

The Highwayman

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V.O.

Ever since man, ages ago, first bent his knee to another; be it God, King, or country; willingly or unwillingly, there existed the burning ember of justice. For God's justice, there goeth the pious. For King's justice, there goeth the soldier. For countries justice, there goeth the patriot. All are absolved under Heaven for their loyalty to their self-imposed master. Or so they would believe. For in the long ages, there are those who bow to no iron wrought justice other than the Truth. A far more taxing master, the Truth oft sets asunder God, King, and country sweeping aside the righteous, the lawful, and the loyal. In the end, it is the servants of the Truth who sit as judge over all and are elevated to the status of legend in service not to God, King, nor country - but to mankind. This my dear listener, is the truth...

EXT. ROAD LEADING TO TAVERN/INN - NORTHERN ENGLAND - 1729 - MIDNIGHT

A full moon illuminates the flowers covering the moor casting violet shadows. AARON, 42, sits atop GALLADEN, a large black Clydesdale. He looks over the moor, taking a deep breath of the fresh air. He sees a light coming from the window on the second floor of the inn. He smiles, and spurs his horse. They trot down the road. The horse prances in perfect form.

EXT. OUTSIDE THE WINDOW OF THE INN - MOMENTS LATER

AARON leads his horse to the wall beneath the window. He pulls his cloak aside and draws a bull whip out. He flips it up into the air, and with one snap unlatches the lock to the shutters. They creep open a bit and he pauses until he hears a giggle. BESS, 17, appears at the window throwing the shutters open. She sits on the ledge looking down at her love AARON.

BESS

You think your so clever.

AARON

And you think I'm so handsome.

BESS laughs, then covers her mouth to keep her father from hearing.

BESS
And what brings my handsome man to
my window at such a late hour?

AARON reaches into a leather pouch on his belt and pulls out a necklace with a beautiful medallion. He motions to her to catch.

AARON
To bring you a gift, and some news.

He throws the necklace upwards, and she catches it, almost falling out the window. She holds it in her hands. The jewel catches the light from the candles, and reflects it onto her face.

BESS
It's beautiful!

She puts on the necklace.

BESS
And what is the news?

AARON looks around to ensure no one is within earshot.

AARON
I want you to stay awake tomorrow
night. And at the stroke of
midnight, I want you to watch for
me by the moonlight. I will
approach from the hill. When you
see me, I want you to have some
cloths packed, and we will ride all
night until we reach the docks.

BESS
(breathless) Oh AARON, are we going
to finally...

AARON
Yes my love. I will be returning
with the gold, and we will finally
be together. The New world is just
big enough for us and our dreams.

BESS reaches down to hold his hand, but they cannot quite reach. She lets her long flowing black hair fall until it reaches AARON's hand. He kisses her hair.

BESS

Hurry back my love. Oh my god, I don't know what to wear. I don't have too many dresses...Oh no, I don't have anything nice to bring...

AARON

I will buy you whatever dresses you require. All I care is that your at my side.

A light appears through the first floor window illuminating AARON.

AARON

Remember, watch for me at midnight.
I love you.

He kisses her hair once more, and rides off. Bess watches until he disappears into the darkness.

BESS

And I love you.

INT. BESS'S BEDROOM - MIDNIGHT - THE FOLLOWING NIGHT

BESS waits patiently until the stroke of midnight. She has a small bag sitting at her side filled with cloths, and her only other pair of shoes. The clock strikes midnight, and she flings open the shutters. Time passes, and yet AARON never shows. Soon darkness gives way to dawn, and BESS begins to nod off at the foot of her bed.

EXT. ROAD LEADING TO TAVERN/INN - NOON - THE NEXT DAY

Dust rises into the air as several squads of soldiers march over the hill From the forest onto the road. COLONEL HAMILTON, 43, orders his men to take positions in several locations. His men begin to disperse as another figure appears riding a white stallion over the hill to catch up to HAMILTON. BENNETT, 36, stops his white horse next to HAMILTON, and looks over the moor.

BENNETT

I'll let you to it, and I'll find the girl.

HAMILTON gives a disapproving look at BENNETT.

HAMILTON
I'll send second squad with you.

INT. BESS'S BEDROOM - SAME TIME

BESS, almost asleep, is startled by the sounds of the soldiers outside. Filled with fear, she hides her sack, and runs downstairs to find her father.

INT. TAVERN/INN OVERLOOKING THE MOOR - ENTRANCE TO THE TAVERN
- MOMENTS LATER

BESS arrives at the base of the stairs just as BENNETT enters followed by several soldiers. Her FATHER walks to intercept BENNETT.

FATHER
What is the meaning of this? Who
are you...

BENNETT slips a dagger into his hand as he approaches her FATHER.

BENNETT
Do please pardon the intrusion.

BENNETT pauses and notices that there are still patrons of the tavern sitting at the tables. They are gripped with fear.

BENNETT
People, can't you see there are
soldiers here? (Pause) Get out.

The patrons flee through the exits leaving the soldiers, BENNETT, and her father on the main floor.

BENNETT
Now where was I? Oh yes, Please
forgive our bursting in here like
this...

He reaches out to her FATHERS hand as if to introduce himself. The FATHER begins to extend his hand, weary of BENNETT. BENNETT grabs his hand, and with one motion glides by, slicing her FATHERS throat. Without breaking stride he continues towards BESS.

