

Can-U-Read

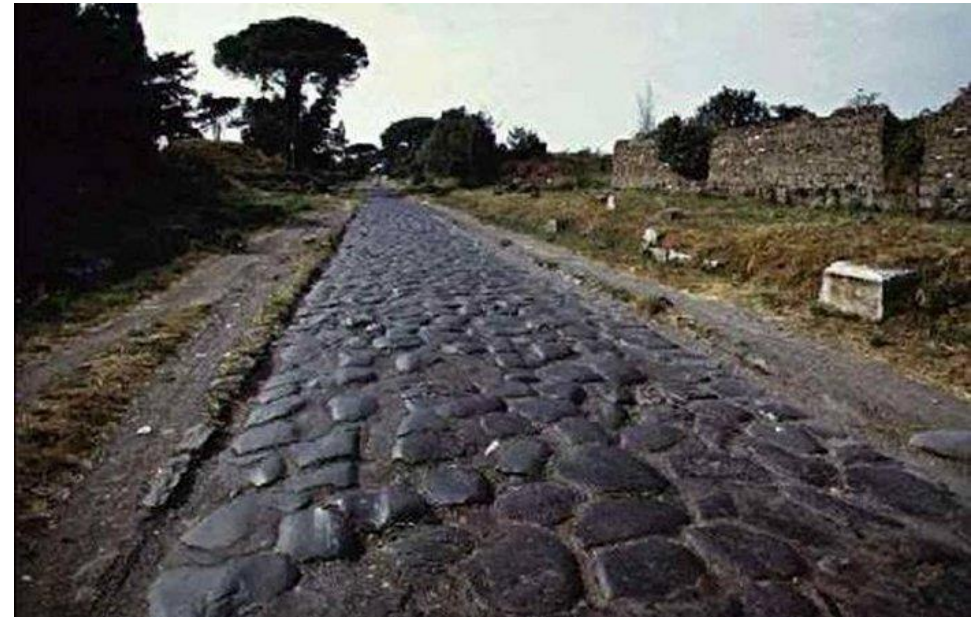
Highwayman

In the old days people had to travel by road from place to place.

If a road was flat or bowl-shaped, water would collect into mud.

Some roads were bowed up to create a dry space. These roads were called highways.

People traveled quickly on the highways because they were dry.



Traveling by road was not safe.

People traveled together to protect themselves from highwaymen.

Highwaymen were pirates of the land.

Highwaymen would use swords and guns to force people to give them money.

Many people died because of highwaymen.



Even in the old west, there were highwaymen.

Stagecoaches sometimes carried money and the driver couldn't stop to fight.

A man sat in front with a loaded shotgun to protect the driver, the money and the passengers.

This is where we get the phrase “riding shotgun” for the front passenger seat of a car.



One famous poem was written about a highwayman.

The poem is *romantic* meaning that it creates a fantasy about highwaymen.

This poem makes him sound brave, beautiful, and likeable. The poem doesn't mention the people he hurts.

Still, the poem is a favorite and one that everyone should hear at least once in a lifetime.



The Highwayman

By Alfred Noyes

1880-1958



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.



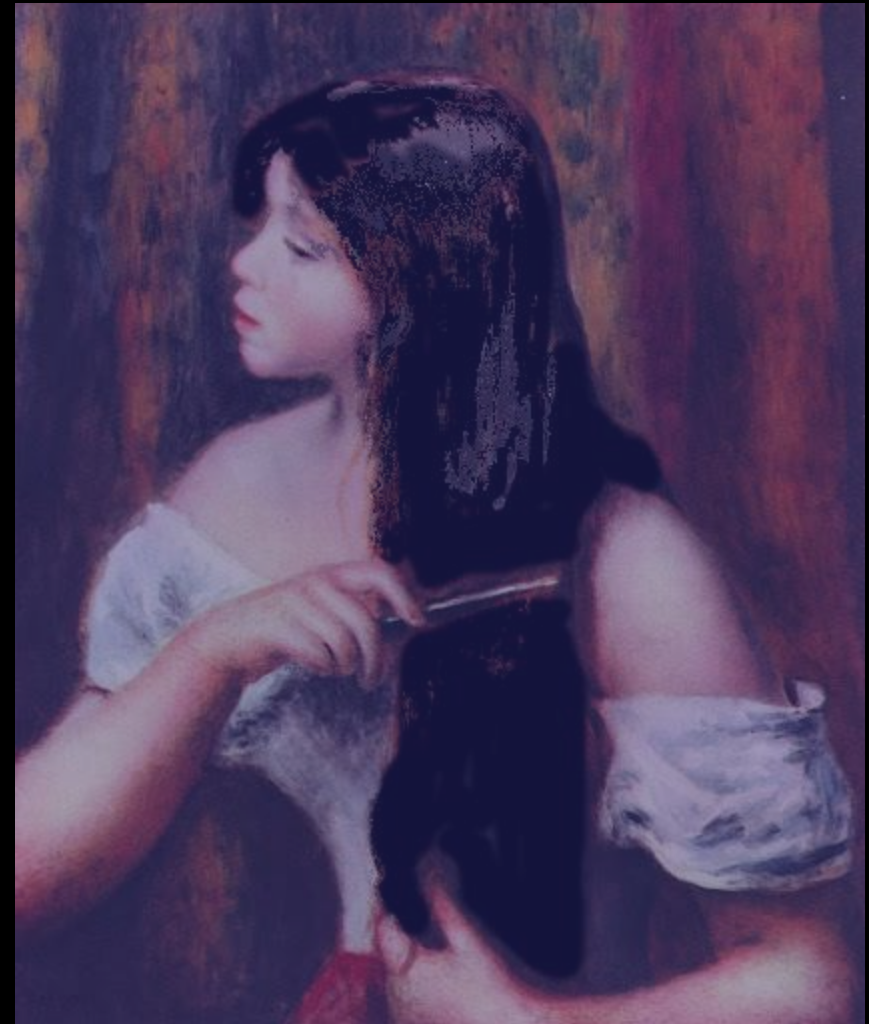
Over the cobbles he clattered and
clashed in the dark inn-yard.

