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Murder of Maria Martin

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or: Confession and Execution of William Corder The Murderer of Maria Marten

If you'll meet me at the Red Barn
As sure as I have life
I will take you to Ipswich town
And there make you my wife

This lad went home and fetched his gun
His pickaxe and his spade
He went unto the Red Barn
And there he dug her grave

Come all you thoughtless young men
A warning take by me
To think upon my unhappy fate
To be hanged upon a tree

My name is William Corder
To you I do declare
I courted Maria Marten
Both beautiful and fair

I promised I would marry her
Upon a certain day
Instead of that I was resolved
To take her life away

I went unto her father's house
The eighteenth day of May
And said my dear Maria
We will fix a wedding day

With her heart so light she thought no harm
To meet me she did go
I murdered her all in the barn
And laid her body down

After my horrid deed was done
She laid there in her gore
Her bleeding mangled body
Lay beneath the Red Barn floor

Now all things being silent
Her spirit could not rest
She appeared upon her mother
Consult her at her breast

For many a long months or more
Her mind was sore depressed
No more at night nor at day
Could she take any rest

Her mother's mind being sore disturbed
She dreamed a dream she saw
Her daughter she lay murdered
Beneath the Red Barn floor

She sent the father to the Barn
Where he the ground did thrust
And there he found his daughter
Lay mingling with the dust

My trial was hard, I could not stand
Most horrible was the sight
When her dear bones was brought to prove
Which pierced my heart wide

Her ancient father standing by
Likewise his loving wife
And in her grief her hair she tore
She scarcely could be tide

Adieu adieu, my loving friends,
My glass is almost run
On monday next will be my last
When I am to be hung

So all young men who do pass
With pity look on me
For murdering of that young girl
I was hung upon a tree

recorded by Shirley Collins & The Albion Country Band on "No Roses" (1971)

This murder ballad was first printed on a broadside by James Catnach in 1828 and he sold 1116000 copies. Above are all 16 verses of the broadside as recorded by Collins, but I'm not sure about the order, because the third verse seems to be the introductory verse. Only three of the verses passed into oral tradition (verses 1, 2 and 7) and were collected from Joseph Taylor of Lincolnshire in 1908. He sung them to the tune of "Dives And

Lazarus", one of the great English tunes. The same tune is used for "Come All Ye Faithful Christians", "Brigg Fair" and most famously for "Star Of The County Down". Collins claims to use this tune too, but I can't hear that.

This street ballad is remarkably similar to the American ballads "Pretty Polly" and "Omie Wise".

MJ