BENNETT
But its the Black Eyed Daughter we
are hear to see.

BESS Screams, and starts to run back to her room. BENNETT catches up to her halfway up the steps, and places the dagger to her throat, and pushes her up the stairs. The soldiers remain frozen in shock.

BENNETT
Corporal, would you and your friend follow me. Oh and find some rope.

EXT. ROAD LEADING TO TAVERN/INN - NOON - SAME TIME

HAMILTON talks with his Capt., as the rest of his men take positions. One squad on each side of the road at the entrance to the forest hidden by a fence. One in the stables, and the other hidden in the field on the other side of the inn.

HAMILTON
Now remember. This man just killed eight of our finest earlier last night. I don't want to take any chances. So wait until I give the signal, and then open the window. He will see we have his bride, and hopefully won't put up a fight.

CAPT.
And if he chooses too?

HAMILTON looks at his men taking position, and starts walking his horse towards the inn.

HAMILTON
Well then we'll give him what he wants.

INT. BESS'S BEDROOM - SAME TIME

BENNETT and two soldiers have pushed the canopy bed to the window. BENNETT holds BESS against the post as the men tie her to it. As they finish, the soldiers begin to walk away.

BENNETT
Wait a minute. Your musket soldier.

BENNETT holds his hand out. The SOLDIER looks at the CORPORAL.

CORPORAL
Sir?

BENNETT shakes his hand impatiently.

BENNETT

His musket!

CORPORAL

Sir our orders where that she was
not to...

BENNETT walks directly in front of the CORPORAL, their faces almost touching.

BENNETT

When I was employed by the Duke, he did not inform me I would have to suffer fools. Now it would pain me to deliver the news to Colonel Hamilton that there was a struggle with the Landlord's daughter, and one, nay two of his men fell tragically. So once again...Give me the musket.

The CORPORAL looks at the soldier, and shrugs his shoulders. They give over the rifle, and BENNETT ties the barrel beneath her breast. As the soldiers leave, BENNETT takes a second, and walks to her.

BENNETT

You're more beautiful than I was told.

He runs his hand along her neck, softly, as if admiring art.

BENNETT

I can see how such beauty might drive a man to commit such a crime. Unfortunately my dear, your Dandy will never get the chance to spend his fortune.

As his fingers slide down her neckline they catch on the necklace. He rips it from her neck.

BENNETT

A keepsake. I'm sure you wont mind. Now behave yourself, and maybe I'll be more gentle next time.

He pulls the hammer back on the musket, and exits.

INT. TAVERN/INN OVERLOOKING THE MOORE - ENTRANCE TO THE TAVERN

HAMILTON enters pulling an old overcoat on hiding his uniform. A soldier walks to HAMILTON, and hands him a hat. HAMILTON smiles, and places the hat on his head.

HAMILTON
Do I look like a drunk now?

His soldiers chuckle a bit.

HAMILTON
Not a word. Now where is?..

BENNETT walks down the stairs.

BENNETT
Present, and everything is set.

HAMILTON notices the body of the FATHER lying against the wall.

HAMILTON
What the hell is this?! I told you that no one was to be hurt!

BENNETT
He attacked me as I approached his daughter. He left me no choice.

HAMILTON walks at a quick pace towards BENNETT. BENNETT braces himself, and they are interrupted by a soldier at the window.

SOLDIER 1
Sir, the Highwayman is approaching!

HAMILTON stops, and turns to see. He looks back at BENNETT as if to say they aren't finished. He then heads to the door.

HAMILTON
Everyone stand ready! And wait for my signal!

He exits stumbling as if he is drunk.

EXT. ROAD LEADING TO TAVERN/INN - SHORTLY AFTER NOON

AARON rides slowly over the hill towards the inn. HAMILTON mounts his horse after several tries.

He fumbles some more, and soon gains control of his horse. He throws an empty bottle of alcohol on the ground to keep the charade going. AARON slows his horse as he sees HAMILTON in the distance riding towards him. AARON moves his blood soaked hand into his coat pulling his pistol from his belt. AARON'S horse has slowed to a walk, and AARON watches what he thinks is a drunkard continuing towards him.

INT. BESS'S BEDROOM - SAME TIME

BESS struggles to get free to warn AARON of the trap. Tears run down her cheek as her wrists begin to bleed. She watches through the crack in the shutters. A soldier walks in at the ready to throw the shutters open.

SOLDIER 2

Easy lass. It will be over soon.

EXT. ROAD LEADING TO TAVERN/INN - SHORTLY AFTER NOON

HAMILTON continues to ride closer to AARON. He mumbles to himself in hopes his acting is convincing. Once AARON is close enough, HAMILTON throws off his coat, revealing his uniform, and AARON'S horse rears up as the shutters to the bedroom are thrown open. AARON looks to see BESS tied up. He pulls his pistol out and turns his attention to the drunkard in front of him. HAMILTON throws his hat off, and AARON gets a good look at the man facing him. AARON pauses, and then smiles. HAMILTON sees AARON smile, and takes a better look. HAMILTON realizes he knows this man.

HAMILTON

Aaron? Is it really...

HIS WORDS ARE CUT OFF BY THE SOUND OF A GUN SHOT.