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 dark old inn-yard a
stable-wicket creaked

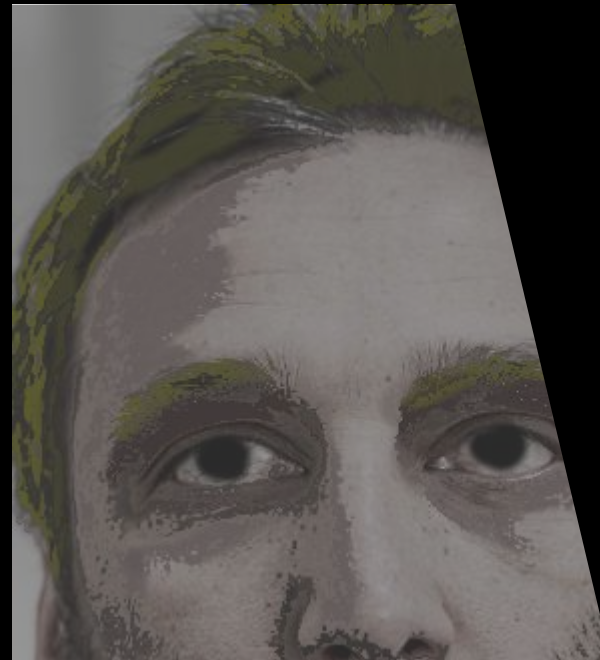
Where Tim the ostler listened. His
face was white and peaked.

His eyes were hollows of madness, his
hair like mouldy hay,

But he loved the landlord's daughter,

The landlord's 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 in 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,

(O, 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 in the dawning. He
did not come at noon;

And out of the tawny sunset, before
the rise of 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 her 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.

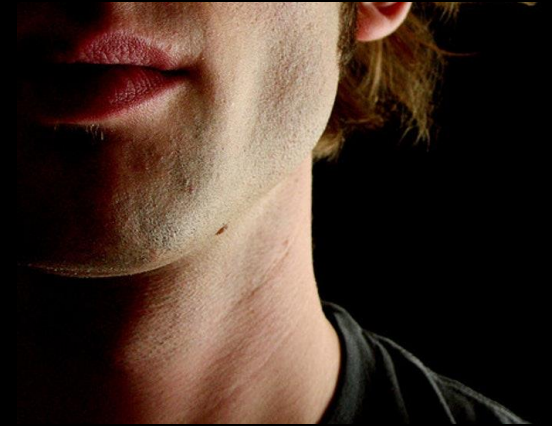
They had bound a musket beside her,
with the muzzle beneath her breast!

