

# THE CENTREFOLD STORY

## THE GREEN LADY *In several versions.*

I mentioned this last time, very briefly, in a review of Hugh Lupton's *Norfolk Folk Tales* and it seems to have aroused interest so I thought I'd expand on it. Although it doesn't seem to be a widely known story now it must have been at one time—around 1900? Hugh has a version from that county. Helen East has 'a very rare London' version in her book and I have very short fragments in both *Derbyshire and Nottinghamshire Folk Tales*. (*The Lady Who Lived in a Glass House* and *The Little Watercress Girl*.) There is a song which seems integral to the story but I knew the song in its own right many years before I came across the story. So here are some versions to compare with those in the books:

Long term subscriber John Pole sent me this one which is from Katharine M. Briggs' *A Dictionary of British Folk-Tales*. He also sent the song version which tells the story in verse using the song within the story as a starting point.

Once upon a time there was a poor old man who had three daughters, and the eldest said: "Father, give me a cake and a bottle of water that I may go to seek my fortune."

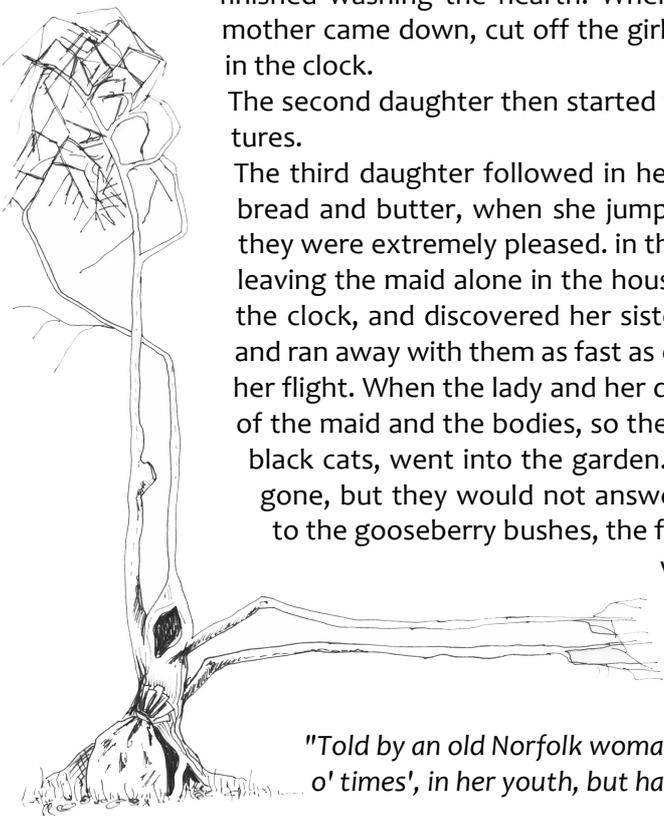
Her father gave her a cake and bottle of water; and when she had gone a little way she met a little old man who asked her where she was going. She replied: "To seek service." "Oh," said he, "give me your cake and bottle of water, and go and knock at the house with the green door, and there you'll find your fortune" So she knocked at the door and a lady opened it, and asked her what she wanted. She told her, and the lady asked her what she could do. She made a doeb and said: "I can bake and I can brew, and I can make an Irish stew." So the lady said she would take her, but she must never look up the chimney or into the clock. The next morning the lady's daughter rode downstairs on a black cat and asked her to cut some bread and butter. The girl said she would as soon as she had finished washing the hearth. Whereupon the young lady ran up in a rage, and her mother came down, cut off the girl's head, stuck it up the chimney, and put her body in the clock.

The second daughter then started to seek her fortune, and precisely the same adventures.

The third daughter followed in her sisters' footsteps until the young lady asked for bread and butter, when she jumped up and cut it for her immediately, whereupon they were extremely pleased. In the afternoon they went for a ride on the black cats, leaving the maid alone in the house. She immediately looked up the chimney, and in the clock, and discovered her sisters' heads and bodies. She took them in her arms and ran away with them as fast as ever she could, calling on the berry-bushes to cover her flight. When the lady and her daughter returned, they were very angry at the loss of the maid and the bodies, so they took choppers in their hands, and, still riding the black cats, went into the garden. They asked all the bushes which way the girl had gone, but they would not answer, so they chopped them down. When they came to the gooseberry bushes, the first one said: "This way, that way, and I don't know which way." But the other said: "She went straight on across the river."

So they rode on into the river and were drowned.

"Told by an old Norfolk woman, 95 years of age, who had heard the tale told 'score o' times', in her youth, but had never seen it in print. She died in 1895, aged 96."