INT. BESS'S BEDROOM - SAME TIME

BESS struggles when she sees AARON, and the rifle at her chest lets off a shot. Blood splatters onto the soldier standing next to her. He is shocked, and runs to her aid.

EXT. ROAD LEADING TO TAVERN/INN - SHORTLY AFTER NOON

AARON'S smile disappears as he watches his love slide down the post. He turns to HAMILTON and aims his pistol. He sees the shock on HAMILTON'S face, and points his pistol at HAMILTON'S horse.

With one shot he takes the horse down without killing HAMILTON. HAMILTON hollers out to subdue AARON. All of the soldiers that were in position hiding leap to their feet. AARON moves like lightning and with one move, pulls two more pistols from his coat. He turns his horse towards the squad at the far side of the entrance to the forest, and charges them taking shots as he rides. He hits one man who spins in the air. As the man spins AARON leaps his horse over the small fence they had taken position behind, and grabs the rifle that had left the soldiers hand. AARON then swings the rifle around hitting another soldier in the face. The other two stumble backwards to avoid getting trampled, but AARON keeps riding past them, and disappears into the forest. Soldiers run from their positions taking shots into the forest. HAMILTON gets to his feet.

HAMILTON
Cease fire! CEASE FIRE GOD
DAMNIT!!!!

The CAPT. runs to HAMILTON'S aid.

CAPT.
Sir, should we pursue?

HAMILTON brushes himself off. He looks at the three dead soldiers at the fence.

HAMILTON
You wanna get yourself killed? No!
Get the men formed up. I'll be
right back.

EXT. DEEP IN THE WOODS SURROUNDING THE MOORE - MOMENTS LATER

AARON brings his horse to a stop at a small clearing. He tries to keep from sobbing. He dismounts, and walks in a circle for a bit. His sadness turns to anger. The death of BESS sets in, and he becomes enraged. He unloads the remaining few bags of gold from his saddle to lighten the load. He then reloads his pistols, and mounts to return to the inn.

INT. TAVERN/INN OVERLOOKING THE MOORE - ENTRANCE TO THE TAVERN

HAMILTON storms in as the soldiers get out of his way.

HAMILTON
What in God's name is going on in
here? CORPORAL?!!

The CORPORAL cowers as he walks towards HAMILTON.

CORPORAL

Sir, I uh...well, we tied a musket
beneath...

BENNETT hops off a bar stool to aid the CORPORAL.

BENNETT

She had to be restrained, and we
could afford no one to watch her. I
take full responsibility.

HAMILTON grabs BENNETT by the throat and throws him onto the
bar, holding him there.

HAMILTON

You're DAMN right your responsible.
Do you have any idea...

His words are cut off by SOLDIER 1.

SOLDIER 1

Sir, he's coming back.

HAMILTON looks through the window as shots are heard. AARON
is charging down the road taking out the soldiers one by one.
HAMILTON releases BENNETT who sheaths the dagger he had
pulled to defend himself.

HAMILTON

Order the men to hold their fire!!
All of them!!
HAMILTON runs out the door.

EXT. ROAD LEADING TO TAVERN/INN - SAME TIME

HAMILTON runs onto the road shouting at his men to cease
fire. AARON has now drawn his sword and has engaged several
soldiers in close combat. AARON is thrown from his horse from
a musket shot. He falls to the ground as another soldier
takes a shot. AARON stands and lashes out in a fierce
display, but is struck with another musket shot. He yells in
pain, as another soldier stabs him with a sword in the ribs.
AARON falls face first into the dirt. The soldiers just stand
there in shock. HAMILTON runs to the side of AARON.

HAMILTON

Everyone back! Back I say. Get
back, all of you.

They back off, and HAMILTON stoops to one knee, rolling over AARON. HAMILTON places his fingers at AARON'S neck, and feels no pulse.

CAPT.

Sir we found no gold on his horse.

HAMILTON

All right. Now...

He can barely hold back his tears from the men. He looks at their faces. They are confused as to why he is acting this way.

HAMILTON

(struggling to regain composure)
Capt. I want you to dig a small grave over by the fence as quickly as you can. We need to move out of here as soon as possible, I'll assemble the men, and look for the gold. It must be hidden nearby.

CAPT.

Sir?

HAMILTON

The people need to know the law is being upheld, (looking at the body, to himself) even when it's being broken.

CAPT.

Yes sir.

The CAPT. Runs towards the inn barking orders. HAMILTON takes Squads 1,4, and 5 with him and they move out to the forest to track AARON'S moves in hopes to find the gold he had taken.

EXT. OUTSIDE THE TAVERN - AN HOUR LATER

The few remaining soldiers form up, and march up the road towards the forest. BENNETT mounts his horse carrying a torch. Waiting for the soldiers to disappear in the distance, he ignites the inn, and the surrounding buildings. BENNETT rides to the shallow grave. He salutes the freshly hewn soil.

BENNETT

Magnificent.

He holds the locket in his hands, and rides off to join the soldiers.

