

## Loreena Mckennitt

### "The Highway Man"

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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 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  
innyard,  
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 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 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  
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 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!

Plot-tlot! Had they heard it? The horse-hoofs were  
ringing clear  
Plot-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!

Plot in the frosty silence! Plot, 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 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 the 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.

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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