

# The Highwayman By Alfred Noyes

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.  
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 dark 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 in 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,  
(O, sweet black waves in the moonlight!)  
Then he tugged at his rein in the moonlight, and galloped away  
to the west.

## PART TWO

He did not come in the dawning. He did not come at noon;  
And out of the tawny sunset, before the rise of the moon,  
When the road was a gypsy'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 her casement, the road that he  
would ride.

They had tied her up to attention, with many a sniggering jest.  
They had bound a musket beside her, with the muzzle beneath  
her breast!

"Now, keep good watch!" and they kissed her. She heard the  
doomed 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 muzzle 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.

Tlot-tlot; tlot-tlot! Had they heard it? The horsehoofs ringing  
clear;

Tlot-tlot; tlot-tlot, 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, straight  
and still.

Tlot-tlot, in the frosty silence! Tlot-tlot, 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  
blood!

Not till the dawn he heard it, and 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 in 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,  
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