EXT. CURVING ROAD IN THE COUNTRYSIDE - NORTHERN ENGLAND - DAY
- FOUR MONTHS LATER

The birds are chirping, the sun is filtering down between the tall trees and wild flowers dot the roadside. It is a beautiful country day by all accounts. A handsome young rider, CHRISTOPHER BORROWMAN, 24, appears. His horse is sauntering down the road. The rider is barely paying attention to his surroundings. Instead you see in his hands a diary and a quill pen. He has a small travellers ink well perched precariously on the saddle. He appears to be composing. The horse stops and the young rider looks up from his book. He notices another horse stopped along the road just ahead. Its rider appears to be inspecting the horse's front hoof and is mostly blocked from view. A pair of long black riding boots stick out from a long riding cloak as the figure kneels next to the horse.

CHRISTOPHER

Pardon me. Do you need help? Can I help you in some way? Are you alright?

A startled gasp is heard from SARAH WILHELM, 23, who quickly stands. Her face is hidden from view by a large cloak hood as well as the front end of the saddle and horses neck.

CHRISTOPHER

Were you thrown? Are you injured? You really ought not to linger along the road. Who knows what sort of unsavory types may come along.

SARAH

And who's to say I am not one of those types?

CHRISTOPHER

Oh... Well yes you do have a point.

Looks about nervously.

SARAH

Who's to say I don't have five men pointing muskets at you this very moment. Or who's to say I won't just shoot you myself. How are you going to stop me? With that feather pen?

A small musket pistol appears around in front of the horse's neck pointing towards CHRISTOPHER.

SARAH

Tell me, what is your name? And what business do you have here?

CHRISTOPHER

I... I can assure you I mean you no harm. Please. I am only a simple student and poet returning home after many years away. My...my name is Christopher, Christopher Borrowman.

A slight gasp is heard and giggle from behind the horse. The hood tips up and a partial face lifts from over the saddle. We see a pair a feminine eyes.

SARAH

Christopher? It is you!

The cloaked figure steps around to the front of the horse. She reaches up with one hand and pulls back the hood. We see a beautiful young woman. She is clad in high boots, riding breeches, and a well tailored, form fitting riding coat. We see a high collar of lace about her neck and signs of a lace blouse extending out her sleeves. She has an air of aristocracy about her, yet an independent, proud stance and mischief in her eye.

CHRISTOPHER

S... Sarah?

A questioning look upon his face as he takes it all in.

CHRISTOPHER (CONT'D)

Sarah, it is you!

He clumsily dismounts out of excitement, spilling ink on himself.

CHRISTOPHER (CONT'D)

What are you doing out here alone?

He gets up and walks towards her smiling as he wipes the ink with his hands. She raises the gun and points it at him again.

SARAH

I still ought to shoot you, for the last time we saw each other you would not give me a farewell kiss.

CHRISTOPHER

A kiss? If I had stolen the chaste honor of Lady Sarah, Sarah of Duke Wilhelm, with a kiss, I would never had dare return. You still can't be mad about that after nearly nine years! Now put that musket away. We both know you were a terrible shot.

SARAH purses her lips, raises her brow and gives him that "just try me" look. After a moment, a smile cracks across her face. She puts down the gun. CHRISTOPHER takes her hand to kiss it.

SARAH

You and your formalities! You were always that way around me even as children!
She laughs and gives him a quick hug.

CHRISTOPHER

Well between your father and mine I did not dare act otherwise. Say how is your father? Does he know you're out alone? My God, is he about? With a look of fear, he steps back and glances around.

SARAH

No, my father is not about. I may have made passing mention of going for a ride over breakfast this morning.

CHRISTOPHER

You always had a way of not listening to your father... and of getting me into trouble along with you. I suspect I have returned home and things will not have changed? Is your horse okay?

SARAH

She threw a shoe.

CHRISTOPHER

We're not far from town. We could go to the livery there.

CHRISTOPHER and SARAH collect their horses and begin to walk.

EXT. LIGHT WOODS ON THE OUTSKIRTS OF DUKE WILHELM'S MANOR

DUKE HENRY WILHELM, 49, along with JOSEPH LEMAY, EARL OF WINCHESTER, and GILLAN FOLGELBURG, EARL OF BARROWBURN, ride in front of a large group of servants. BENNETT rides among the servants, keeping to himself. They hold muskets under their arms. The group winds down well beaten paths as the aids tend to all of their needs.

JOSEPH

HENRY, this was a splendid idea. Many thanks to you for arranging this expedition. I have not enjoyed the fresh air in quite some time. Or the thrill of the hunt.

GILLAN

Yes indeed. Are you sure you're up to the task, Joseph? Your only prey these past few months has been those handmaids in your manor. I'm not sure these pheasants will be captured quite so easily.

WILHELM and GILLAN laugh.

JOSEPH

Ah, a great sport. And even more challenging is keeping my wife in the dark.

WILHELM stands in his saddle and places his hand to shield his eyes from the sun. He gives a polite smile at the jest, looks back to one of his aides and gives a nod. His aide yells out "Pheasant," and we see another servant about thirty yards ahead of the group hidden behind a bush. He pulls the door to a large cage open, and shoos a pheasant out. It flies into the air. JOSEPH sees this and takes aim.

JOSEPH

I've got him!

With one shot the pheasant goes down. His aide rushes off to gather his kill.

WILHELM

Well, the mighty hunter bags another.

JOSEPH

Not as thrilling as my usual prey.

GILLAN

But almost as pretty...

JOSEPH slaps GILLAN'S horse to make him run, but GILLAN keeps her well under control. JOSEPH jokingly moves his musket back to his shoulder poised to shoot the horse.

