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The Grammarian's Five Daughters

By Eleanor Arnason

29 March 2004

Once there was a grammarian who lived in a great city that no longer exists, so we don't have to name it. Although she was learned and industrious and had a house full of books, she did not prosper. To make the situation worse, she had five daughters. Her husband, a diligent scholar with no head for business, died soon after the fifth daughter was born, and the grammarian had to raise them alone. It was a struggle, but she managed to give each an adequate education, though a dowry -- essential in the grammarian's culture -- was impossible. There was no way for her daughters to marry. They would become old maids, eking (their mother thought) a miserable living as scribes in the city market. The grammarian fretted and worried, until the oldest daughter was fifteen years old.

Then the girl came to her mother and said, "You can't possibly support me, along with my sisters. Give me what you can, and I'll go out and seek my fortune. No matter what happens, you'll have one less mouth to feed."

The mother thought for a while, then produced a bag. "In here are nouns, which I consider the solid core and treasure of language. I give them to you because you're the oldest. Take them and do what you can with them."

The oldest daughter thanked her mother and kissed her sisters and trudged away, the bag of nouns on her back.

Time passed. She traveled as best she could, until she came to a country full of mist. Everything was shadowy and uncertain. The oldest daughter blundered along, never knowing exactly where she was, till she came to a place full of shadows that reminded her of houses.

A thin, distant voice cried out, "Oyez. The king of this land will give his son or daughter to whoever can dispel the mist."

The oldest daughter thought a while, then opened her bag. Out came the nouns, sharp and definite. Sky leaned up and filled the grayness overhead.

[Before Paphos](#)

by Loretta Casteen

8 January 2007

It starts again. The baby begins to cough and choke.

[Locked Doors](#)

by Stephanie Burgis

1 January 2007

You can never let anyone suspect, his mother told him. That was the first rule she taught him, and the last, before she left him here alone with It.

[Heroic Measures](#)

by Matthew Johnson

18 December 2006

Pale as he was, it was hard to believe he would never rise from this bed. Even in the darkest times, she had never really feared for him; he had always been strong, so strong.

[Love Among the Talus](#)

by Elizabeth Bear

11 December 2006

Nilufer raised her eyes to his. It was not what women did to men, but she was a princess, and he was only a bandit. "I want to be a Witch," she said. "A Witch and not a Queen. I wish to be not loved, but wise. Tell your bandit lord, if he can give me that, I might accept his gift."

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