

"Tatters and Tosh": a Children's Story

(By Annie Margaret Pike)

CHAPTER I.

"Tatters" and the Bad Cold.

If you are fond of asking questions, the first one you will ask when you read the name of this chapter is "Who was Tatters?"

But of course you are. I know I am.

Well, the answer is that Tatters was Tosh's dearly loved dog.

He had cream-colored hair: not altogether and only cream, but cream-coloured with an ish tacked on at the end of it, for fifty-one or so of the longest hairs were white, and a few were more than a little yellow.

It was long hair and locks of it hung over his eyes.

His eyes were lovely, that is they were full of love, and he never by any chance lost his temper, or snapped at Tosh, although I am very much afraid that sometimes, not very often of course, but sometimes, Tosh was cross to Tatters.

There was a strict rule in Tosh's home that neither Tatters nor Selina the cat might lie on any of the beds so you'll be surprised to hear that the tales I am going to tell you were first told by Tosh to Tatters while Tatters was lying comfortably curled up on the foot of Tosh's bed.

It happened in this way.

Tosh had as he told me, "a frightfully bad cold" and had to stay in bed for three whole days. Jennie and Malcolm and Bruce were at school almost all day, and their mother was desperately busy canning fruit.

She had bought some cases of peaches and apricots, which we all know must be canned quickly or they will spoil, and Mr. Ballantyne was at the office in the city from morning till evening, so there was no one left to sit with Tosh and amuse him.

Reading, as an amusement, was no use to Tosh, for even if he could have read a book, which he could not without spelling all the long words aloud, he had been told to keep his arms covered.

This being so, he begged to have Tatters for this once, and his mother agreed.

She knew it wasn't exactly Tosh's fault that he had caught such "a frightfully bad cold" at that particularly inconvenient time.

People with "frightfully bad colds" have a funny way of talking.

You have heard them say doze for nose and things like that I expect, but when Tosh told these recollections of his over again to me, when I was staying awhile at his home, and had "a frightfully bad cold" myself, he spoke quite clearly, for of course he was quite well again by that time.

I will tell you in the next chapter where and how he caught his cold, and I will tell you his real names now, for I am sure you are beginning to want to know them.

Tosh was entered on the school register as James MacIntosh Ballantyne, but no one dreamed of calling him all that at once.

At the time he had this "frightfully bad cold" he had been living for nearly a year in Vancouver.

He was born in Edinburgh, where he had lived for all and a few months more than his six years; from which you will understand, if you can do simple addition sums, that Tosh was seven years old when he told these stories in a hoarse voice to Tatters his dearly loved dog.

CHAPTER II.

How Tosh Caught the Bad Cold

I promised to tell you how and where Tosh caught his cold.

He was the first person I ever heard of to do it just in the way he did, and he only did it that way once.

His mother, as I said before, was very busy that September canning large quantities of fruit. She worked with an oil cooking-stove in the cool basement, near the side window; and that explains why it was that she did not observe which way Tosh went, when he left the yard at the back of the house, where he was playing when she began pitting the fruit, after Jennie and Malcolm and Bruce went to afternoon school.

The Summer had been hot and dusty and the streets had to be sprinkled diligently; but the evening before Tosh caught his cold the man who drove the big yellow water-wagon in that neighbourhood left it in the lane near the Ballantyne home, telling Malcolm, who happened to be passing, that it was too late to go down to the city yards with it.

Well, rain came in the night unexpectedly, and fell for a few hours in the morning too; and that's why the man didn't come again until the evening.

The small square lid in the middle of the top of the huge barrel-shaped sprinkler had been left open by some big boys, or perhaps it was not boys, but girls; for all the children from the nearby houses had taken turns at a climbing game before running along to school; and of course when a lid can be opened everybody likes to open it to see what it covers.

The wagon was empty when the man left it, but some rain water was there now because of the open lid, and the inside was a damp place as you may suppose.

Tosh had been excused from school that day because he had a sore hand.

Nobody was near, so he climbed up on the driver's seat.

He was slow about it on account of his sore hand, but once there he thought he was very comfortable.

There are several things to press with your feet, things connected with the machinery of the wagon. They reminded Tosh a little, just a very little of the pedals of the piano. But whatever fun there may be in pressing the pedals of a piano and hearing the music grow loud or die down, you soon get tired of pressing the things on a water-wagon where there is no sound either to rise or fall, and Tosh found this out before long.

Sitting still and doing nothing was not to his taste, so he scrambled back on the sprinkler itself and peered down into its dark depths.

As his eyes grew accustomed to the dimness, the longer he looked, the less deep it seemed, so he swung himself through the opening and dropped with a little splash into the inside.

The rain-water that had collected there did not trouble him at all at first, and he forgot that it is much easier to drop down than it is to climb up, especially when one of your hands is sore.

He groped about for awhile making believe he had discovered a cave, but after all a cave, even if you are the discoverer of it yourself, is only interesting for a short time unless there are side passages, or at least rocks with possible smugglers hiding behind them, and a rising tide that works its way up the shore with little lapping noises that you can hardly hear.

There were none of these things in the water-wagon.

Tosh soon felt chilly, for though it was, as you know, the month of September, there had been rain unexpectedly in the night, and no sunshine that morning.

"I'll get out and run home now," thought Tosh.