WILHELM

Gentleman, we are here to shoot pheasants, not each other.

They laugh as they move along the trail.

INT. LARGE TENT IN THE SAME WOODS - AN HOUR LATER

WILHELM, JOSEPH, and GILLAN sit in an extravagant tent, filled with all the comforts of home. BENNETT haunts a corner of the tent, listening intently. They are being served wine as they toast to their great day of hunting.

WILHELM

Gentleman, I thank you again for accompanying me today. And here is to many more days we may bask under the sun and enjoy the fruits of our labor.

They all hold their glasses high.

JOSEPH/GILLAN

Hear, hear.

They drink and sit in silence for a moment.

GILLAN

Henry, I've heard rumors that South Sea might make a return, and trade will resume. Do you know anything of this?

WILHELM

I've been looking into it.

JOSEPH

Damn South Sea! And damn he who brought about their fall!

GILLAN

Word is, they may have a new investor who will purchase their debts, and will rework trade negotiations with the Spanish.

GILLAN(cont'd)

What wonders that will do for all those who lost their fortunes.

JOSEPH

Blasted King George, trusting a company to save this great nation!

Servants pour more drink as they continue.

WILHELM

What wonders indeed. With the wealth returned to those who earned it, they might have a voice to be heard. And those responsible for the near collapse of our government can be held accountable.

With a small wave, WILHELM dismisses the servants after their next round.

GILLAN

The man that could rekindle the fire that was South Sea would command great power. Such a man might be feared. For with the power that South Sea may bring, even the crown may bend to his will. I wonder if these rumors of an investor are true?

JOSEPH

If so, then Walpole would know of it. His intelligence net lets slip no secret.

GILLAN

Save the return of the Stuarts, a man with the power of South Sea behind him might be the only hope we have of returning England to her glory. I pray 'tis true.

JOSEPH

But would that man be any better than King George? It takes more than business savvy to run a nation. I would have to meet this man before I bend a knee to him!

WILHELM

Perhaps you already have.

Silence fills the tent as the two take in what they have just heard. GILLAN and JOSEPH exchange smiles. Joseph holds up his glass once more.

JOSEPH
May the fruits of...

A ruffle of the tent flaps signals the end to privacy. HAMILTON enters.

WILHELM
Ah. Gentlemen, I would like you to meet the secret to my success. Colonel Robert Hamilton, veteran of the Fifteen Rebellion.

BENNETT sends HAMILTON a dark look as the soldier bows slightly to the gathered.

GILLAN
Splendid. I was wounded by a round in The 15 myself. The ball never quite came out. Time and again it will give me a reminder of days of glory past.

JOSEPH
What lies do you spread? He was wounded by his own weapon, attempting to remove a rook from the eaves of his smokehouse.

GILLAN
And what a fight it gave me too!

All laugh at the jest and HAMILTON moves close to WILHELM.

HAMILTON
Milord. Your daughter has been away on her daily ride long past her usual time of return. Shall I send a party?

WILHELM
Yes, I believe so. Though she may protest, if I didn't send for her, she may think that I do not care.

HAMILTON nods and exits.

GILLAN

Fetching children? Is that the sort of task you would give a fine military man like that, Henry?

WILHELM

You don't know my daughter. Compared to her, King George is but a lamb.

EXT. A SUNNY FIELD. SAME DAY

SARAH sits atop CHRISTOPHER'S horse following as he walks her horse through the picturesque countryside.

CHRISTOPHER

So how is your father faring?

SARAH

He is as he has always been, serious and demanding. He feels the burden of his station as affairs of state weigh heavily upon him. He continues to expand his holdings. Even this field is now part of the family lands.

CHRISTOPHER

It sounds as if much has changed.

SARAH

Well it will be nine years this season since you left. You left a boy, though not without your charms, and now return a young man of learning. Was schooling all that you thought it would be? More importantly, did you think about me?

CHRISTOPHER

Yes, everyday I didn't get in trouble, I thought about you. School has been good to me. I had begun studies in medicine these recent years thinking I might become a doctor for my father so that perhaps he would not think less of me for leaving his service.

CHRISTOPHER(cont'd)

But when word came to me of his passing I began to lose interest in it. I have found a new passion in writing and poetry.

SARAH

I am sorry of your father's death. He was a fine man and soldier. My father held great respect for him. Why else would he have been the commander of his military for so long? One of his Captains is now Colonel. You may remember him. Hamilton? He is a noble one and cares for his men perhaps even more than your father. He is also strict to the rules. I'm sure he'll have words for me when we return.

(imitating HAMILTON))

Why did it take you so long to come home?

CHRISTOPHER

I did not get word of my father until almost a month after. We did not communicate much. Only a few letters each year. And even then as was my father, they were short and to the business at hand. I did not feel right coming home after his death. I was too angry at losing the chance to apologize to him.

SARAH

I know your father loved you and was proud of you.

(pause)

So, is that the only reason you returned?

CHRISTOPHER

No, of course not. I had to come claim that which is mine.

SARAH

Oh?

(stops horse, leans slightly towards him)

And what is it you think you are worthy to have come and claim?

CHRISTOPHER

Why that which I have dreamed of these past years and oft was the subject of my writing. A beauty like none other with long flowing chestnut hair, eyes of fiery light, and a figure unmatched in form and grace. But what is most appealing is her free spirit that could not be tamed.

