

The Demon of the Gibbet

By Fitz-James O'Brien

There was no west, there was no east,
No star abroad for eyes to see;
And Norman spurred his jaded beast
Hard by the terrible gallows-tree.

“O, Norman, haste across this waste,—
For something seems to follow me!”
“Cheer up, dear Maud, for, thanked be God,
We nigh have passed the gallows-tree!”

He kissed her lip: then—spur and whip!
And fast they fled across the lea.
But vain the heel, and rowel steel,—
For something leaped from the gallows-tree!

*“Give me your cloak, your knightly cloak
That wrapped you oft beyond the sea!
The wind is bold, my bones are old,
And I am cold on the gallows-tree!”*

“O holy God! O dearest Maud,
Quick, quick, some prayers—the best that be!
A bony hand my neck has spanned,
And tears my knightly cloak from me!”

*“Give me your wine,—the red, red wine,
That in the flask hangs by your knee!
Ten summers burst on me accurst,
And I'm athirst on the gallows-tree!”*

“O Maud, my life, my loving wife!
Have you no prayer to set us free?
My belt unclasps,—a demon grasps,
And drags my wine-flask from my knee!”

*“Give me your bride, your bonnie bride,
That left her nest with you to flee!
O she hath flown to be my own,
For I'm alone on the gallows-tree!”*

“Cling closer, Maud, and trust in God!
Cling close!—Ah, heaven, she slips from me!”
A prayer, a groan, and he alone
Rode on that night from the gallows-tree.