

The Highwayman

The wind was a torrent of darkness upon the gusty trees,
The moon was a ghostly galleon tossed upon cloudy seas,
The road was a ribbon of moonlight looping 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, and a bunch of lace at his chin;
He'd a coat of the claret velvet, and breeches of fine doe-skin.
They fitted with never a wrinkle; his boots were up to his thigh!
And he rode with a jeweled twinkle--
His rapier hilt a-twinkle--
His pistol butts a-twinkle, under the jeweled 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.

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 black-eyed daughter;
Dumb as a dog he listened, and he heard the robber say:

"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 moonlight,
Watch for me by moonlight,
I'll come to thee by moonlight, though hell should bar the way."

He stood 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 sweet black waves of perfume came tumbling o'er his breast,
Then he kissed its waves in the moonlight
(O sweet black waves in the moonlight!),
And he tugged at his reins in the moonlight, and galloped away to the west.

Questions on the first six verses of 'The Highwayman'

1. Write down a sentence to summarise each of the first six verses of the poem. The first one has been done for you:

- 1. On a moonlit and windy night the highwayman rode over the moor to the old inn.
- 2.
- 3.
- 4.
- 5.
- 6.

- 2. Many colours are referred to in the first six verses of the poem. Highlight or underline each one that you find.
- 3. As well as metaphors, which we have already identified, there are a number of similes in the first six verses of the poem. Underline or highlight the similes that you can see in the poem.
- 4. What do you notice about the rhyme scheme of the first six verses? The rhyme scheme is the way that each line does or does not rhyme with others in the poem. Write down your ideas around the poem.

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