

The Fugitive

[*Sixteenth Century*]

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Ah! I can linger now,
Here, 'mid the darkling trees;
The hair is hot on my brow,
And oh! my aching knees!
God! I can scarcely stand—
Oh! Let me sleep! Let me sleep! . . .
Are they watching on either hand? . . .
Oh! how the path was steep!

We broke and fled, and then
They chased us for miles, and we—
Fifteen hundred men—
Made way right heartily;
And for seven miles I've run,
And the stones have cut my feet:
Ah! but the chase is done
Now, and the rest is sweet.

I can hear water there—
There, by the cutting; maybe
I might for a moment dare,
Without letting the devils see:
I'm parched and sick and done,
And I'd give my soul for a drink;
For a moment I might run
There, by the river's brink,

And drink, and drink, and drink;
And then sleep till the light, . . .
God! how the blood did stink! . . .
God! But the stars are bright!
Oh! let me sleep, and forget!
Ah! this is good—to be
Out of the blood and sweat,
Under this wide oak tree! . . .

They killed my brother; he lies
Under the burning stars;
There's a glaze upon his eyes,
And his arms are rigid bars.
I know! For, before I ran,
I stumbled across him; I kneeled,
And, . . . oh! but it does a man—
Seven miles off the field . . .

And there was blood on his brow,
And his locked teeth grinned at me;
And his eyes! I can see them now!
Ah! but the wind is free
Over my brow; 'tis good
To sleep out under the trees,
Here on the skirt of the wood—
Here, with the blessèd breeze.

Seven miles I've run! . . .
Oh! let me sleep, now wake
But to greet the rising sun,
Onward my way to take.
A breeze has sprung from the south,
The night is calm and deep;
The moonlight kisses my mouth . . .
Oh! let me sleep! Let me sleep! . . .