

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 here 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.

Over the cobbles he clatters and clangs in the dark
inn-yard,
And he taps with his whip on the shutters, but all is
locked and barred;
He whistles 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.