

The Maidens

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EXT. BOOKSHOP. HIGH STREET. SHROPSHIRE -- DAY

A well dressed, bookish looking older man goes into a second hand book shop. The shop front reads "Tales Bookshop" and in smaller letters "Proprietor - Bob Taylor. Established 1956"

The man is wearing an overcoat and scarf as it is a blustery day. He walks to the door. We see a cobweb in the top right window of the shop. Just as we hear the shop bell ring the web vibrates as if a fly has landed on it and a big, black spider emerges briefly on to the web before scuttling off out of sight.

CUT TO:

INT. BOOKSHOP. HIGH STREET. SHROPSHIRE -- DAY

The man comes into the shop. There are all sorts of books stacked any which way and the aisles between the shelves are very narrow. The shop is very maze like, deep, wide and cavernous with several aisles running at right angles to the window and others running off them the other way to form junctions and little dead ends and cubbies. It has obviously just grown organically over the years.

There is no one at the desk at the front. He hears someone moving about at the back of the shop.

SMITH

Hello. Anyone there!

He looks down one of the aisles and just catches the trail of a woman's dress as it disappears behind some shelves.

VIOLET (O.S.)

(from a distance, muted)

Be with you in a minute love.

The man looks up at a shelf of books and begins browsing casually. As he moves around to the next aisle he spots a book lying on the floor. It is a hardback Life of St. Francis of Assisi. He picks it up and has a very brief flick through it. He goes back to the first aisle and looks to the back of the shop where the voice seems to have come from. There is nothing to be seen.

SMITH

Is Bob about?

Seconds later he hears some quick foot steps and the voice suddenly comes from away on the other side of the shop. He seems a little puzzled by this.

(CONTINUED)

VIOLET (O.S.)

Not today dear. He's had to go home to get ready. He's got a funeral to go to this afternoon.

The man holds on to the book putting it under his arm as if he is going to buy it. He continues to browse the shelves.

SMITH

(Nonchalantly)

Oh. I see...no one close I hope.

VIOLET (O.S.)

(from back)

Close enough I think sir.

SMITH

He telephoned me yesterday. Didn't say anything about a funeral.

VIOLET (O.S.)

(again from a different position)

It was sudden. He only just found out. Were you after anything in particular, darling?

Smith puts the paperback back on the shelf.

SMITH

Well I'm a collector. I'm particularly interested in antiquarian books, First Editions, that kind of thing. Bob usually lets me have a first look at any new stock.

There is a noise from the other side of shop as if something heavy is being dragged across the floor.

Smith looks down the aisle - very slightly concerned. He pops his head around where a row bisects an aisle. Where the noise seemed to have come from is a dead end.

VIOLET (O.S.)

There's some new stuff just come in. Its right at the back dear...next aisle.

The man walks down deeper into the shop. Further inside it is darker.

(CONTINUED)

VIOLET

Right there next to you!

It is obvious that though he cannot see her - she can see him. He looks a little perplexed.

VIOLET (cont'd)

Came from an old stately home.
Entire library was sold up.

SMITH

Really!

He turns to the books. Enthusiastically - anticipating some old treasures, a bargain or two.

VIOLET (O.S.)

Family died out. All the menfolk.
No heirs.

He looks up and down the stacks of books. They have been stacked flat on a table prior to being priced and put on the shelves. They are very old and dusty. One book catches his eye.

VIOLET

Locals reckoned it was some kind of
curse.

SMITH

(Dismissively to himself)
Curse?

VIOLET (O.S.)

(whispering but very close
behind him)
Don't you believe in such things
sir? Curses and the like?

He jumps a little and turns and looks through the books on the shelves. He has a letter box view of a woman's eyes looking at him intently through the books.

SMITH

(shaken, flustered)
No... I...just superstition!

He turns back to the pile of books. He hears steps going away.

VIOLET (O.S.)

(in distance)

(MORE)

(CONTINUED)

VIOLET (O.S.) (cont'd)
Goes back to the time of the
Normans. William the Conqueror.
Some ancestor of theirs.

