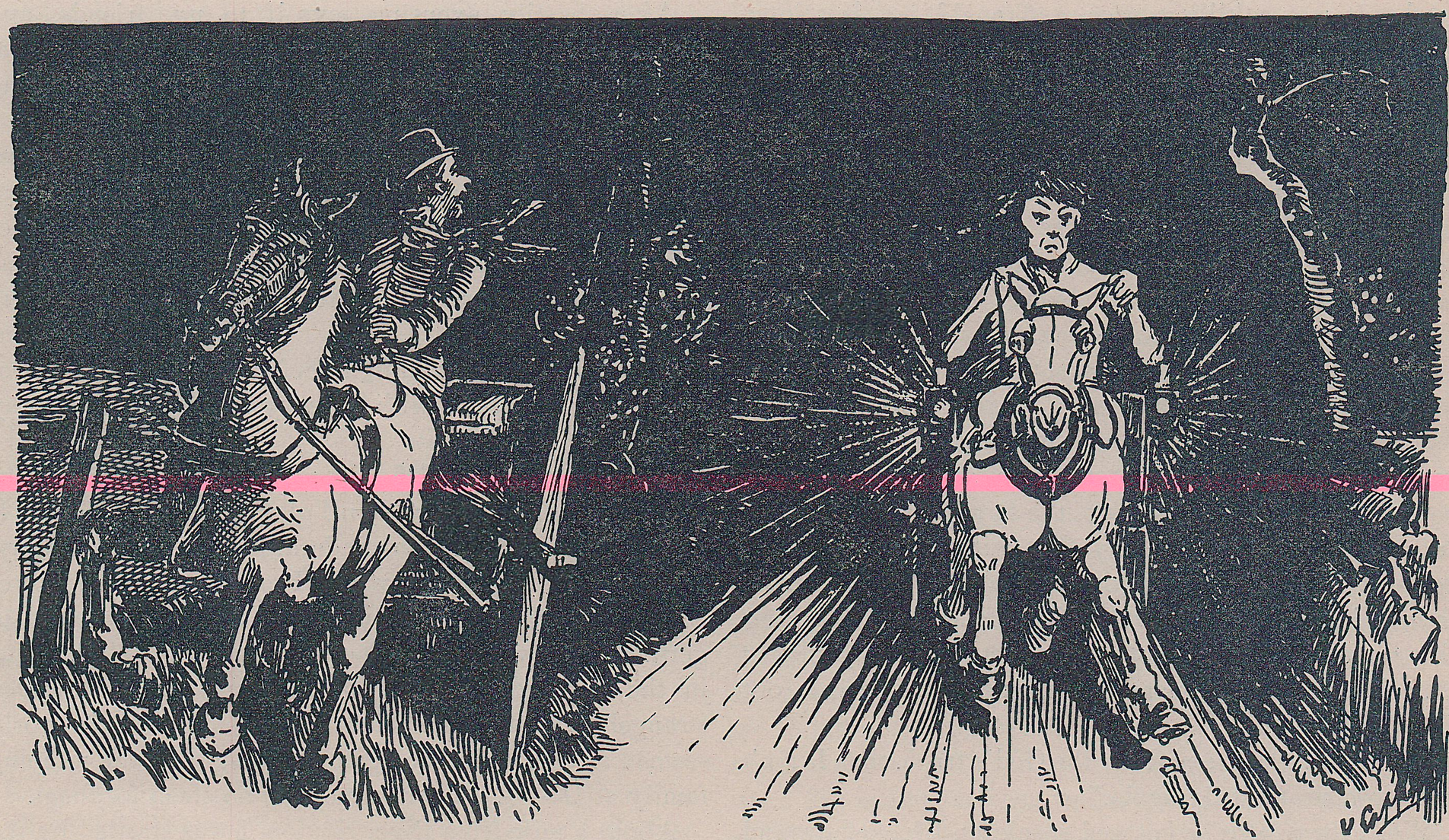

[*Written for the Christmas Number.*]

## THE PHANTOM DRIVER.

A CHRISTMAS STORY.

I had lived but a few weeks at the small town of Y—town, Kentucky, before I became acquainted with Jim Austin. Jim was certainly the most notorious liar in town, and when he told me an absurd story about a phantom driver and a two-minute horse one night in my office, I must confess that I took it all with a huge pinch of salt, and in fact, refused to believe him in words more forcible than polite.

On a subsequent occasion a crowd of horsemen was sitting around the big stove in the hotel office after midnight, when I came in, and the same subject was under discussion. I joined the group and listened to the following sensational narrative.

"Boys," a man, who certainly looked as truthful as Mr. Robert Bonner, was saying, "it's as true as gospel, so help me glittering angels; and you can go out and see my road-cart for yourselves. I left Barker's at 10 o'clock and drove along the pike towards town at a pretty good clip, for I wanted to get home. It's a good six miles, and as the mare seemed just as anxious as I, it did not take long before we got to River Station, where I stopped a moment to see a man I had traded a horse with last week. He had the best of me in the deal, and I had a few remarks I wanted him to listen to. Well, he talked so soft and nice to me, and offered to pay something to call the thing square, that I thought after all, that I was mistaken in my opinion, and we went over to the hotel and had a drink or two.

"When I said good-night and drove off, it was after eleven, I think, and the mare lost no time getting over the ground for home. It seemed to me she never went faster, and, you know, she never was one to take much dust from anybody. It was pretty dark along the road, for the moon was hidden by some clouds. Not a soul did I pass or meet, and it seemed particularly quiet. The mare was going strong, and I began to think she was almost in too much of a hurry for a dark road, when I heard the sound of wheels behind. I looked around quickly, and saw quite a long distance back a peculiar kind of a buggy coming along at a frightful speed. The lamps were lighted, and I could see the horse, a gray, was covered with foam, and evidently being driven at the top of his speed.

"Just then the mare heard the sound of the rig behind, and, laying back her ears, she actually bolted at a trot. I could not hold her, and she seemed crazy with fear or something. She had never run away with me before, and I did not quite like the idea. The rig behind seemed to be rapidly overhauling me, and when I turned to look, it was but a few yards behind, and, boys, a woman was driving. The queerest looking woman I ever hope to see, and the strangest built rig. She looked more like a grinning corpse than a live female, and I began to feel a curious feeling in my hair.

"No longer trying to check the mare, I clucked to her, and even used the whip, until we fairly flew along the