

# Highway Man

Red Simpson

The wind was a torrent of darkness among the gusty  
trees,  
The moon was a ghostly galleon tossed upon cloudy seas,  
The road was a ribbon of moonlight, over the purple  
moor,  
And the highwayman came riding- riding-riding-  
The highwayman came riding, up to the old inn-door.

He'd a French cocked-hat on his forehead, a bunch of  
lace at his chin,  
A coat of the claret velvet, and breeches of brown doe-  
skin;  
They fitted with never a wrinkle: his boots were up to  
the thigh!  
And he rode with a jewelled twinkle,  
His pistol butts a-twinkle,  
His rapier hilt a-twinkle, under the jewelled sky.

Over the cobbles he clattered and clashed in the dark  
inn-yard,  
And he tapped with his whip on the shutters, but all  
was locked and barred;  
He whistled a tune to the window, and who should be  
waiting there  
But the landlord's black-eyed daughter, Bess, the  
landlord's daughter,  
Plaiting a dark red love-knot into her long black hair.

And dark in the old inn-yard a stable-wicket creaked  
Where Tim the ostler listened; his face was white and  
peaked;  
His eyes were hollows of madness, his hair like mouldy  
hay,  
But he loved the landlord's daughter, The landlord's  
red-lipped daughter,  
Dumb as a dog he listened, and he heard the robber say-

"One kiss, my bonny sweetheart, I'm after a prize to-  
night,  
But I shall be back with the yellow gold before the  
morning light;  
Yet, if they press me sharply, and harry me through the  
day,  
Then look for me by moonlight, Watch for me by  
moonlight,  
I'll come to thee by moonlight, though hell should bar  
the way."

He rose upright in the stirrups; he scarce could reach  
her hand,  
But she loosened her hair i' the casement! His face  
burnt like a brand  
As the black cascade of perfume came tumbling over his  
breast;  
And he kissed its waves in the moonlight,  
(Oh, sweet black waves in the moonlight!)  
Then he tugged at his rein in the moonlight, and

galloped away to the West.

He did not come in the dawning; he did not come at  
noon;  
And out o' the tawny sunset, before the rise o' the  
moon,  
When the road was a gipsy's ribbon, looping the purple  
moor,  
A red-coat troop came marching- Marching-marching-  
King George's men came marching, up to the old inn-  
door.

They said no word to the landlord, they drank his ale  
instead,  
But they gagged his daughter and bound her to the foot  
of her narrow bed;  
Two of them knelt at her casement, with muskets at  
their side!  
There was death at every window; And hell at one dark  
window;  
For Bess could see, through the casement, the road that  
he would ride.

They had tied her up to attention, with many a  
sniggering jest;  
They bound a musket beside her, with the barrel beneath  
her breast!  
"Now keep good watch!" and they kissed her. She heard  
the dead man say-  
Look for me by moonlight; Watch for me by moonlight;  
I'll come to thee by moonlight, though hell should bar  
the way!

She twisted her hands behind her; but all the knots  
held good!  
She writhed her hands till her fingers were wet with  
sweat or blood!  
They stretched and strained in the darkness, and the  
hours crawled by like years,  
Till, now, on the stroke of midnight, Cold, on the  
stroke of midnight,  
The tip of one finger touched it! The trigger at least  
was hers!

The tip of one finger touched it; she strove no more  
for the rest!  
Up, she stood up to attention, with the barrel beneath  
her breast,  
She would not risk their hearing; she would not strive  
again;  
For the road lay bare in the moonlight; Blank and bare  
in the moonlight;  
And the blood of her veins in the moonlight throbbed to  
her love's refrain.

Trot-trot; trot-trot! Had they heard it? The horse-  
hoofs ringing clear;  
Trot-trot, trot-trot, in the distance? Were they deaf  
that they did not hear?  
Down the ribbon of moonlight, over the brow of the  
hill,  
The highwayman came riding, riding, riding!  
The red-coats looked to their priming! She stood up

strait and still!

Trot-trot, in the frosty silence! Trot-trot, in the  
echoing night!  
Nearer he came and nearer! Her face was like a light!  
Her eyes grew wide for a moment; she drew one last deep  
breath,  
Then her finger moved in the moonlight, Her musket  
shattered the moonlight,  
Shattered her breast in the moonlight and warned him-  
with her death.

He turned; he spurred to the West; he did not know who  
stood Bowed,  
With her head o'er the musket, drenched with her own  
red blood!  
Not till the dawn he heard it, his face grew grey to  
hear  
How Bess, the landlord's daughter, The landlord's  
black-eyed daughter,  
Had watched for her love in the moonlight, and died in  
the darkness there.

Back, he spurred like a madman, shrieking a curse to the  
sky,  
With the white road smoking behind him and his rapier  
brandished high!  
Blood-red were his spurs i' the golden noon; wine-red  
was his velvet coat,  
When they shot him down on the highway, Down like a dog  
on the highway,  
And he lay in his blood on the highway, with a bunch of  
lace at his throat.

And still of a winter's night, they say, when the wind  
is in the trees,  
When the moon is a ghostly galleon tossed upon cloudy  
seas,  
When the road is a ribbon of moonlight over the purple  
moor,  
A highwayman comes riding- riding-riding-  
A highwayman comes riding, up to the old inn-door.

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And he taps with his whip on the shutters, but all is  
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