

Loreena Mckennitt "The Highwayman"

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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 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

Plot-plot, plot-plot, had they heard it?
The horses hoofs ring clear
Plot-plot, plot-plot, 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 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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