SMITH
(More interested)
I see.

VIOLET (O.S.)
Chap called Eadric. Out on patrol
one day. Welsh were a bit
rebellious at the time! Nothing new
there!

She gives a little giggle.

VIOLET
Stumbles across all these girls
dancing.

He reaches out and picks one up. He blows some dust off it.
The cover reads "Shropshire Folk Tales" from "The Terrific
Tales" series. The man opens the book randomly somewhere in
the middle.

There is a chapter page with an illustration of maidens
dancing in a circle as if around a maypole. Though you cant
see a maypole. The man is a little startled that he has
opened the book at just such a scene as she is describing.

VIOLET (cont'd)
Naked they were according to
some...!

He reacts a little surprised and then flushes a little with
embarrassment.

VIOLET (cont'd)
Ooh! No offence sir! Didn't mean to
embarrass you.

He looks around another nearby corner. Hears footsteps but
still can't see her. He looks down into the book. As he does
so the illustration in the book becomes alive and we are
drawn down into the world of the illustration.

CUT TO:

EXT. MAIDEN DANCING AROUND IN A CIRCLE -- AFTERNOON. SUNNY

There are seven maidens each clad in clothes representing each colour of the rainbow - dancing in a circle. As the camera rises it is gradually revealed that they are dancing around an ancient and slightly ominous standing stone.

We can see and hear that they are singing something but it is difficult to make out. A Robin very briefly lands on the tip of the standing stone. It whistles and then wiggles its head and tail feathers in the jerky fashion that Robins do as if expressing disapproval. It then flies off.

CUT TO:

EXT. EADRIC RIDING ALONG WITH HIS BAND OF MEN -- AFTERNOON

Eadric and his men are riding along as if on a mission. They wear chain mail and are armed. Eadric is tall and Lord-like with a droopy moustache. He carries a shield with a red English cross on it. His squire is seen riding alongside him pointing something out.

CUT TO:

INT. BOOKSHOP. HIGH STREET. SHROPSHIRE -- DAY

Violet continues to tell the tale.

We cut to the man's face as light from the scene is reflected into his face.

SMITH

How fascinating!

VIOLET (V.O.)

They were all very beautiful but one more so than all the others.

CUT TO:

EXT. MAIDENS AT CIRCLE -- AFTERNOON

Eadric is seen walking towards the most beautiful of the women cautiously with his hand on the hilt of his sword.

Some of his men dismount and start to follow him with lecherous looks on their faces. He notices the concern on the woman's face and turns. He signals to his men to hold back. They stop and wait for him. The squire is seen holding Eadric's horse. The woman's sisters huddle together - clearly frightened - a few steps behind her.

CUT TO:

EXT. MAIDENS AT CIRCLE -- AFTERNOON

Eadric is seen in animated conversation with the most beautiful one. She nods in the negative. He looks angry. He signals to his men and begins to walk away. They draw their swords and start to move towards them.

The woman chases after Eadric, grabs his hand and drops to her knees imploringly. They talk again. She then nods in assent as if she has agreed to something under duress. He strokes her cheek. She turns her face away. He then signals to his men to stop.

He then takes her by the arm and half drags, half leads her away. She looks back distraught but signals for her sisters to stay where they are. One of them breaks ranks but is held by the others.

Her six sisters are seen anguished and crying as she is led further away.

VIOLET (V.O.)

She agreed to go with him and marry him as long as he promised her three things. First not to let her sisters be harmed. Second - to allow her to visit them on that very same day each year. And lastly to never ever reproach her about her sisters.

Eadric and his men are seen galloping away into the distance. The beautiful sister is on the back of Eadric's horse. Weeping she looks back to her sisters.

We see the sisters wailing and crying, some prostrate on the floor, some trying to comfort each other.

VIOLET

(voice-over slightly bitterly,
with emphasis)

She sacrificed herself to save them!

CUT TO:

INT. BOOKSHOP. HIGH STREET. SHROPSHIRE -- DAY

SMITH

What happened in the end?

