

Diary of a Mountie - Part the First "Sergeant Preston, your government needs you..."

By

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(based on COTY)

Day One- Saturday, August 8, 1936
Vancouver, British Columbia

Well, here I am. As I write these words I am in the study of a small house just inside the Vancouver city limits, on the first day of my first real vacation in nearly thirteen years. I don't know if you can really call a day like this part of a vacation, though. I spent most of it on the train. The rest- well, I had to spend that unpacking, and convincing Yukon Prince that the property was safe. It took him several circuits of the yard and two more of the house before he was satisfied that nothing smelled out of the ordinary. I'm not surprised, really. The property owner said the last renter left in a hurry. You hear a lot of stories about big cities like this. It wouldn't surprise me in the least if the last person to rent the premises had stashed some ill-gotten gains or other contraband in the walls, intending to return for it after the coast was clear. Gold dust, counterfeit money, or other things of that nature- why, all kinds of things might pass through a place like this!

Mind you, that's not the case here. I searched myself, just in case there was something Prince didn't smell. There's nothing here but the house and the dog run (which Prince shows no interest in- can't blame him- must get some tools and make him a proper kennel as long as we're here). I'll manage, I suppose, but that kind of thinking isn't something you can put on and take off like a hat. Vacation or no.

Day Two- Sunday, August 9
Vancouver, British Columbia

Found the Second United Methodist Church today. The pastor preaches a fair sermon, though longer than Reverend Snyder. Their choir is nothing short of astounding. Makes a man wish he were better at singing.

Afterwards, I got out and had a stroll around the city. Prince stayed home and seemed much the better for it. Don't blame him on that either- this is no place for a husky, not at this time of year. Wish I had Regina with me, but there's no stable on the premises and I'm not up to building her one. Bit of a bigger town than I'd imagined, really. I find myself comparing it to Dawson City at every

other step. Even Calgary wasn't half so big- nor so cosmopolitan. I don't think I've ever seen this many Chinamen in my life. Some of them came to head north for gold, but the majority of them came to stay. Wonder what it must be like back home for them, to come so far to a place like this. They're worse off than Americans when it comes to being foreign, poor devils.

I should find out if there is any kind of opera house in this city. Louise loved opera. The house had a phonograph, I recall- maybe there's a music seller somewhere nearby.

Oh- I found a lumberyard. Prince will have his kennel by nightfall.

Day Five- Wednesday, August 12
Somewhere Over Alberta

Prince wasn't happy this morning, and neither was I. The sun was barely halfway up the sky and already the heat was growing more than a little hard to take. (I'm told it's hardly anything compared with the weather they get south of the border.) Taking him on my constitutional in the nearest city park did no good what-so-ever, as nothing puts a damper on the enthusiasm of the other park-goers like the presence of a seeming wolf. The collar did absolutely nothing to allay their fears. I spent the rest of our time there with leash in hand, giving the park-goers my reassurance on the honor of the Northwest Mounted that he was completely harmless so long as he was at my side. I can't blame them, really. Prince is half wolf by blood, and he looks the part. Apparently wolves almost never show themselves within miles of the city.

But I digress. Prince and I returned to our lodgings. I'd just finished tidying up from lunch when there was a knock at the door. Since I'd stopped by the provincial police offices to say hello, but given my name to no one else, I assumed it was either the constables or a well-meaning neighbour. I turned out to be wrong. On my step was a young English woman, who very politely asked me if I were Sergeant Preston of the Royal Canadian Mounted Police. When I said yes, she informed me that her name was Mary Poppins and that the British Government needed me. Caught me by surprise, I'm afraid. All I could think to do was offer Miss Poppins some tea. By the time I'd finished putting up the kettle, she had produced a file from her carpet bag (practical item, that- I ought to get one at some point) bearing the image of the King. I hardly had time to do more than glance at the contents, as she informed me straightaway that she was speaking for the legendary League of Extraordinary Gentlemen.

Understand that when I say 'legendary', I mean 'fantastical'. Stories get up to the Yukon the same as they do to anywhere else in Canada, but something about the trip distorts even the most plain-spoken account. The things one

hears about the League make the cremation of Sam McGee sound factual.

Not that I could say this to her, of course. Telling a lady something like that right to her face would've been rude. I thought I'd buy a little time by looking more closely at her file. Miss Poppins was either an excellent forger of government documents, or extremely well connected. I've seen papers from Canadian, British, and even American government offices before. The scanty information she offered on shipping troubles in Glasgow looked genuine. It occurred to me that western Canada was a terribly long way to travel if she were nothing but a forger. Miss Poppins' accent was definitely British, sounding much too natural to be an actor's put-on, so it seemed likely that she'd come from England. At least, at some point in her history. On the other hand Britain does have a native police force; why on Earth would the Crown need to call me across the ocean? Why, they turned me away when I volunteered to join the Great War- said the RCMP was a vital service and I couldn't be spared! Were there no detectives left in Scotland, no officers of the law?

I had been about to ask Miss Poppins that very question when I turned the page. There, last of all documents in her folder, lay a Letter of Release to International Service- from the RCMP to the direct service of the Crown, signed by the Prime Minister of Canada and the Commissioner of the Northwest Mounted alike.

I don't think I could have been more thunderstruck if Prince had started reciting Shakespeare. Thank Heaven for whistling kettles; I got up and poured the young lady her tea, but to be frank I felt as if the steam ought to be coming out of my own ears. I knew that document. There was no way, simply no way, that Letter of Release could have been a forgery. The League might be fantastical, some kind of cover or code name for a more comprehensible organization- but the Letter was real. I didn't have a choice; I had to accept.

Once I'd packed, tidied up, and convinced Prince to abandon his new kennel, we followed Miss Poppins out into the shadowed street. Miss Poppins had apparently arrived in a dirigible, if you can imagine such a thing. And what a dirigible, at that! The thing was larger than most of the ships I'd seen at dock in Vancouver. Last time I'd seen anything that size it was a feature of the landscape and buried under twenty-two inches of snow. I must have looked a fool or worse, but Miss Poppins was polite enough to look the other way until I finished gaping. Prince didn't like it one bit, but as neither he nor I had any choice, we rigged a sling for him and hoisted him into the craft ahead of my luggage. He promptly ran for the nearest piece of furniture and hid under it, refusing to come out.

I am writing this in the dirigible's sitting-room- the thing has a sitting room!-

somewhere over the province of Alberta. I don't think I'll be returning to the Yukon any time soon.