

THE BOOKKEEPER'S DAUGHTER

Mei Tam

Wind whistled and thunder clapped and rain poured,
But the little old bookkeeper was safe in his store.
He paused as he shelved book number five seven three,
Looking out his window at the three girls across the street.

Their sun umbrellas a poor shield against the rain,
Their skirts hiked up high as they dashed across the lane,
They ran arm in arm, laughing despite the weather.
The little old man smiled, *three* birds of a feather.

He watched as they lighted upon the crumbling sidewalk,
Watched as they paused and inspected each shop.
Their hands on their hats to keep them from blowing away,
As they entered his store, the door chimes tinkling "good day."

“Just marvelous, Lucy,” the shortest one wondered out loud.

“Indeed. Quite marvelous,” the tallest allowed.

“Did I not tell you so?” the middle one said proudly.

“Hello, Mr. Bookkeeper, are you here?” she continued quite loudly.

The little old bookkeeper called for them to wait just a smidgen,

While he put number five seven three back with its companions.

He climbed down the ladder that leaned against the shelf,

Brushed off his apron and straightened himself.

A man of more than five and sixty years,

He had little else but a cap to cover the space above his ears.

He wore an old white apron and saucer-round spectacles,

And he was covered in ink from his head to his toes.

His bright blue eyes twinkling, he pushed his specs back into place,

And asked, “how may I help you young ladies today?”

He observed as they wandered off into the shelves,

Each nodding occasionally and talking to herself.

Five and twenty minutes had passed when they gathered at the checkout stand,

Each with a book or two or three in her hands.

“A wonderful collection,” the bookkeeper said to the first,

“A wonderful collection of rhyme and prose and verse.”

“Quite an adventure,” he mused to the second,

“The tale of a knight and his quest to kill a dragon.”

But as Lucy stepped up and handed him her book of choice,

The little old man laughed and said in a decidedly amused voice:

“Are you sure you want this one? It's not a very happy ending you see.”

“Well why ever not?” asked a rather confused Lucy.

“Oh, it is indeed a romance,” he answered, straightening his cap,

“But it is quite different from others, I can assure you of that.”

“You see, the author was a young woman quite like yourself,

Proud and beautiful and spirited, whom a tragedy befell.

In fact, this novel has its own history,

Now where to start, I believe it was eighteen seventy three...”

The Bookkeeper of London was a man old and grey,

Who ran a small shop at the corner of Main.

A man of few words, he was silent and somber,

And cared about little except his books and his daughter.

Beautiful was she, a true English rose,

More beautiful than Aphrodite, so the story goes.

Though lacking in fortune and riches and fame,

She was desired by every man in town, just the same.

Now the Duke of Whydham had a daughter and a son,

The latter a casnova well known by the London *ton*.

He was tall and dark and handsome and charming,

With a smile as evil as it was dashing and disarming.

Rich and manipulative, he was quite the ehcnahter,

Skilled in the art of seductive, witty banter.

Every woman who saw him couldn't help but fall,

Under his intoxicating spell, completely enthralled.

The dear Bookkeeper's daughter fell into his trap,

Entangled in his web, with no way back.

Or out of the spell under which she'd been cast,

He had her wrapped around his finger, her heart held fast.

Oh the ladies, they cationed and counseled and warned,

But completely smitten, she sniffed and she scorned,

The advice they so wisely and willingly gave,

The poor Bookkeeper's daughter dug her own grave.

The moment she saw him outside the bar on St. James,

For better or for worse, she was irrevocably changed.

Her innocent heart, pure as a dove,

Corrupted and murdered by a black, twisted love.

The Duke's son knew well of the power he held,

Of the unwavering ardor he so callously compelled,

But to him the Bookkeeper's daughter was naught but a game,

For her and all his other conquests were one and the same.

She was only a riddle, a new challenge to be won,

Then thrown away once his interests were done.

In fact, he thought amusedly "She's hardly from money,

And her lineage is so terrible, it's laughably funny.

There's nothing more there than a pretty face,

And a pretty visage is rather easy to replace."

So the Duke's wicked son, with intentions cruel and dark,
Set out to win the Bookkeeper's daughter, before he broke her heart.

He courted and wooed and fulfilled her every desire,
A trickster, a fraud, a silver-tongued liar.

He wove her a tale of the future, glittering and bright,
Though he wanted from her nothing but one, immoral night.

The Bookkeeper's daughter, besotted and blind,
Was enamoured completely, heart, soul, and mind.
She thought nothing of the requests he demanded,
No matter how scandalous, vile, or underhanded.

So willingly she followed wherever he led,
Even to her sacrifice, the altar his bed.
She gave without thought the innocence she'd so carefully treasured,
Wasted it for naught but his wanton pleasure.

His prize in hand, his interest now faded,

He left her soon after, heart unfeeling and jaded.

With another conquest now his, he reset his aim,

To another woman, another puzzle, another game.

But the Bookkeeper's daughter, with her heart broke and torn,

With her anger her passion, she vowed and she swore:

“Ne'er again will he do this, ne'er again shall he lie,

Ne'er again shall a woman feel the pain that's now mine.”

Revenge her determination, hatred firm in her breast,

She picked up her pen, and she wrote without rest,

The tale of her destruction by the Duke of Wyndham's son,

She smiled grimly when she finished, quite sure that the *ton*,

Would enjoy the small novel she'd penned for their sakes,

That not another woman would make her mistakes.

She published her work, she prayed in her mourning,

That the ladies of London would heed her warning.

Then the joyous day came, when news reached her ear,

That the Duke of Wyndham's son was ruined, fled and disappeared.

Her novel was a bestseller, and all of London had read,

Of every crime he'd committed, every woman he'd misled.

Now exposed and uncovered, his every shame brought to light,

The Duke's disgraced son fled London in the night.

Rejected and outcast by the power of a pen,

The Duke of Wyndham's son fled, and was never heard from again.

“And that, my dear girls, is the reason why,

This book isn't very happy, though it's a favorite of mine.”

“It is?” Lucy asked, “Well how can that be?”

All in all Mr. Bookkeeper, it sounds rather ghastly.”

“You see, Lucy dear, this book has a moral,
It cautions young men against being immoral.
And well they would do to avoid what they've been warned,
For Hell hath no fury like a woman scorned.”