

## The Highwayman

'The Highwayman, the criminal known for holding up high-profile peoples while they are in their cars using replica flintlock pistols, has struck again. Business entrepreneur Ryan MacIntyre became the latest victim and takes the of number of robberies up to ten.'

The report continued on the television inside the headrest of the car while the passenger made his remarks. 'You heard about this guy, Jacob? Flintlock pistols! Inspired, that is!'

The driver quickly acknowledged the statement with a hum, keeping his eyes on the narrow and twisting country roads ahead of him. While the choice of vehicle was of the upmost luxury, it was still a challenge to keep steady amongst potholes and natural debris. In the rear there were no such stresses: entertainment of all kinds; champagne, legroom to spare and even shag-pile carpets were all included for the man with enough money to spend. The world outside seemed a fair distance away; tinted windows shaded the bushes as they sped past them, the only company there seemed to be on this road were the crows picking at the carcasses of the unlucky wildlife that tried and failed to flee man's path.

The passenger chuckled boisterously with his deep, gravelly voice. A thin man, well aged with a slicked back mane of brilliant silver hair, the wrinkles on his face only appeared during his many fits of smiles and laughter. His navy two-piece suit remained pristine, covering him like armour. Even though seated, he still moved as easily as a man a third of his own age, fiddling with buttons and leaver to squeeze the last parts of extravagance out of his ride. Youth of heart unfortunately does not extend to the bones, and the passenger needed comfort, lest he paid the price in aches and pains later in the day.

After many minute adjustments, he merely enjoyed the lavish journey. The driver, however, gave the road his full attention, the buttons of his uniform glimmering in the morning sun. There was something else glimmering further up the road, though. Something unnatural. This solitary road, this path through fields, trees and bushes, now revealed something that looked almost as if it was rejected by the surroundings, almost as if it was punished for intruding.

Getting closer, the driver took notice of what looked to be the results of an accident on the road: two thick skid marks faded into the road, growing apart for some distance, leading towards the centre of the scene. A sports bike laid on its side on the road, the driver seemingly thrown from the vehicle some some fifteen feet, in a black heap, unmoving. The driver slowed as he approached this scene, looking on with panic. He had already come to a decision as to what to do. With confidence in his choice, he brought the car to a complete halt before the bike, swung his head around to look at the passenger and, before he had a chance to enquire, told him quickly 'I'm awfully sorry sir, but there's a motorcyclist who's come off his bike. Please hold tight, I'm going to get some help for him.'

He hurried out of the door as the passenger, still smiling, reached over to the drinks compartment hidden under the middle seat, unfazed by any of it. Outside the car, the driver jogged over to the fallen motorcyclist, calling out to him as he did. He did not move. Getting closer, he kept getting pangs of dread, fearing the worst had happened in front of him. Blurting out enquiries of health in a panic, he crouched over the the fallen man and instinctively shook him gently by the shoulder. There was no response, only the feel of cold leather and dead weight.

The driver shot up. He clasped his hand to his mouth before reaching for the mobile phone in his pocket. Before dialing, however, he checked everything one last time. That's when he noticed; noticed that there was not a single scuff, scratch, smudge or scathe on the motorcyclist's leathers or helmet.

Before there was any time to process any of this further. Something grabbed the driver from behind. In one fluid motion, his legs were swept from beneath him and his head was smashed against the tarmac. Seeing but only a blur of grey and blue, he now joined the motorcyclist: untarnished and unmoving in the road.

A dark figure rose after his successful take-down and didn't waste any time in heading for the car. Large, confident strides spread his cloak behind him. A dark hood over his head, shading his eyes and a startling red scarf disguised his face, all else was black. His boots creaked as he twisted to face the left rear door. Then, in one graceful motion, he reached for the door handle with the left while drawing a weapon with the right. The door was thrown open and a flawless example of a flintlock pistol was immediately thrust toward the space created. Without a moment's hesitation he spoke, clearly and loudly

'Gregory Statham. Stand and deliver.'

'Now there's an original line!'

Meeting him was a glass of champagne, held out by Gregory. Smiling, he offered it to him. 'Come on, lad, let's have a chat.'

'Your money or your life, sir.'

With this, Gregory was forced to put down the two glasses, not being able to control his laughter. 'I knew you were gonna be something special, but I didn't know you were going to be all Adam Ant on me, mister Highwayman!'

Tensing, the Highwayman left hand reach for another flintlock that was holster at his waist. Through the condescending laughter he pointed the pistol upwards above his head and pulled the trigger without a single hesitation. The thunderous shot shook metal, skin and bone right to the core. Bellowing out of the barrel was thick white smoke, following the sound out and around the Highwayman as the wind caught it. Echoes of a moments impatience still hung in the air moments later as the desired attention was now being paid.

Gregory's smile lessened. Raising his hand, he threw his finger at him while conjuring the words to speak.

'Very nice, very nice.' He said. 'You've got quite a style going here, lad.'

