



# *Tattersails*

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Historical, Magic

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There was once an old woman who had no children of her own. So, she said to herself:

“I will stitch myself a daughter from the odds and ends in my workbasket. Then I will have someone to love and care for.”

So, she stitched the child all of patchwork, with wool for hair and buttons for eyes. When she was made, the old woman kissed her to life, and she stood up and danced in her raggle-taggle dress.

The old woman sang to her, and told tales to her, and tucked her into a shoebox at night. They loved each other dearly, and the old woman was overjoyed.

But when springtime came around, the patchwork child said:

“I would go to seek our fortune. Make me a ship with sails, that I may go forth into the world.”

Though the old woman begged and pleaded, the patchwork child insisted:

“It will only be for a while. Then I will return to you.”

So, the old woman stitched her child a ship from the odds and ends in her workbasket. Its hull was of leather, its ropes of fine cord. And its sails were as the dress of the child herself: lace and muslin and cotton and chintz, with a red ribbon flying from the topmast.

She carried the ship down to the seashore, and the child sailed away with the tide. And wherever she went, sailors remarked upon the little ship with its raggle-taggle sail, and the raggle-taggle child who piloted it. So,

the patchwork child came to be known as Tattersails.

She sailed to Istanbul on the blue Bosphorus, where stands the great mosque-church of Holy Wisdom. There, among the hammams and the souks, she met a woman of Damascus, whose earrings and necklaces jingled with medallions.

“Take me with you,” she said to Tattersails. “I have studied medicine and the brewing of potions. But here, it is forbidden for a woman to be a doctor. Take me to India, for there they have universities where I might study.”

So, Tattersails and the woman of Damascus sailed to Bombay of the seven islands, with its cave temples and trading outposts. There, among the colonial monuments and bustling streets, they met a woman of Seranysore, whose sari was green and whose hair was neatly parted.

“Take me with you,” she said to Tattersails. “I have studied anatomy and the circulation of the blood. But here, it is forbidden for a woman to be a doctor. Take me to Japan, for there they have universities where I might study.”

So, Tattersails and the women of Damascus and Seranysore sailed to Tokyo, seat of the shoguns in the shadow of Mount Fuji. There, among the sake shops and tea gardens, they met a woman native to that city, wearing a dark kimono with a wide sash.

“Take me with you,” she said to Tattersails. “I have studied surgery and the setting of bones. But here, it is forbidden for a woman to be a doctor.”

“But where can we go?” said the woman of Seranysore. “I thought we would be recognised in Japan.”

“And I thought we would be recognised in India,” said the woman of Damascus.

Then Tattersails thought of her mother, who had stitched a daughter from odds and ends, and kissed her to life.

“You shall come home with me,” she said. “And meet a good woman who taught me all I know.”

But in her daughter’s absence, the old woman had become dull, then despairing. Finally, her health had failed her altogether, so that when Tattersails arrived home, her mother was lying in bed, grievously ill.

Straight away, the three doctors got to work. The woman of Seranysore searched the old woman’s body, and

examined her blood. The woman of Tokyo operated on her vital organs. And the woman of Damascus administered healing medicines. Within a week, the old woman's health was restored, and she grew stronger every day. News of the three doctors spread, and soon people throughout the district, and then the entire country, sought their wisdom and praised their skill. Before a year was out, their fame was such that they could return to their native lands, each becoming the first officially recognised female doctor among their people.

As for Tattersails, she stayed beside her mother for the rest of that good woman's life. And when the time finally came to lay her to rest, Tattersails took to her ship once more, sailing here and there in search of those she might aid.

For all I know, she is sailing still.

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