

SCRIPT TITLE

Written by Jennifer Carson

with lyrics by Jennifer Carson and music by William Ogmundson

Based on the Poem, *The Highway Man* by Alfred Noyes

A LIGHT OF VICTORY

BOOK BY JENNIFER CARSON
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CAST OF CHARACTERS:

BESS HAVERSTOCK— YOUNG LADY
MR. HAVERSTOCK— BESS'S FATHER
MR. BAUER— TAVERN PATRON
MR. GIBBONS— TAVERN PATRON
MR. LEDBETTER— TAVERN PATRON
NICHOLAS— A HIGHWAYMAN, AND BESS'S LOVE INTEREST
FRASIER— THE OSTLER
THE CAPTAIN —CAPTAIN OF THE SOLDIERS
BARKER— A SOLDIER
SOLDIER 1
SOLDIER 2
ENSEMBLE— EXTRA TAVERN PATRONS AND SOLDIERS MAY BE NEEDED TO
FILL OUT THE STAGE

SETTINGS:

TAVERN
BESS'S ROOM
LONESOME ROAD

SCOTLAND, LATE 18TH CENTURY

LIGHTS UP:

INT. HAVERSTOCK INN, A RURAL, 18TH CENTURY SCOTTISH TAVERN

BESS HAVERSTOCK. With long dark hair she is a classical beauty, but only a motherless innkeeper's daughter. The inn is full of patrons, most of whom are older men deep into their cups. Bess's father, MR. HAVERSTOCK is at the bar counter, cleaning up from the long day.

BAUER, in his fifties, more well-to-do than his hostess, gestures to her for another ale. Bess turns to her father at the bar.

BESS:

Another tankard for old Bauer.
He'll soon be floating away.

Haverstock nods, fills a tankard from the keg, and hands it to Bess.

Bess carries the ale through the tavern to a table in the corner where Bauer, MR.LEDBETTER, a very old gentleman, and MR. GIBBONS, a middle-aged philanderer, are sitting.

BESS: (CONT'D)

Here you are Mr. Bauer, another
tankard against my better judgment.
Will my father have to tie you to
your horse again tonight?

Mr. Ledbetter and MR. GIBBONS chuckle, Obviously drunk.

Mr. Gibbons grabs Bess's derriere.

MR. GIBBONS:

Sweet Bess, you're a piece of work,
ain't ye? Why don't ye come and
warm me bed tonight?

Bess pulls away.

BESS:

I'd appreciate it if you would
remember, Mr. Gibbons, that my
father runs a tavern, not a
whorehouse.

MR. LEDBETTER:

We'll, if you won't warm ole'
Gibbons' bed, miss, perhaps you'll
warm mine.

The men laugh harder and pound on the tables.

BESS:

The only thing that ought to warm
your bed, Mr. Ledbetter, is a hot
coal.

Bess turns on her heel and storms through the crowd to an
empty table which she begins to tidy with a rag from her
apron pocket.

BESS: (CONT'D)

*I never dreamed that this would be
my life.
I thought by now that I would be a
wife.
Cooking meals, nursing babies,
living my life.
This inn, it is our livelihood.
The sticky floors, the groping
boors, the rotting wood.
It could be worse, I shouldn't
moan.
This is my home.
This is my life, I shouldn't want
it any other way.
I shouldn't dream, I shouldn't
wish, I shouldn't pray.
For something else, no...someone
else.
I think of him every day...
I think of him every day.
Hair as black as night, lips like
rubies.
When he rides he is a thing of
beauty. Since mother died he's
watched over me,
Like a brother, but more than that,
I think he would agree...but
This is my life, I shouldn't want
it any other way.
I shouldn't dream, I shouldn't
wish, I shouldn't pray.
For something else, no...someone
else.
I think of him every day.*

BESS: (CONT'D)
*But this is my life, I shouldn't
want it any other way.
I shouldn't dream, I shouldn't
wish, I shouldn't pray.
For something else, no...someone
else.
I think of him every day...I think
of him every day.*

Music fades out and the return of the noise of a bustling tavern return.

BESS: (CONT'D)
What is it about ale that makes men
behave like feral dogs?

MR. HAVERSTOCK:
I'm sorry, lass. I know it's not
the right place for ye to be
working, but there's no choice. If
I had the money, I'd hire a server,
and you could work in a proper
household.

BESS:
I don't think I've wiped my arse as
many times as he's groped it.

MR. HAVERSTOCK:
(angry)
Was it old Gibbons again? I'd like
to grope the seat of his pants and
toss him out the door...
(resigned)
But you know we count on his coin
and good graces to stay in
business.

Bess walks behind the bar to the window and stares out. The
rush of wind is audible for a moment.

BESS:
Yes, I understand. And it's not
just Gibbons, but half a dozen
other men as well.

She turns back to her father.

BESS: (CONT'D)
You can't tell me you don't see it.

MR. HAVERSTOCK:
(rubs forehead as if he
has a headache)
Perhaps it is time that Nicholas
and I have a talk. Is he coming
back into town tonight?

Bess fiddles with the pendant hanging from her necklace. It
is the only thing on her that looks as if it has value.

BESS:
I've been trying not to think about
it. Every time the tavern door
opens my heart goes to fluttering
and then shatters when it's not him
that walks in.

MR. HAVERSTOCK:
Ah, to have young love once again.

BESS:
He said he would only be in Fife
for a few days. It's been five.
What's keeping him?

MR. HAVERSTOCK:
Mayhap his business took him longer
to finish than he thought. Don't
worry lass, he'll come.

BESS:
I hope so.

MR. GIBBONS:
(Holding mug aloft)
Wench!