SARAH

(leans in even closer)
And what might be the name of this creature?

CHRISTOPHER

Ah, a name most beautiful.

He pats his horse on the neck.

CHRISTOPHER

Saphron.

SARAH

The horse?!

CHRISTOPHER

Why yes. Isn't she a most magnificent beast? What else would I have been talking about?

SARAH

The horse! But of course. What else would there be here for you?

She spurs the horse into a run and leaves him standing with her horse.

CHRISTOPHER

Sarah, wait. Be careful, that's all I have! Wait for me at the livery!

EXT. OUTSIDE THE DUKE'S MANOR HOUSE

HAMILTON walks briskly towards the manor house. He passes a group of Hessian soldiers that have been recently recruited. They sit in front of their quarters gambling. He scowls and moves on. Soon he is stopped in his tracks by ALEC, 23.

ALEC

Sir, sir.

He rushes to face HAMILTON and salutes. HAMILTON, frustrated, snaps a return salute.

HAMILTON
Yes Alec, what is it?

ALEC
Sir, I was just informed, three more men were murdered last night. There were no witnesses. I thought...

HAMILTON takes his hat from his brow, and smacks it into his hands.

HAMILTON
BLAST!!! No witnesses indeed. Where is our new Captain?

ALEC
Sir? Oh yes, he just arrived this morning. I would guess...

HAMILTON
Don't guess, damn you.

ALEC
Well he is in his quarters. I think he was going to rest before he got settled.

HAMILTON places his hat back onto his head.

HAMILTON
Well, then perhaps you should fetch him then. I will be speaking with Duke Wilhelm momentarily.

ALEC
Right away sir.

INT. DUKE'S STUDY

The furnishings in this room are rather well to do, but certainly not opulent. One notable feature on the east wall above the fireplace are several mounted trophies of game of all sorts--stag, boar, and the like. WILHELM sits at his desk, rolling a gold coin across the back of his fingers of his right hand. Across the desk stand HAMILTON at attention, giving his status report.

HAMILTON

Morale is unexpectedly high amongst the troops, especially with all of the recent quartering problems we have encountered-

WILHELM interrupts, seemingly only half-interested in what HAMILTON is saying, his focus is totally on the gold coin he is rolling continually back and forth across the top of his hand.

WILHELM

And the gold?

HAMILTON

Sir?

WILHELM stops rolling the coin in his hand and looks up at HAMILTON, irritation evident in his voice.

WILHELM

The gold that was stolen from me. I assume it has still eluded you?

HAMILTON

Well, no, sir, not as such, but I thought it best that we get all of the arriving Scotts quartered first before...

WILHELM

(voice dangerously quiet)

Not as such? Have you found the gold or not?

HAMILTON

I beg your Lordship's pardon, sir, but no. The newly arrived Scotch troops are still in need of quartering before we can mount any successful search.

Losing his temper, WILHELM jumps to his feet and hurls the coin at HAMILTON. It bounces off his surcoat and clatters to the floor.

WILHELM

Bloody well quarter them at Bailey's Inn! At the crossroads! At the God damn chapel for all I care!

Fighting the urge to let his anger at WILHELM show on his face, HAMILTON'S feature curves slightly into a look of disdain at WILHELM'S behavior.

HAMILTON

Of course sir. I beg pardon, but the more precipitous we are at our search, the more likely we are to overlook some vital clue as to its whereabouts. The thieves have had months to run and hide. It is no easy task.

WILHELM

Well you must temper speed with a keen eye. We must find that gold before the Jacobites do!

HAMILTON

Jacobites, sir? These are intelligences unbeknownst to me. I know of no network of Jacobites at play here.

WILHELM

My good man, humor me for a moment and let us pretend that you are a soldier and I am your regent, and that you will obey my orders without question. Can you do that? Is that too taxing?

HAMILTON

No, sir.

WILHELM

Good. Dismissed!

HAMILTON turns and leaves. After he leaves, WILHELM hurries around the table and retrieves his gold coin.

INT. TAVERN IN SMALL VILLAGE - LATE EVENING

Rain pours. SARAH and CHRISTOPHER enter the tavern brushing off the rain from their cloaks. Villagers fill one half of the bar as the Duke's soldiers who had been sent to find SARAH take seats at the tables against the wall near the stairs. Two soldiers walk up the stairs with prostitutes leading them pulling on their coin purses. The bartender nods at SARAH and CHRISTOPHER as they look to find a table. They sit as a soldier motions to a bar maid to come and help them.

EXT. FRONT OF TAVERN - MOMENTS LATER

A single soldier stands at the corner of the tavern in the pouring rain keeping an eye on the horses. A dirt road extends to the top of the hill leading to the center of the village. Lanterns along each side of the road give some light in the darkness. The soldier sneezes and pulls his coat tight to his chest trying to keep warm. As he moans and complains to himself, a silhouette at the top of the hill emerges. The HIGHWAYMAN, cloaked in shadow, sits atop a large stallion. Two wolves run across the road next to the HIGHWAYMAN's horse. He moves to the center of the road and starts down the hill towards the tavern. The wolves disappear into the darkness. The soldier doesn't notice at first. Soon his gaze falls upon the HIGHWAYMAN who is galloping towards him. The soldier stands frozen as he closes fast. The soldier starts to react, pulling his musket from his side. The HIGHWAYMAN takes his horse to a full gallop, drawing a pistol.