“Now, keep good watch!” and they
kissed her. She heard the doomed
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 up to attention, with the
muzzle 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 horsehoofs ringing clear;

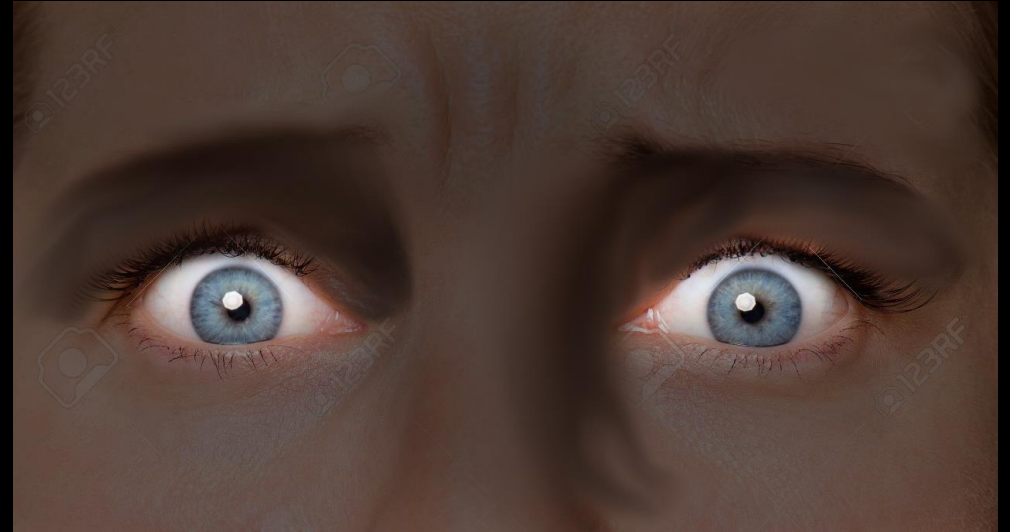
Tlot-tlot; tlot-tlot, in the distance?
Were they deaf that they did not
hear?

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 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 blood!

Not till the dawn he heard it, and 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 in 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 a 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.*



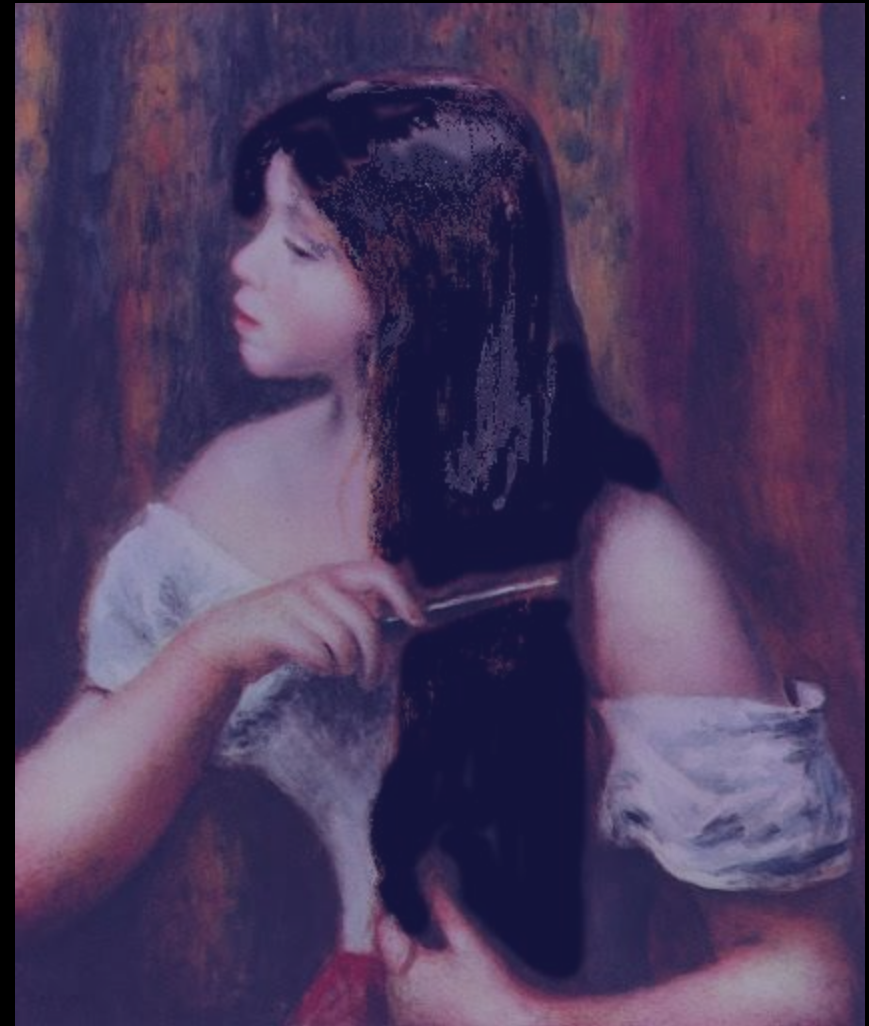
*Over the cobbles he clatters and
clangs in the dark inn-yard.*

*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
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The End

