spoke was written down as it was spoken. She said:

I am twenty or twenty-one years old. My father belonged to the Mt. Holly Shipp in slavery time. 'Twas on Tuesday—after March court. Mack Farrar came to my house. He was living with Uncle Solomon Holland and Jinny, his wife. He [Solomon] hired me to work for him. ...

... On Tuesday morning, I had got to work for Mack Farrar. ...

... I told Mack Farrar that I was going to get some more work. ...

... I told Mack Farrar that I was going to get some more work. ...

... I told Mack Farrar that I was going to get some more work. ...

She added further I started to tell at the magistrates trial just how it was. But Mack wouldn't let me. He says "You hush up the least said the earliest mended." I was afraid of Mack. [Did Mack give you ten dollars to swear him clear?] No. The day he left here after he came clear, he handed me ten dollars twice but I give it back; told him I didn't want it. He didn't offer me ten dollars to swear him clear.

THE BEST SHE COULD DO.

That much of her story related to her crime. When asked if she had ever done anything real bad in her life she said no. When asked how many children she had ever had she said two—the first one died three or four years ago at the age of six months. She was a very young mother. That child, too, was taken with a "tho-in-up." It died from a hurt, the doctor said. It was jumping in a chair and jumped out on its face. It died bleeding at the nose, and the doctor [Coster, I think] said it was hurt inside. I asked if any one had ever hinted to her that she had poisoned that child, too. She answered no. She said that one was Jack Davenport's child. When asked why she threw herself away with these men, she said it was the best she could do. Her parents died when she was thirteen or fourteen years old. Her folks were mean to her, and would take up her wages where she worked, not allowing her to have them. She took up with these men because they would help support her. With what they gave her and what she made she could make out a living.

"JUST LIKE I'M TELLING YOU— THAT'S THE TRUTH."

She said she had a sister which she expected to come to see her before she was hanged. But the sister never came, and Caroline had already seen her for the last time. On one of the iron bars lay a small red covered copy of the New Testament. "Can you read?" I asked. "I can read a little," she answered. It was time for me to return home. I told her the time was drawing near for her to die, and insisted that she tell the truth, if she hadn't told it. She declared that just like she had told me—that's the way it is—that's the truth. I am ready to go. I am innocent of murdering my baby. I am not afraid to die." I expressed my sympathy for her, saying it was hard to have to die innocent, but it was better for her to die that way than to die guilty. She said yes, she was innocent and wasn't afraid to die.

"YES, A COUPLE OF BOXES."

I then told her I did not know that I should speak with her again, and asked if there was anything I could do for her before she left this world. She thought she wanted. She hesitated a moment while I stood in most curious suspense, wondering what she would ask for. "Yes," she said, "I'd like to have some sardines." "As many as you want, just one box or two or three?" I said. "Well, a couple of boxes, please," she answered. I promised to send them and asked Mr. Campbell, who stood by, if he would see that the sardines were brought to her. I bade her good-bye and left.

#### STILL DECLARES HER INNOCENCE.

The next morning just before the execution, I saw the open boxes on the iron bars and I remarked that she had got her sardines. "Yes, sir," she said, and I am very much obliged to you. Mr. C. F. King, of the Atlanta Journal, in the presence of myself and one or both of the colored ministers asked her again, if she knew she had told the truth about the murder of her child. She declared that she had told the truth, that Mack Farrar poisoned her child, and that she was ready to die. Mr. King then asked if there was something she wanted. She asked for two oranges and he got them for her. We again bade her good-bye, and never spoke with her again. The same story about the death of her child which she related to us separately and together, she related and re-affirmed on the scaffold a few minutes before her death. On the scaffold she varied the story only by adding the incident of old man Solomon Holland's finding the box of poison out near his house.

#### GUILTY OR NOT GUILTY?

That question was asked many times on that hangman's day. The jury, with the evidence before them, had said she was guilty. Standing within a few moments of eternity the woman declared she was innocent. Was she guilty or not guilty? Mr. Mason, the most active of the lawyers for the defense, was of the opinion that she was guilty as an accessory, but that she was a simple minded tool used by Mack Farrar who was the guilty of the two. Mr. B. P. Tipton of the Mt. Holly News says that in his opinion she was entirely guilty. He is doubtless acquainted with facts of her character and circumstances which justify this belief, as it was in the Mt. Holly vicinity that she lived and was known.

#### FOUGHT NOT TO HAVE BEEN HANGED.

For my own part, I do not think she ought to have been hanged. I do not know all the circumstances; I do not know that any one man is acquainted with all the circumstances, but from my knowledge of the case I thoroughly believe that she was either innocent or of weak and unsound mental faculties. Both alternatives may be true, I believe the latter is true, that she was a weak minded man, and plant tool in the hands of her paramour. What right under heaven had the State of North Carolina to require a lot of men to take this ignorant woman out into an open field and choke the life out of her with a big rope? Was it for vengeance or for the prevention of crime? If for vengeance the State is wrong. If for prevention of crime, could not something else have been done with her to conserve the safety of society? If this woman was guilty, she just got rid of her child because it was in her way and she didn't want it. That is just about the way the State of North Carolina treated Caroline Shipp.