

The Ballad of Mikhail Reveltor

Part One

Within a noble's mansion
With dawn hours away,
The thief Mikhail Reveltor,
A precious thing has ta'en.
A jewel of haunting beauty,
He's hunted far and wide,
Now in his hand he holds it,
Held to his Elven eyes.

But to that trice of triumph
There comes a boorish shout.
An angry hand flings ope the door
A wrathful Lord steps out.
No guards has he beside him,
The mansion is not roused,
In evening robes he stands alone
Before the thief he's found.

Mikhail draws his slender sword
And holds it to the berk,
He who dares to think to pester
A rogue about his work.
And yet this feckless noble,
Armed with only folly,
He slaps aside Mikhail's blade
And moves in recklessly.

A moment of astonishment
For such audacity,
Affords a punch and then one more,
Both feeble and thrown clumsily.
A lesson needs here to be taught
To such a fool as this.
The sword slashes lazily
And cuts open a wrist.

The slice would soon prove fatal
In any other room,
Yet nearby sat the potions
To sew up such a wound.
Atop a small worktable
Were healing draughts brewed fresh,
Just one sip of this blessed brew
Would remake blood and flesh.

Mikhail, he drops one of these
On the lap of the shrieking lord,
Then shouldering his jewel and loot

He walks straight out the door.
Through the window, down the vines
Which clung tight to one wall,
Mikhail flitters shadow-like
And flees from one and all.

'Neath the moon and quick as rain
Mikhail flies swift through the street,
Until he comes to inn and bed
And falls upon the sheets;
But ere the rogue can fall asleep
To wake in triumph's light,
A mighty blow smites on his door
Which breaks before such might.

Five men, all armed, all charge inside
Seizing sword and elf and jewel.
They wear the cloaks of city guards
And look fittingly cruel.
They beat and bind their prisoner,
They take all that he has,
Until at last one thinks to speak,
His gravelled voice is glad.

'Here it ends you thieving shite,
You've vexed your final house,
Know you who you slew this night?
Know you his pregnant spouse?
Would that I could end you here
But I'm a man of law.
So we shall let the courts decide
The fate you have in store.'

Mikhail makes to answer
But a halter stops his tongue.
Thus in his mind he silent cries:
'No murder have I done!
I left the potion by the man,
He surely must have drank,
And how are you swine here so soon?'
This whole scene truly stank.

Out the inn and o'er the streets
They drag the pinioned thief.
Pointed stone and broken glass,
These cause his legs much grief.
Into a cell they fling him
With mocking barbs and kicks.
Bound and gagged they keep him,
Wary of his tricks.

Part Two

The trial starts at the break of day,
Mikhail mostly spectates,
Hung in a cage to hear old men
Their fool-accusations dictate.
He's charged foremost with homicide,
That deed he did not do.
Twas not his fault the Lord he snicked
Had chanced to die, the fool.

A thousand thefts are spoken of,
Almost a third are lies.
The court is keen to list his sins,
He does not much care why.
The sentence comes, at last, at dusk:
To spend all of his days
In darkness 'neath Light's city,
To live and die in chains.

There was more than he could see
To this sham of a trial,
Someone had contrived his fall
And likely planned a while.
Yet this scheme was tomorrow's problem,
Today he must get free.
The best chance he would likely find
Once they were out at sea.

With patience, he endures the jeers,
Led hooded passed the crowds,
Who'll always watch a convict pass
And howl their swine-scorn loud.
He smells the salt blend with the air,
He hears the creaking masts.
The ground gives way to a plank's tilt,
And soon he'll have his chance.

The hood is pulled off once aboard
A ship cleaner than most.
A brace of guards stand at each side
And liberally boast.
'The sky you'll never see again,
You've lost the sun and moon.
You'll spend your days twixt dungeon walls
We'll place you in quite soon.'

Down in the hold, there sits a cage
Whose like he's never seen,
Smooth and solid walls he marks
Where bars there should have been.
Inside they chain up both his arms
And slam the door behind.

Scant's the light and grim the air,
No easy flight he'll find.

'Welcome friend.' A woman says
A few feet off from him.
He sees a fair yet fearsome face
E'en though by shadows dimmed.
'I am sorry to see you here,
In this cage of my design,
Misused by these filthy law-men,
Like this ship which once was mine.

'I am Captain Esmerelda,
This was the Ebony Emerald.
This cage was meant for captives
Whose kin would buy them back with gold.
There is no lock to probe within,
There's no weak point to clout.
Irony is not my friend,
For I left no way out.'

'Despair ill suits a Captain's voice.'
Mikhail replies with cheer.
'Prithee loan me that hairpin
And I'll bear us from here.
This is a clever cage in truth
But there's always a flaw.
In due course, it shall know defeat
By Mikhail Reveltor.'

She leans to grant the pin he seeks
But hope she cannot give.
So certain's she that all is lost,
In chains e'remote to live.
But soon enough the elf's two chains
He's picked with pin and teeth.
Yet the door must fall to smite
The Pirate Captain's grief.