INT. TAVERN IN SMALL VILLAGE - SAME TIME

SARAH and CHRISTOPHER enjoy catching up with each other. The room is filled with high spirits. Soldiers laugh as they down their drinks. Suddenly a shot rings out from outside the tavern door. The room grows quiet. The soldiers look around to discern where the sound came from. The only SOUND is that of the SOLDIERS gathering their coats and weapons. Time passes slowly until the front door crashes inside the tavern. The body of the guard outside is crushed under the hoofs of the black horse as it leaps into the room. Flashes of light explode followed by the thunder of the musket shots from the HIGHWAYMAN. Two soldiers immediately fall, and the bar bursts into chaos. Villagers scramble to hide under whatever they may. Soldiers leap to safe points to get a clear shot at the assailant. SARAH is frozen in shock, as CHRISTOPHER pulls her to the wall, pulling the table on its side to protect them. One soldier leaps out from the side of the stairs taking a shot at the HIGHWAYMAN, but his fear effects his aim. The HIGHWAYMAN turns his horse around using its rear side to knock the soldier into the bar. The soldier slams into the bar knocking several bottles onto the floor. Two soldiers seize this opportunity to attack. They aim their muskets as the HIGHWAYMAN turns to see. He spurs his horse making it kick the table behind him. The table flies into the air, knocking the lantern and drinks into the soldiers. The lantern bursts against the wall, catching on fire. The fire spreads across the wall. The soldiers from upstairs come rushing down with swords drawn. The HIGHWAYMAN grabs the hanging lantern from the ceiling and swings it, hitting the first soldier in the head.

He falls down the stairs as the second soldier leaps from the steps to the ground, taking a shot and hitting the HIGHWAYMAN in the shoulder, flipping him off the horse. The HIGHWAYMAN lands on his feet and immediately charges the soldier with sword in hand. The soldier fights hard but to no avail. The HIGHWAYMAN dispatches him and finishes the others. The fighting stops as one soldier is left alive cowering next to SARAH. All is suddenly quiet. They watch in silence as the HIGHWAYMAN walks over each soldier as if the Angel of Death, reaching into a coin purse, and placing gold coins onto their eyes. The villagers, struck with fear, dare not move. The HIGHWAYMAN finishes, and leaps onto his horse. Half the bar is on fire, but everyone remains still. The HIGHWAYMAN rides his horse towards the entrance, leaping through the ring of fire around the door. He exits, and all watch as he disappears into the darkness.

EXT. DAY - THE GROUNDS OF THE DUKE - THE NEXT DAY

An ADVANCE RIDER thunders down a country road. Mud spatters in his wake. Violently he reigns his mount at the base of the manor's steps. Young boys rush to take the horse as the rider dismounts.

ADVANCE RIDER

Colonel Hamilton! I must speak to
the Colonel!

STABLE BOY

He is within.

The ADVANCE RIDER hurries into the mansion.

EXT. DAY - THE GROUNDS OF THE DUKE - SEVERAL MINUTES LATER

SARAH, CHRISTOPHER and a retinue of the Duke's Men arrive. A cart filled with bodies of the dead and wounded rattles closely behind. WILHELM, BENNETT, HAMILTON, and ADVANCE RIDER stand at the top of the veranda, gazing down the steps as the party arrives. HAMILTON and ADVANCE RIDER descend to meet the group.

WILHELM

What do you make of this, Bennett?
It comes too, closely on the heels
of last weeks slaying for my
comfort.

BENNETT

True. But soldiers have been killing each other when liberal amounts of alcohol were introduced for ages. If it weren't for the bravery that drink brings, most soldiers wouldn't even kill at all.

WILHELM

Oh really? Remind me to send you a bottle from my stores. Something about this does not sit right. And what's worse is that this time they involved my daughter.

SARAH has dismounted and quickly sprints up the steps towards her father. CHRISTOPHER is left by his horse, uncertain.

HAMILTON

You there, a hand with these men. And then to the stables with these horses.

CHRISTOPHER

(gesturing towards SARAH)
I... uh...

HAMILTON

(giving an inspecting look)
What's that? Christopher? Chris Borrowman! Forgive me! I mistook you. Your father. I am so sorry, please accept my sincerest condolences. Your father was a fine man. I couldn't have asked for a better man to serve under.

CHRISTOPHER

Thank you ... Hamilton, is it? You must forgive me as well. I'm afraid my father was closer to his men than I. I feel I should remember you more clearly.

HAMILTON

Think nothing of it. When I last saw you, I believe you were more interested in the insects that young Sarah was collecting and not so much in the military.

Others have arrived to assist with the dead and the wounded, among them, CAPTAIN JAMES HERSHEL, 32. He approaches HAMILTON, quickly saluting.

HERSHEL
Colonel Hamilton, I came as soon as I heard.

HAMILTON
(to Christopher)
You had best join Sarah. Come by my cottage later. I have two glasses and a bottle of scotch I have been saving.

CHRISTOPHER smiles and nods and then moves up the stairs where SARAH speaks with her father. HAMILTON and HERSHEL walk towards the back of the cart.

HAMILTON
What have you heard so far? What do the barracks say?

