

# **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,  
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.  
Tlot-tlot; tlot-tlot! Had they heard it? The horse-hoofs 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 chest 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 the 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;  
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.