It is the work of several days
With hairpin and re-purposed chain
Working at the feeding hatch,
A task which looks in vain.
But Elven patience and resolve
Should never be dismissed.
Mikhail comes to know this door
And how it does resist.

In time he knows just where to pull
With one of his two chains
Fed through the broken hatch's gap,
A wider gap to gain.

The door can hold fast less and less
As Mikhail fights on.
Hard-earned leverage he wields
And soon the battle's won.

Esmerelda looks, wide-eyed,
To see her cage destroyed.
But soon her mind turns to revenge,
Of grief, she's now devoid.
Yet they are just two stood alone
Against hundreds of crew,
Weaponless, weary and half-starving,
What can they hope to do?

Part Three

Cautiously they sneak above
To spy the state of things.
Late evening it must be, judge they,
By snores and hammock swings.
Discarded swords and uniforms
They take and don with haste,
And then they seek two sleeping fools,
To take up their former space.

Such a ruse won't work for long
But still might buy them time,
Enough perhaps to get away
If the coast should come nearby.
As they search the snoring snipes,
One stirs and bolts upright.
He quickly spots the brace of rogues
By moon and candlelight.

'By the depths Captain, it's you!'
a joyful voice does whisper.
Who're this is they're overjoyed
To see this 'scaped prisoner.
Esmerelda soon does mark
In barely fitting sailor's weeds
One of her recent pirate crew,
Who chortles on with glee:

'When the guards snuck on the ship
Whilst most of us did revel,
Your faithful crew ashore contrived
To sneak on-board as well.
We're all here to a man, Captain,
Disguised and biding time.
Beastly hard it's been to bear
The Emerald pack with law-swines.

'We've searched for means to set you free,
But the cage's key eludes us.
A moot point, Captain, now you are free
And once more may command us.'
Esmerelda claps his shoulder
And grins from ear to ear.
Mikhail too is more than pleased,
Revenge may well be near.

'Get you 'bout our own, my friend.'
The 'Emerald's Captain says.
'Tell them to prepare to strike
Our ship we'll soon regain.
Tell them to await my sign,
Which they'll all know, fret not.
Tell them they're to fight like fiends
Till victory's our lot.'

The pirate nods and bows and flees,
And Mikhail Reveltor
With swift Elven softness
Binds the crew to their beds as they snore.
Next, casual as they please,
The two ascend to the main deck
And climb the rigging to the nest
And find a man and break his neck.

The body lands with a red thump,
First blood goes to the pirates.
'At them my lads and lasses!
Cut down these skulking hen-hearts!'
A roar sounds across the deck
And spreads throughout the ship.
From nowhere comes this mad attack
On those whose vigilance slipped.

Those who slept wake up tied up
And not a one breaks free.
Those awake are caught off guard
And face a butchery.
Mikhail wastes no time but flies
Back down to join the fray.
By his hat he marks the Captain
And him resolves to slay.

But then his eyes must widen
To a surprising sight.
For his own sword the Captain holds,
The Elf-wrought hilt gripped tight.
The sword he stole is clumsy,
Oversized and weak,
But it would serve him just this once,

The Captain's end to seek.

He leaps up the steep staircase
And calls a challenge out.
The Captain turns and scowls and then
A haughty voice does shout:
'We should have killed you back at home,
Your crimes deserve no less.
But here and now I'll make an end,
If you'll not submit to arrest.'

Mikhail spins his sword and says
With cold, impatient voice:
'You should have left me well alone
But now you've made your choice.
I never did the murdering
Which the courts ruled I had done,
Yet here we are and now I swear
That I will spare no one.'

The Captain fights with practised grace,
He has a fencer's skill.
The Elven blade well suits his form
But Mikhail fights to kill.
He cuts the man from balls to beak
And looses foulsome gore.
The Captain's feathered hat falls free
And rolls off overboard.

No sooner has this deed been done
Than a howl comes from behind.
He turns and sees an officer,
Too close, rage in his eyes.
A sword is raised to split his head,
There's no time to react.
But sure as shot, his foe falls dead,
A bolt stuck in his back.

'Now we're even!' Comes the call
From halfway up the mast.
Esmerelda waves her crossbow,
Mikhail bows and laughs.
The ship is theirs in short order,
The crew who fought are slain.
The Ebony Emerald is steered
By pirate hands again.

The rogues and Captain find they've won
Fine store of food and weapons,
And prisoners whose luckless fates
It's best to not dwell upon.
Mikhail is surprised once more

When searching the Captain's doublet,
Beneath which sits the jewel he stole,
Profaned by blood and sweat.

This had to be another piece
Of the recent mystery;
There had to be some reason more
For these strange days at sea,
But now was not the time to dwell,
This was a happy day,
And as a guest he passes three more
Till at last a port is made.

Esmerelda bids him fond farewell
Before he disembarks,
And longingly she kisses him,
A sight which all must mark.
The hairpin which he asked for
To break free from his chains,
She gives him for a keepsake,
and swears they'll meet again.

'The stories speak the truth of you
Mikhail Reveltor,
But now, alas, it's time you left
To inspire yet more.
The worst and best of thieves you are,
But merely best of friends.
Remember the 'Emerald's Captain
Wherever your path wends.'