

The Green Mist

(Time – 3:07)

In the fens and marshlands of Eastern England, folk held onto the old ways to keep bad luck at bay. During the winter nothing grew so the spirits had nothing but evil to do. During the short dark days and long dark nights, clammy fingers scratched at the windows and doors. The people inside spoke spells, whose meanings had been forgotten, in the hope that these chants would keep the spirits away. Every morning at dawn they would sprinkle salt and bread, hoping that the green mist would come – because with the green mist came the Spring, and the Spring meant the retreat of the darkness.

A family had done what could be done yet, for all that, one winter heavy sorrow was on them. Their daughter, the prettiest lass in the village, withered and shrivelled. Now she could barely stand. She asked for her bed to be moved to the window. She watched the silent world outside and said to her mother, ‘If I can just outlive the winter, perhaps the green mist would make me straight and strong again, like the trees and the flowers and the corn in the fields.’

Down in the village, a young lad had always had a corner for her. He’d see her at market. When she became weak and rarely ventured from her cottage, he even went to church in the hope of glimpsing her. Time passed; the green mist didn’t come. She grew more gaunt and more weak. One day she said to her mother, ‘If I could live as long as those cowslips that grow by the door, I swear I’d be content.’

‘Shh,’ said her mother, ‘The spirits might be listening.’

The very next morning, the green mist came and the girl rallied. She sat in the sun and laughed with joy. She grew stronger and prettier whenever the sun shone, though a cold day would make her white and weak. When the cowslips flowered, she grew so beautiful they were almost afraid of her.

The young man was filled with relief. ‘What a blessing,’ he said to himself. ‘While she is well, I’d best go to her, tell her my feelings.’ So he walked to her house. He stopped outside the door, shifting from foot to foot. If only he had something to give her.

There – those flowers. In the cottage, they heard a knock. She opened the door. There stood the young man, the cowslips in his hand. She looked at them, gave a cry and fainted. As the flowers wilted, so did she. She was gone within a week.