CUT TO:

EXT. EADRIC'S CASTLE. FLOWER GARDEN. -- DAY

Eadric and his bride are seen walking hand in hand in the garden, laughing like lovers do.

VIOLET (V.O.)
 She learned to love him by all
 accounts. They lived happily for
 years.

INT. EADRIC'S CASTLE. DINING HALL -- NIGHT

VIOLET (V.O.)
 Until one day he did reproach her.
 She was late.

Eadric is seen at his dinner table. It is laid for dinner.
 Her food is there but hasn't been touched.

CUT TO:

INT. EADRIC'S CASTLE. DOORWAY INTO DINING HALL -- NIGHT

VIOLET (V.O.)
 She'd been visiting the sisters on
 that one day she was allowed!

His bride is seen going through the doorway.

CUT TO:

INT. EADRIC'S CASTLE. DINING HALL -- MOMENTS LATER

Eadric is seen now shouting at his bride. She is wearing
 different clothes but they are the same colour as before.
 She vanishes.

VIOLET (V.O.)
 He called the sisters a bunch of
 old witches.

CUT TO:

INT. BACK OF BOOKSHOP. HIGH STREET. SHROPSHIRE -- DAY

You see the hand of a woman snapping her fingers.

VIOLET (O.S.)
 Just like that! Right in front of
 his eyes.

CUT TO:

INT. EADRIC'S CASTLE -- NIGHT

Eadric looks around shocked, amazed.

CUT TO:

INT. EADRIC'S CASTLE. DINING HALL -- LATER

He has clearly been drinking heavily. He finishes his goblet and throws it against the wall. He then curses and pushes the table over. Everything falls on the floor.

VIOLET (V.O.)
Never saw her again.

CUT TO:

EXT. EADRIC IN THE COUNTRYSIDE -

Eadric is seen galloping around with his men - asking people if they have seen her etc..

CUT TO:

INT. BOOKSHOP. HIGH STREET. SHROPSHIRE -- CONTINUOUS

VIOLET (O.S.)
They searched high and low. No
trace.

SMITH
Where did you say all this
happened?

Just as he does this he pricks his finger on a sharp piece of wire sticking out from the book's binding. A tiny drop of blood falls onto the illustration and coloured sparks fly off it in rainbow colours.

He winces. Puzzled. He goes to suck his thumb.

VIOLET (O.S.)
The Forest of Clun. Its up on the
border. Wild part of the country in
those days I'd imagine.

She begins to recite part of an A.E. Houseman poem from A Shropshire Lad

VIOLET
"In valleys of springs of rivers By
Ony and Teem and Clun..."

CUT TO:

EXT. MAIDEN DANCING AROUND IN A CIRCLE -- AFTERNOON

We see the girls dancing contentedly around the circle again.

VIOLET (O.S.)
 (voice-over)
 "The country for easy livers, The
 quietest under the sun..."

You see the girls dancing quicker and quicker around the stone.

CUT TO:

INT. BOOKSHOP. HIGH STREET. SHROPSHIRE -- AFTERNOON

The man starts to recite the next verse as he looks down into the book.

SMITH
 'Tis a long way further than
 Knighton, A quieter place than
 Clun, Where doomsday may thunder
 and lighten.

He looks down into the book and hesitates. Again the light seems to shine into his face. It perceptibly dims a little.

VIOLET (O.S.)
 (with emphasis on the "one")
 And little will it matter to one.

He looks up briefly and shudders slightly as if a chill has gone through him.

VIOLET
 You know it sir!

SMITH
 A Shropshire Lad. A.E. Houseman.

He looks at his thumb. The bleeding hasn't stopped.

CUT TO:

EXT. MAIDEN DANCING AROUND IN A CIRCLE

The maidens all look up suddenly as the sky turns dark and thunderous.

Lightning crackles.

(CONTINUED)

They are suddenly transformed into old hag type witches as the sky begins to rain blood. We see specks of blood landing and then trickling down the standing stone.

The witches dance round faster and faster. We hear manic cackling, demented laughter.

VIOLET (O.S.)