'I don't care for style, I'm just out for what I can get,' the Highwayman immediately spoke, 'so it would serve you well to pay your way out of my line of sight.' Each word was spoken eloquently yet forcefully, like the thrusts of a rapier.

'Course you care! No one goes prancing around in a cloak and boots like yours if they don't! You care so much you based your little get-up on those weapons.'

The Highwayman once again replied as soon as the last word was spoken 'I am not a book for you to read.'

'Well, you're wide open.' Gregory took out a thick, aromatic cigar from a case in his breast pocket, holding it between his fingers and, once again, jabbed and pointed it in the Highwayman's direction. 'Let's say you did go ahead and make them firecrackers first. That makes you a man who likes to put in a little more effort than most, doesn't it? I mean, why make such nice pieces when a pipe and some powder would do the trick?' He took a moment to light the cigar with a match. Sucking and biting down on it, his mouth formed a natural smirk as he continued. 'Also, mister stylish, how do you get a hold of enough gunpowder to make that fancy armory of yours? I'm guessing you must work in some fireworks shop or factory or something.'

At the moment the Highwayman was shocked into life and broke his statue-like facade. He thrust one boot down onto the edge of the seat, almost stomping on Gregory's thigh. The pistol was thrust deeper into the car, closer to the temple of Gregory. With a tone of anger he made his opening statement once more. 'Gregory Statham, stand and deliver, before I feel that your life may be a liability to my work!'

Gregory held his hands up. 'Alright, alright. Let me patch up that nerve I hit.'

He reached over to the seat opposite his, having an eye and a gun trained on him at all times; a prisoner finally brought under control. This man, this cocksure old old, had been given all the freedom his runaway mouth had earned him, but the man seemed to have more surprises than just a nimble tongue and a keen eye.

'Will twenty-five grand do you?' He said, as he turned around. A wad of a mixture of crisp and tattered notes filled his hand. He could barely wrap his fingers around it. Offering it, a grin growing on his face as he looked up to the almost nonexistent face of his capturer. This charm offensive had no effect on him. The Highwayman barely glimpsed at the money. 'Hmm, well, you do seem like you're the kind of fella that fancies a challenge, don't you?' he put the money away. 'How about this: I take this and the 10 others from this suitcase and hire some nice little private eyes to snoop around everywhere with the words "firework" and "cracker" on the front and I get to be the man who stop Dick Turpin? How's that for a challenge?'

'I suppose I need to shove this pistol further into your wrinkled smirk, old man.'

'Let's not get personal, mate. I know you like the hunt more than the chase, so why don't I tell you about the biggest hunt that's going on right under your nose and make more money you'd make hijacking Lady GaGa's car every day for a year.'

'Please, I'm not your pawn for your own use.'

'I ain't gonna be using you, mate. All I ask is half the prize on offer, and half of twenty-five million is a nice sum for a week's work, don't you think? You want adventure? It's yours. I'll even throw in a new suit. I know a guy who can work wonders.'

There was quiet between them. Gregory noticed a wavering in the arm of the Highwayman, the pistol was almost quivering in the light breeze of the early morning. What he couldn't see was his eyes, darting around the edge of his sight. Gregory decided to go for the final blow in his argument.

'You're probably thinking if I'm the real deal or not, ain't you? Well, I've been driving around looking for you, lad.' He took a puff of his cigar. 'I didn't lock my door when we stopped and I threw money at you and you're still suspicious. That's good, you've got good instincts. The so-called "criminal underworld" is impressed by you, they wanna see what you can really do.' he held out his hand to him, taking a humbler tone compared to everything he had said previously. 'What do you say, lad? Let's show them what you're made of, and make a pretty penny while we do!'

The Highwayman lowered his gun, turning his head to look at the outstretched deal in the making. He took his foot off the seat of the car the hand moved with him, maintaining a closeness to him. This man was eager to recruit him. In a world where the mundane seemed like torture, even these hijackings were becoming routine. Security was becoming harder to penetrate, victims were becoming savvy and, more dangerously, the police were closing in. He had to stop.

Holstering the pistols, he gathered his cloak and made his exit, walking from the car. Gregory shrugged his shoulders and mumbled under his breath as he used his hand to close the car door instead of a deal. He consoled himself with a large inhalation of his cigar, blowing it above him with his head leant back. This time it was this predator who had failed his hunt.

Suddenly, the door opposite him sprung open, making Gregory jump back into life.

'I'll be taking this upfront.'

The Highwayman swiped the briefcase full of cash from the seat before placing himself in it harshly. He remained stoic even as Gregory shook his hand with a vicegrip, excitement pouring out of him in the way of words of victory and riches. He pushed him away for a brief moment so that he could get a word in. 'If I'm going to do this, then I need you to stay out of my way and equip me with every last thing I need.'

'Keep the money, lad! Money, bombs, boots, armour, it's yours! I, aah, just have one thing to ask that you do, though.'

'What now? What stipulation are you going to enforce now?'

'Can you do us a favour drive the car? I've only just remembered that you socked Jacob.'