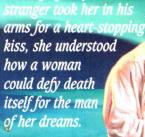


The road was a ribbon of moonlight over the purple moor, And the highwayman came riding—Riding—riding,
The highwayman came riding, up to the old inn door.

hough her father had been the legendary highwayman who lost his life for the innkeeper's daughter he loved, down-to-earth Lizzie Tynsdale had no use for romance. She had enough to do running the inn she'd inherited without falling for a handsome face or a pair of broad shoulders.

But when a mysterious guest appeared at the inn one stormy night, it seemed history was destined to repeat itself. Once again, the redcoats were ordered to hunt down an innocent man, and Lizzie, like her mother before her, would risk her own safety to prevent his capture. For when the dark-eyed





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# Highwayman's Jaughter

Anne Jvery



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### **TEMPTATION'S TORTURE**

"Laugh all you want, but it's my neck on the line as well as yours if you're caught," Lizzie snapped.

John deliberately polished the apple on his sleeve, then took a large bite. "I won't be caught. Not unless you turn me in yourself."

"Don't push me. I might be tempted."

She might be tempted! John could have told her what temptation was! It was sitting across from her and seeing the candlelight dance in her eyes. It was hearing the sensuous huskiness of her voice when the world around them had long since fallen into silence.

Temptation was Lizzie and the night and a feather bedonly a few feet away...a bed with linen sheets that smelled of lavender. Other Love Spell books by Anne Avery:
THE SNOW QUEEN
HIDDEN HEART
FAR STAR
ALL'S FAIR
A DISTANT STAR

# The Highwayman

### **Part One**

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 jeweled twinkle,

His pistol butts a-twinkle,

His rapier hilt a-twinkle, under the jeweled 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 back-eyed daughter,

Bess, the landlord's daughter,

Plaiting a dark red love-knot into her long black hair.

And 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 moldy 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 kay-

"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 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.

### Part Two

He did not come in the dawning; he did not come at noon; And out o' 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 her 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 moonlight;

Watch for me by moonlight;

I'll come to thee by 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!

The tip of one finger touched it; she strove no more for the rest! Up, she stood to attention, with the barrel beneath her breast, She would not risk their hearing; she would not strive again; For the road lay bare in the moonlight;

Blank and bare in the moonlight;

And the blood of her veins in the moonlight throbbed to her Love's refrain.

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; tlot-tlot, in the frosty silence! Tlot-tlot; tlot-tlot, in The echoing night!

Nearer he came and near! 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 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 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.

Back, he spurred like a madman, shricking 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 bishings and a second siding and

A highwayman comes riding, up to the old inn-door.

Over the cobbles he clatters and clangs in the dark inn-yard; And 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.

Alfred Noyes

### **AUTHOR'S NOTE**

One of the fondest memories of my childhood is of the hours I spent lost in the magical kingdoms of imagination that lay within the pages of the Childcraft Books that my parents bought for my brothers and me, even though that purchase meant a major financial sacrifice for them. Of the set—which continues to occupy a place of honor on my crowded bookshelves—my favorite was the volume which brimmed with poetry and the bright, imaginative art that helped bring the words alive to a child's eager mind.

The pages of that book are worn at the edges, the corners bent or, sometimes, missing altogether—four pages of "The Pied Piper of Hamlin" are almost unreadable because a childish hand rather sloppily cut them off with a pair of stubby little scissors—but every page is a treasure house of

imagination and memory.

I think my eldest brother sliced up "The Pied Piper," though I'm not perfectly sure about that. If he did, it was probably in retaliation for the havoc I wrought on his I Thought That I Saw It On Mulberry Street, by Dr. Seuss, an act of desecration which I continue to regret almost forty years later. At the time, chopping up his book was the most horrible thing I could think of to get back at him for some long-forgotten slight, but of all the things I would do over if I could, that would be one of the first.

If my brother thought to get even with me by chopping up the Childcraft volume, however, his vengeance wasn't nearly as effective as mine—he missed "The Highwayman" by Alfred Noves entirely. That poem spelled romance to me, and I'm quite sure it shaped my love of the dark and tragic love story that—alas!—is so seldom published these days. Even now, I can close my eyes and hear my mother reading it to me before bed, or listen to my own voice as I read it aloud to myself, over and over and over again . . .

The wind was a torrent of darkness among the gusty trees,
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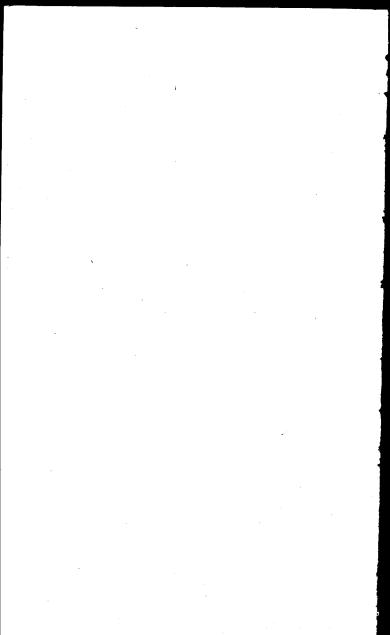
The swiftly galloping beat and the vivid, powerful language of the poem make the story of Bess, "the landlord's black-eyed daughter," and her dashing Highwayman lover come alive in ways that no novel can ever hope to match.

I haven't tried to match the power of the poem—I wouldn't dare—but I have tried, to the best of my abilities, to render homage to it by telling this tale of *The Highwayman's Daughter*.

I said that I like tragic endings. It's true. But I think modern readers will forgive me for having provided a happy ending this time around. It was the least I could do for something that has provided me so very much pleasure over the years.

Above all, this book is dedicated to my parents and to Alfred Noyes, with my heartfelt thanks for a gift that will truly last a lifetime.

# Highwayman's Jaughter



## Chapter One

If life had taught John Francis Carleton anything, it was to take his pleasures where he found them. Right now he was enjoying a pint of good ale, a roaring fire, and a snug seat in the corner near the King George's hearth. He was dry, well fed, and comfortably protected from drafts and the ice-cold rain that blew in with each sodden new guest . . . yet it was not enough. Not tonight.

John Carleton wanted a woman. A pretty, plump, and willing woman who would indulge him with a rousing round or two of cock-in-the-henhouse, then snuggle up close to keep him warm through the rest of this miserable, misbegotten English night.

Unfortunately, the George came provided with most of the amenities a traveler might require, but

### Anne Avery

it did not come provided with a woman. At least, not a plump and willing one.

The crone in the corner opposite looked as if she might once have been plump and pretty and more than willing to oblige a lonely stranger, but her days for slap-and-tickle were long past. Now she sat hunched over her ale pot, avidly listening to the heated argument that two stolid farmers and their equally stolid wives had been conducting at some length. The debate seemed to revolve around a complicated tangle of land rights, lost heirs, and the old Lord Henry Malloran's steward's meddling where he oughtn't, and the crone cackled with satisfaction each time one of the disputants scored a particularly telling point.

John had followed the discussion with the discreet, but bored curiosity appropriate to any traveler in an unfamiliar place, but his attention had been more pleasantly fixed on the comely wench who functioned as the inn's tapster and serving maid.

The wench had possibilities. She was a touch too tall and slender for his taste, but she had a full, soft mouth that invited kisses, a perfect complexion, delicately pale to complement the raven black hair piled under her mobcap, and breasts that would torment a blind man's dreams. The breasts, John had long ago decided, more than compensated for the lack of flesh on her long bones. She was graceful, sloe-eyed, and eminently beddable—but she was not willing. He'd found that out when his first foray had earned him a set-down sharp