MR. HAVERSTOCK:
(pounds fist on counter
and points at Gibbons)
It's Ms. Haverstock to you,
Gibbons. And if ye' put your ruddy
paws on my daughter again, I won't
fetch the constable, but put you in
the stocks meself!

Bess pecks her father on the cheek.

BESS:
Thanks, Da.

She fills three new tankards and saunters over to the table
of men. Mr. Ledbetter and Mr. Bauer are anxious, but Mr.
Gibbons leers at her.

BESS: (CONT'D)
Will that be all for you tonight,
gentlemen?

MR. GIBBONS:
That will be all for this occasion,
Ms. Haverstock. Perhaps on another
night you can provide us with more
friendly service.

BESS:
(as she gathers the empty
tankards)
I doubt you could rise to the
occasion, Mr. Gibbons.
(beat)
I'm afraid a friendly smile and a
cup of ale is all you'll ever be
served.

Ledbetter and Bauer hoot with laughter--Bess has gotten the better of Gibbons. Bess basks in the glow on one upping him as she takes the tankards behind the bar and drops them in the sink. Then she grabs the broom and starts sweeping. It is getting late and a few of the regular patrons take their leave. FRASIER, the ostler, late 20s, with a bit of a hunched posture, and greasy hair that plasters across his forehead, sidles up behind her. It is almost intimate when he whispers in her ear.

FRASIER:
You shouldn't talk to Mr. Gibbons
that way.

Bess turns and puts the broom between them.

BESS:
You mean he shouldn't talk to me
that way.

Frasier smooths his limp hair, his hand shaking slightly.

FRASIER:
I would never talk to you that way,
but Gibbons is a powerful man. He
could put your father out of
business.

Bess steps away, putting more distance between them.

BESS:
Everyone knows my father's inn is
the best in the village.

Frasier steps back into her personal space.

FRASIER:

Yes, and he uses his good
reputation to his advantage,
doesn't he?

Bess shakes her head. She doesn't know what Frasier is
talking about.

FRASIER: (CONT'D)

I heard a rumor he houses
unsavories. Highwaymen and the
like.

Bess squares her shoulders. This is a serious accusation.

BESS:

And where would this rumor come
from? An ostler perhaps?

The ostler scoffs.

FRASIER:

No one cares who starts a rumor.
And no one cares to find the truth
behind the whispers. Perhaps your
father should stop welcoming
thieves to his door.

BESS:

(Fierce whisper)

My father doesn't welcome thieves
or any other unsavories...except
you.

FRASIER:

Poor, Bess. So young and naive.
They haven't even told you the
truth about your dear, pretty
Nicholas, have they? Ever wonder
where he gets those handsome
trinkets he gives you?

Bess holds her ground even though she is visibly shaken by
his words.

BESS:

You would do well to remember your
position. I'm sure these gentlemen
will need their horses saddled and
ready before the hour is up. You
should see to it, since that is
what my father pays you to do.

The ostler's eyes dart over Bess's shoulder and meets Gibbons's stare before dropping to the floorboards.

FRASIER:

Yes, perhaps I ought to.

He shuffles away.

Bess stares after him, fiddling with her pendant, then glances to the table in the corner. Mr. Gibbons raises his cup to her before taking a swallow of ale. Bess composes herself and turns away pretending not to have noticed him. She continues to sweep.

BESS:

*This inn you see it is our
livelihood.
The sticky floors, the groping
boors, the rotting wood.*

Mr. Gibbons takes his leave from Mr. Bauer, whose head is nodding in his cups.

BESS: (CONT'D)

*Since mother died I've been his
"right hand man"
Thankfully the drunkard's have
short attention spans.*

Mr. Ledbetter, not quite as drunk as Mr. Bauer, leers at Bess from across the room, a feeble wave the only acknowledgment of Mr. Gibbons' departure.

A feeling of unease grows in Bess.

BESS: (CONT'D)

*It could be worse, I shouldn't
complain.*

Bess returns the broom to it's spot against the wall.

BESS: (CONT'D)

*This is my home...this is my
life...*

BESS: (CONT'D)

(To her father)

Will you be all right if I head to bed? I can finish washing the tables in the morning.

MR. HAVERSTOCK:

Go on with ye. Wash up, it's been a long day.

(MORE)

MR. HAVERSTOCK: (CONT'D)
I'll bring up a plate when I get
those two gone for the night.

BESS:
The roast sure smelt good today,
Da.

MR. HAVERSTOCK:
It did, didn't it? Just like your
ma use to cook it.

Bess smiles and kisses her father's cheek. Mr. Haverstock watches her ascend the stairs to their living quarters, then takes up the broom and picks up where she left behind, ruminating.

MR. HAVERSTOCK: (CONT'D)
*Hair as black as night, lips like
rubies.
She has become a thing of beauty.
Since mother died she has watched
over me
My right hand man, but not a man,
A woman now is she.
This is her life, I wish it wasn't
so.
She should dream, she should wish,
and I should pray.
For something else, no...someone
else.
Perhaps he'll come today.*

FADE OUT.

INT. BESS'S SECOND FLOOR BEDROOM

The timber-framed room is small but cozy with a window looking out over the moor and a fireplace, which is burning low. A small dressing table is opposite the four-poster bed that dominates the space.

Bess enters the room and crosses to the window, gazing out at the moonlit landscape. She sighs and closes the shutters. Turning, she unties her apron, leaving it in a pile on the floor and removes her overdress, hanging it over the back of the chair. She sits on the edge of the bed and starts to braid her long hair, weaving in a ribbon.

A whistle is heard from the courtyard. Bess visibly brightens.