## THE GREEN LADIES (2)

By John Pole ©1978

1. I'm off to find me fortune, father,  
Like Lucy and Phoebe done before me.  
Have you got a bit of bread and a bottle of wa-  
ter  
For me to take on my long journey?

2. Here, take your loaf and your bottle of water  
Like I give both your sisters, Dinah..  
First Lucy left, then Phoebe followed –  
Never heard word nor news from either.

3. Fare you well, Dinah. Fare you well, father..  
I'll seek service with some gentry.  
She walked a little way, then late that day  
She met an old traveller, cold and hungry.

4. He stepped up and said: Where you going,  
girl?  
Seeking service, she give answer.  
I'll tell you where to find your fortune  
For a crust of bread and a sup of cold water.

5. Here, take me bread and me bottle of water –  
Where shall I find me fortune, tell me?  
Knock at the house with the green door, girl,  
With the clock that's stopped and the high dark  
chimney.

6. Knock-knock-knock - the green door opened,  
A tall green lady come to answer..  
Do you need any help in the house now, missis?  
Have you got a maid? she asked her.

7. What can you do? - Why, bake and brew,  
Make a stew, whatever you bid me..  
You'll do, says she, but don't you never  
Look in that clock nor up that chimney.

8. She cooked and cleaned and she fetched and  
carried,  
She baked their bread and she drew their water,  
And away they rode on great black cats,  
The green lady and her green daughter.

9. And she looked in the long-case clock and  
found  
Two headless women's bodies  
And up the chimney, black with blood,

Both Lucy's head and Phoebe's...

10. Fast as ever she could run  
She up with her sisters' heads and bodies  
Out the house and down the garden  
Crying: Hide me! to the berry-bushes.

11. Home come them two green ladies,  
Saw blood by the clock and soot by the chim-  
ney:  
Come you here, Dinah, where are you hiding?  
Nobody heard, for the house stood empty.

12. Down them steps on two black cats  
Rode them two green ladies,  
Axes shining on their shoulders,  
Anger in their faces.

13. Where's that girl gone? The berry-bushes  
wouldn't say..  
They chopped and chopped – one bush give a  
quiver:  
That way, this way, I don't know which way!  
The next said: Straight across the river!

14. Straight down to the river they rode,  
The green lady and her green daughter..  
They stopped, they stumbled, in they tumbled,  
Drifted and drowned in the swift brown water.

15. Dinah saw 'em drown, then she laid down  
The heads and the bodies of her dead sisters..  
Their dead eyes began to open,  
Their dead lips began to whisper...

16. O feed our mouths with the bread of love,  
For we have had nothing but the crust of pain,  
Wash our wounds with the water of life  
And we'll be healed and whole again!

17. Where will I get them? Dinah wondered,  
When who stepped up but the poor old travel-  
ler,  
In one hand the loaf she'd given him,  
In the other her bottle of sweet well water.

18. You and your sisters all met me, girl,  
But you give me all that you had on you..  
There's love in the loaf and life in the water  
So take you back what I got from you!

Note over—————>

## THE GREEN LADY In several versions (3).

### THE MAID'S LAMENT

I have mentioned several times before Margery 'Mum' Johnstone who I knew when I lived in Bedfordshire back in the late 1970s/80s. She was born in 1901, one of twins, and daughter of a farm labourer who moved from farm to farm very, very frequently. When she was a small child she spent a lot of time with her granny who loved to sing whilst she did the housework, and little Margery, often hiding under the table, would listen and learn. She sang me half a dozen songs she'd learned in this way. (If you'd like to hear her singing and talking about May Day pre World War 1 go to <http://www.youtube.com/watch?v=xZjJSqjTo6w&feature=related> )

This is her version of the song from the Green Lady story. Whether it was a song everyone knew which was incorporated into the story, or whether it was taken out of the story, I don't know.

I can bake and I can brew  
I can cook an Irish stew  
Wash a shirt and iron it too  
But I must go out on Sundays.

Six days I work with all my might  
To keep the pots and kettles bright  
And put the cobwebs out of sight  
But I must go out on Sundays.

I have a young man in the town  
Some day we hope to settle down  
Then I shall have a nice new gown  
When we go out on Sundays.

*This is the only picture of 'Mum' I can find. Somewhere I have one of her in the costume she wore for public appearances, particularly May Day, but I just cannot find it. In those days you didn't take so many photos. In the same way I have no video. I took her up to Norwich on one occasion to do a TV programme but it went out live and we didn't know anyone with a video machine so we never saw it!*



*Note re the song, previous page:*

*John says: I made a song out of it and occasionally sing it, as does Donal Maguire, who has made his own tune to it, though I have one of my own. It's pretty long, and once or twice I've told the story and used verses from my song here and there as I went along.*