

The background of the cover is a painting of a rural landscape. In the foreground, there is a body of water, possibly a pond or a slow-moving stream, with a dark, silty appearance. A wooden fence or bridge structure is visible in the lower left. The middle ground features a row of tall, slender trees with dense foliage in shades of yellow and green. To the left, a small house with a thatched roof and a chimney is partially visible behind the trees. The sky is a pale, overcast grey.

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**GOBLIN TALES  
OF LANCASHIRE**

**JAMES BOWKER**



# **GOBLIN TALES OF LANCASHIRE**

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## Th' Skriker (Shrieker)

ON a fine night, about the middle of December, many years ago, a sturdy-looking young fellow left Chipping for his cottage, three or four miles away, upon the banks of the Hodder. The ground was covered with snow, which in many places had drifted into heaps, and the keen frost had made the road so slippery that the progress he made was but slow. Nature looked very beautiful, and the heart of the rustic even was touched by the sweet peacefulness of the scene. The noble old Parlick, and the sweeping Longridge, with its fir-crowned Thornley Height and Kemple End, stood out boldly against the clear sky, and the moon shed her soft silvery light into the long silent valley, stretching away until its virgin paleness mingled with the shadows and the darkness of the distant fells beyond Whitewell.

All was still, save when the sighing wind rustled gently through the frosted branches of the leafless trees by the roadside, and shook down upon the wayfarer a miniature shower of snow; for even the tiny stream, so full of mirth and music in the summer time, had been lulled to sleep by the genius of winter; and the cottagers, whose little houses, half-hidden by the rime, seemed hardly large enough for the dwellings of dwarfs, had been snugly sleeping for hours.

Adam was by no means a timid or nervous being, but there was a nameless something in the deathly silence which oppressed, if it did not actually frighten, him; and although he sang aloud a verse of the last song he had heard before he left the kitchen of the Patten Arms, his voice had lost its heartiness. He earnestly wished himself safely across the little bridge over the brook; but he was yet some distance from the stream when the faint chimes of midnight fell upon the air. Almost immediately after the last stroke of twelve had broken the silence a cloud passed over the face of the moon, and comparative darkness enveloped the scene; the wind, which before had been gentle and almost noiseless, began to howl amid the boughs and branches of the waving trees, and the frozen snow from the hedgerows was dashed against the wayfarer's face.

He had already begun to fancy that he could distinguish in the sougling of the wind and the creaking of the boughs unearthly cries and fiendish shouts of glee; but as he approached the dreaded stream his courage almost entirely failed him, and it required a great effort to keep from turning his back to it, and running away in the direction of the little village at the foot of Parlick. It struck him, however, that he had come a long distance; that if he did go back to the Patten Arms the company would be dispersed, and the inmates asleep, and, what was more effective than all, that if he could only cross the bridge he would be safe, the Greenies, Boggarts, and Feorin not having power over any one who had passed over the water. Influenced by this thought, yet with his knees trembling under him, he pushed forward with assumed boldness, and he had almost reached the bridge when he heard the noise of passing feet in the crunching snow, and became conscious of the presence of a ghastly thing he was unable to see. Suddenly a sepulchral howl brought him to a stop, and, with his heart throbbing loudly enough to be heard, he stood gazing fixedly into the darkness. There was nothing to be perceived, however, save the copings of the bridge, with their coverings of rime; and he might have stood there until daylight had not another cry, louder and even more unearthly and horrible than the preceding one, called him from his trance. No sooner had this second scream died away than, impelled by an irresistible impulse, he stepped forward in the direction whence the noise had come. At this moment the moon burst forth from behind the

clouds which had for some time obscured her light, and her rays fell upon the road, with its half-hidden cart-tracks winding away into the dim distance; and in the very centre of the bridge he beheld a hideous figure with black shaggy hide, and huge eyes closely resembling orbs of fire.

Adam at once knew from the likeness the dread object bore to the figure he had heard described by those who had seen the Skriker, that the terrible thing before him was an Ambassador of Death.

Without any consciousness of what he was doing, and acting as though under the sway of a strange and irresistible mesmeric influence, he stepped towards the bridge; but no sooner did he stir than the frightful thing in front of him, with a motion that was not walking, but rather a sort of heavy gliding, moved also, slowly retreating, pausing when he paused, and always keeping its fiery eyes fixed upon his blanched face. Slowly he crossed the stream, but gradually his steps grew more and more rapid, until he broke into a run. Suddenly a faint knowledge of the horrible nature of his position dawned upon him. A little cottage stood by the roadside, and from one of its chamber-windows, so near to the ground as to be within his reach, a dim light shone, the room probably being occupied by a sick person, or by watchers of the dead. Influenced by a sudden feeling of companionship, Adam tried to cry out, but his tongue clave to his parched mouth, and ere he could mumble a few inarticulate sounds, scarcely audible to himself, the dwelling was left far behind, and a sensation of utter loneliness and helplessness again took possession of him.

He had thus traversed more than a mile of the road, in some parts of which, shaded by the high hedgerows and overhanging boughs, the only light seemed to him to be that from the terrible eyes, when suddenly he stumbled over a stone and fell. In a second, impressed by a fear that the ghastly object would seize him, he regained his feet, and, to his intense relief, the Skriker was no longer visible. With a sigh of pleasure he sat down upon a heap of broken stones, for his limbs, no longer forced into mechanical movement by the influence of the spectre's presence, refused to bear him further. Bitterly cold as was the night, the perspiration stood in beads upon his whitened face, and, with the recollection of the Skriker's terrible eyes and horrible body strong upon him, he shook and shivered, as though in a fit of the ague. A strong and burly man, in the very prime of life, he felt as weak as a girl, and, fearing that he was about to sink to the ground in a swoon, he took handfuls of the crisp snow and rubbed them upon his forehead. Under this sharp treatment he soon revived a little, and, after several unsuccessful efforts, he succeeded in regaining his feet, and resumed his lonely journey. Starting at the least sigh of the breeze, the faintest creak of a bending branch, or the fall of a piece of frozen rime from a bough, he slowly trudged along.

He had passed the quaint old house at Chaigely, the sudden yelp of a chained dog in the court-yard giving him a thrill of horror as he went by, and he had reached the bend in that part of the road which is opposite the towering wood-covered Kemple End. A keen and cutting blast swept through the black firs that crowned the summit, and stood, like solemn sentinels, upon the declivity. There was a music in the wind mournful as a croon over the corpse of a beautiful woman, whose hair still shimmers with the golden light of life; but Adam heard no melody in the moaning sighs which seemed to fill the air around. To him, whose soul was yet under the influence of the terror through which he had so recently passed, the sounds assumed an awful nature; whilst the firs, standing so clearly defined against the snow, which lay in virgin heaps upon the beds of withered fern, seemed like so many weird skeletons shaking their bony arms in menace or in warning.

With a suddenness that was more than startling, there was a lull, and the breeze ceased even to whisper. The silence was more painful than were the noises of the blast battling with the