The remaining sisters hated all men because of Eadric's broken promise. Hated that their sister who was foremost among them had gone. Taken from them for ever and ever!

CUT TO:

INT. BOOKSHOP. HIGH STREET. SHROPSHIRE -- AFTERNOON

The light in the shop darkens and becomes quite threatening. The noise from the street is replaced by an eerie silence. You could hear a pin drop. The man is shocked and slams the book closed. He looks scared.

VIOLET (O.S.)

Ha.Ha.Ha.Ha.

You hear the verse again faintly but it is now being chanted by much harsher voices.

CUT TO:

EXT. SIX WITCHES DANCING AROUND STANDING STONE -- NIGHT

The stone is now drenched in blood. There is a full moon. A great black crow is croaking from on top. The witches have blood on their hands and faces. The circle is much tighter now and they are very near to the stone.

WITCH#1

"A long way further than Knighton"

WITCH#2

"A quieter place than Clun"

[PLEASEINSERT\PRERENDERUNICODE{ÃÃ}INTOPREAMBLE]WITCH#3

"Where doomsday may thunder and lighten"

WITCHES ALL

"And little 'twill matter to one."

(CONTINUED)

Shrieking they stop and all throw their hands in the air. -
Lightning comes from their fingers and goes up into the sky
- joining together into one big streak.

CUT TO:

INT. AISLE IN BOOKSHOP. HIGH STREET. SHROPSHIRE

Close up of the man's face. Now clearly frightened. He hears
footsteps. He starts to walk towards where they come from.

He turns a corner and goes into the final aisle to
investigate.

SMITH

(gasps)

Oh my God!

He is shocked to discover the dark outline of a body lying
on the floor. All that's left are things that wouldn't burn
like belt buckles, metal buttons, zips etc. He reaches down
and picks up a pipe. Strings of a gooey substance fall away
as he lifts it.

SMITH (cont'd)

Bob!

He hears footsteps coming towards him from behind and hears
manic laughter. He starts to back away towards the front of
the shop. He looks around and sees that the shelves at the
front are closing in on him. The steps are very near now.

He stumbles backwards. The woman appears - it is Eadric's
lost bride. She has a terrible unworldly look about her. She
flings her arm towards him and lightning comes from her
fingers. There is an almighty crash and a bolt of lightning
comes towards him. He puts up his hands instinctively.

CUT TO:

INT. BOOKSHOP. HIGH STREET. SHROPSHIRE - INSIDE THE CLOSED
SHELVES- MOMENTS LATER

There is smoke. When it clears the shelves have snapped shut
like a set of jaws but Smith is nowhere to be seen.

CUT TO:

INT. ENTRANCE TO BOOKSHOP. HIGH STREET. SHROPSHIRE - OUTSIDE
THE CLOSED SHELVES- CONTINUOUS

There are wisps of smoke coming through the gaps in the shelves. However Smith has managed to get through and reach the door. There are more steps and scratching sounds behind him. He struggles frantically with the catch. The footsteps get closer and closer. A shadow looms over him.

CUT TO:

EXT. BOOKSHOP. HIGH STREET. SHROPSHIRE -- EVENING

The door bursts open and Smith tumbles onto the pavement, falling at the feet of alarmed passer-by.

He struggles to get his breath back. He looks disheveled, his scarf is now hanging off revealing a dog collar. He is a priest.

PASSER BY

Are you all right Padre?

He is helped up by the passer by - a retired, moustached Major type with some sort of blazer with a St. George cross on it. He looks up again at the shop.

SMITH

Yes I think so.

The man reaches down and picks something up.

PASSER BY

Did you drop this?

The man hands him the Life of St. Francis. He looks at it. The back cover is fine. He turns it over. The front cover is all charred and burned around the edges. It falls away at the page he originally opened.

He looks pale. Aghast. He looks to the shop just as a small, nondescript old woman comes to the window. She smiles cryptically and laughs. She turns away inside.

CUT TO:

EXT. BOOKSHOP. HIGH STREET. SHROPSHIRE -- EVENING

A Robin lands on some nearby railings. It whistles.

END