HERSHEL
That our men were attacked in East Chalex. Unknown assailants, nearly beaten to the man.

HAMILTON
Not just beaten. Killed. One survived.

HAMILTON gestures towards a shaken man sitting at the back of the cart.

EXT. TOP OF STEPS TO WILHELM'S MANOR - SAME TIME

WILHELM smiles and strokes his daughter's hair. CHRISTOPHER stands several paces away, not quite sure what to do with himself.

WILHELM
Are you sure that you are all right? When the rider came, I had feared the worse. First you do not turn up all night and then this attack...

SARAH
I'm fine. I'm fine. I told you. My horse threw a shoe and I was simply delayed for a b...

WILHELM

But suppose this attack had been meant for you? No matter how much you may love me, there are always people who would look to harm us.

SARAH

I know. You've told me so before. But I refuse to believe that anyone could possibly hate you. In any case, he was more interested in your men than me. Mind you I was underneath a table, which was a good thing, since Christopher had nearly taken a blow to the head when one man went flying at...

WILHELM

Wait a moment. Christopher?

SARAH

Oh! Yes.

(beckons Christopher)

Father, you remember Christopher Borrowman? Colonel Borrowman's son?

WILHELM

Ah yes, Christopher. A shame about your father. Weren't you in France, attending the academy?

CHRISTOPHER

Only until recently, sir. I returned...

SARAH

He returned in the nick of time I would say.

At this interruption, CHRISTOPHER fades back into the background.

SARAH

If he hadn't been so fortuitous, I may have had a rougher time getting home today. It was horrendous, Father...

EXT. YARD AT THE BASE OF THE STEPS TO WILHELM'S MANOR - SAME TIME

In the yard in front of the steps the LONE SURVIVOR rubs his forehead with a clenched fist - never opening his hand, eyes downcast as HAMILTON and HERSHEL listen intently.

LONE SURVIVOR

The devil. It was the devil. Or as close as I ever want to get. One man. Believe me, sir, it weren't no drink neither. The piss in Chalex couldn't souse a rat but we drinks it just the same. Please sir... A moment...

HAMILTON

Take your time.

LONE SURVIVOR

You'll still think me a drunk but I swears it - there was only one man. Just one man, but he was death enough for us all. 'Put ole Lainey through before he could stand up, let alone fight. The rest...

HAMILTON

And how is it that you survived?

LONE SURVIVOR

Please sir, I ain't no coward. These were me mates. Though I've only served under ye fer but a month, I ain't had no other brothers but fer them. I tried my best sir, but he wanted no part of me. I might as well have been tryin' to fuck the wind than to lay a hand on 'im. He was a ghost. The devil...

HERSCHEL cracks a small smile at the comparison to the wind. Nonplused, HAMILTON interrupts firmly.

HAMILTON

Soldier. Calm yourself. Start from the beginning - what exactly happened?

EXT. TOP OF STEPS TO WILHELM'S MANOR - SAME TIME

WILHELM looks unconvinced at SARAH.

WILHELM

Surely there had to be more than one man. You said yourself that you were under a table.

SARAH

Table or no, I know what I saw. One man, with a rapier and a flintlock. It would have been rather exciting if it weren't for the fact that I was stuck in the middle of it all.

WILHELM

Of course, now - why don't you refresh yourself, my dear. I'm sure you would appreciate clean clothing and fresh water. I will need to consult with Colonel Hamilton.

SARAH

Of course, Father.

SARAH flashes CHRISTOPHER a smile and is whisked away by servants. CHRISTOPHER is left standing awkwardly on the steps. He gives a slight smile to WILHELM and BENNETT who just stare at him.

CHRISTOPHER

Well, I guess I'll see if I may help that man. Good day, gentleman.

He self-consciously walks back down the stairs.

WILHELM

Christopher, see that Hamilton finds you suitable quarters for the evening. You must stay. Sarah will have it no other way.

CHRISTOPHER waves and continues down the stairs.

CHRISTOPHER

Thank you, sir.

BENNETT and WILHELM turn their gaze towards HAMILTON and the LONE SURVIVOR as the soldier recounts his story to HAMILTON animatedly.

They cannot hear the interaction from their distance but the pair watch for a long moment. It is evident that something more than a bar fight has transpired.

WILHELM
(MORE)
Get to the bottom of this.

EXT. YARD AT BASE OF STEPS TO WILHELM'S MANOR - SAME TIME

HAMILTON and HERSHEL have stepped a few feet away from the LONE SURVIVOR as CHRISTOPHER and others tend to the LONE SURVIVOR'S wounds.

HERSHEL
It's quite a story. One worth checking out. This is most likely related to the previous attacks.

HAMILTON
Quite. Any man might claim to be overwhelmed in numbers and paint himself the hero were he to be the only survivor of such an ordeal. This is most puzzling. But please, keep what you have heard to yourself. I would rather know the whole truth than to have half-truths flourishing.

LONE SURVIVOR
Colonel! I was wrong!

HAMILTON
What's that? What do you mean?

LONE SURVIVOR
I was wrong. He was not the devil. No... He was the reaper. The bloody grim reaper!

The LONE SURVIVOR thrusts his clenched fist forward, opening it to reveal two coins pressed deep enough into his palm to leave their impression in his skin. HAMILTON and HERSHEL exchange puzzled looks.

HAMILTON
Just like the others...