

# The Highwayman

Loreena McKennitt

The wind was a torrent of darkness  
Among the gusty trees  
The moon was a ghostly galleon  
Tossed upon the 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 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 jeweled twinkle  
His pistol butts a-twinkle  
His rapier hilt a-twinkle  
Under the jeweled sky  
And 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  
"One kiss, my bonny sweetheart  
I'm after a prize tonight  
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 the moonlight  
Watch for me by the moonlight  
I'll come to thee by the 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 the perfume  
Came tumbling over his breast  
And he kissed its waves in the moonlight  
Oh, sweet waves in the moonlight  
He tugged at his rein in the moonlight  
And galloped away to the west  
He did not come at the dawning  
He did not come at noon  
And out of the tawny sunset  
Before the rise o' 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 the casement  
With muskets at their side  
There was death at every window  
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 niggering jest  
They had 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 the moonlight  
Watch for me by the moonlight I'll come to thee by the 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 Tlot-tlot, tlot-tlot, had they heard it?  
The horses hoofs ring 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, in the frosty silence  
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 she 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 gray 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  
And 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 the spurs in the gold moon  
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 the bunch of lace at his throat  
Still of a winter's night, they say  
When the wind is in the trees  
When the moon is a ghostly galleon  
Tossed upon the 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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