

T'was Christmas Eve

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FADE IN:

EXT. RUE BELSIDE BRIDGE - EVENING

The sun sets, as light snow falls, over the small stone footbridge that spans the narrow Belside river; crossing it, is a dozen or so joyous families, dressed in early 1900 European winter fashions, heading south towards a small candle lit church.

A wooden road sign located near the footbridge, next to a dozen singing Carollers with lantern in hands, points towards the North; it reads 'Rue Belside'.

A few metres away, to the Western end, near a manual water pump - the towns water supply - stands MARION, dressed in rags, watching the crowd.

Marion, a 25 year old who could pass for 40, searchingly gazes towards the joyous crowd, holding tight her shivering bare arms.

She slowly advances towards the footbridge.

She passes the carollers and tries to smile, as they eye her in disgust.

In the moving crowd, a 30 year old woman, LOUISE, accompanied by her 40 year old husband HENRY and her five year old daughter ELSBETH, looks to Marion.

She stops and points.

LOUISE

Ya filthy wench. T'is Christmas eve. Ain't ya got no decency in front of our young'ns?

The crowd almost comes to a grinding halt and begins to murmur. A lady's voice sings out in disgust "you Jezebel"

The carollers hush, all eyes are on Marion.

Henry grabs hold of Louise's arm and whispers.

HENRY

Don't create a spectacle Louise. Let the poor lass be.

Louise shakes his hold, appears appalled.

LOUISE

Ya support that kinda filth Henry?

Marion looks to them.

A tears rolls down her cheek; without hesitation, she quickly turns and runs towards the fountain, till out of sight.

Elsbeth tugs on Louise's arm, as the crowd recommence their stroll towards the church.

ELSBETH

That lady looks so cold and sad,
ma'am.

LOUISE

(stern)
T'is no lady Elsbeth.

Louise snobbishly lifts her head as she takes a firm hold of Elsbeth's hand.

She tugs her along, hurriedly pacing towards the church.

Henry quickly glances back then follows without a word.

Elsbeth looks back; there, by the fountain, Marion has returned, faintly visible in the dark.

Marion lightly waves, Elsbeth gently smiles as she continues being led by Louise, who is non the wiser.

The crowd enters the church; its interior warmly lit by candle light as the organ plays.

FADE TO BLACK.

EXT. TOWN WATER PUMP - EVENING - MOMENTS LATER

Marion sits by the fountain shivering.

She looks towards the closed church doors, as she holds unto a small locket - hanging from a chain, that's placed around her neck.

She looks to the pendant then gently rubs it; a tear rolls down her face.

She looks up towards the church then back to the locket.

FADE TO BLACK.

INT. MARION'S ROOM - NIGHT - 5 YEARS PRIOR

The room, lit by a few candles, reveals Marion in tears, sitting on an old bed, a bundled baby in arm; Henry stands near her.

Marion stands and slowly hands Henry the baby.

HENRY

She'll be well looked after
Marion. No one will ever know.
We'll treat her like our own. I
promise.

Marion nods as she caresses the baby's face then looks
deeply into Henry's eyes.

MARION

That's our little daughter Henry.

Henry lovingly caresses Marion's cheek.

HENRY

I know. But that's our secret.
Louise shall never know. I told
her I was picking up a child that
had just lost its mother.

MARION

Can I ever see her again?

HENRY

No. No-one must ever know about
us.

Henry places his hand in his pocket and pulls out a locket
on a chain. He hands it to Marion.

HENRY (CONT'D)

I want you to have this Marion.
It was my mothers.

MARION

Why?

HENRY

A gift from the heart. It's
Christmas eve.

Marion drops her head in tears; gathers her hands to her
face, locket in palm.

She sobs and utters in a hurt but gentle manner.

MARION

Go. Go now. Before I change my
mind.

Henry, silent, sadly turns and walks to the wooden door. He
opens it.

Marion looks up, as Henry quietly exits. He closes the
door.

Marion throws herself on the bed in tears.

END FLASHBACK

EXT. RUE BELSIDE BRIDGE - EVENING - PRESENT

Marion rubs the locket and gently guides it back towards her heart as she looks to the church once more.

Rue Belside appears bare as the villagers, inside the church, sing in choir.

Marion stands and walks towards the footbridge, shivering.

The fresh snow, reveals only her footprints.

She reaches the bridge's stone railing, her eyes hypnotised by the moon lit ripples forming on the water's surface.

She glances towards the church then up to the moon.

She steps onto the one foot thick stone wall and opens her arms wide.

MARION

Virgin Mary. Could you carry me?
Close to your bosom and in your
loving arms. Could you carry me?
To the gates of Eternity.

The moon appears to glow brighter. Marion smiles and looks towards the church.

MARION (CONT'D)

Take care of my little girl
Henry. She was "my" Christmas
gift, to you.

She takes hold of her pendant and holds it tight.

A tear rolls down her cheek as she looks to the rippling water. She closes her eyes for an instant, smiles and leans forward.

Her body, as if in slow motion, gently falls then submerges into the river, until it disappears.

Marion's footprints are now barely visible as the snow keeps falling; the church vibrates with villagers' Christmas cheers.

FADE OUT.