

Diary of a Mountie - Part the Second Enter the Shadow

by

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(based on COTY)

Day Six - Thursday, August 13
New York City

We have reached New York City, a place I never thought I'd see. I'm afraid I'm not impressed. When Miss Poppins informed me that we were heading to New York to pick up the next League member- a fact that's sinking in- I made sure to settle myself near one of the dirigible's windows. I'd heard stories of the place, mostly from people fighting their way up to the Yukon in the hopes that gold could get them out from under the thumb of the Depression. I'd never given them much thought one way or the other, but I had no reason to disbelieve their tales. They spoke of a city strung across three huge islands and the seacoast, full of the tallest buildings, the brightest lights, the millions of people. Despite myself I was really looking forward to my first glimpse of the place. It would seem that not all fantastical stories are the truth. The city sprawls. Its buildings are taller than any I've ever seen- but the place looks like an open-pit mine, crawling with God alone knows what. You might just as well kick over an anthill and expect order inside as expect any kind of grace or dignity from New York City.

It was a relief to hear that Miss Poppins knew exactly where to find our next companion, a Mr. Lamont Cranston. When she saw I'd never heard the name, she mentioned that he sometimes used an alias- not a good sign, I think. Unfortunately I had never heard 'The Shadow' used as a name either. Might just as well have asked her if she'd ever heard of Sam Steele, I suppose... This Shadow fellow was to be found at a gentleman's club in the city. She asked me to stay behind, as it would likely take her less than half an hour to retrieve him. Given the look of the city I would rather have come along for her own good, but she made it quite plain that my assistance wouldn't be needed. That kind of statement worries me, but what could I do? I stayed with the dirigible and spent a good ten minutes trying to coax Prince out from under the Chesterfield before giving up.

I'll say it right now: I don't like flying. I know there's more to it than dirigibles but frankly, if the alternatives are anything like this, you can keep 'em. I'd sooner ride a raft down the Mackenzie in full flood than spend any more time than I've absolutely got to in the air. God knows I'd be a happy man if the trip to England was to be made by boat, but you can't just hire one of these blimp things and fly it across the continent, can you? I expect I'm going to be stuck in this thing for a while.

At least there will be company. I'd just about given up on finding a decent book on recent events in Scotland when Miss Poppins returned, Mr. Cranston in tow. He was still wearing a formal dinner jacket. Hadn't had time to change, I suppose. Prince showed him no particular dislike. He had a certain arrogance about his walk, like a man who assumes he's the biggest game in town and expects others to know it. With an alias like 'The Shadow'... well. I decided then and there that I'd trust him only as far as I absolutely had to. There was something about him that didn't sit right with me.

He did have the sense to inquire about Prince. People tend to assume a great deal about that dog- that he's either a man-eating wolf ready to lunge at them in the blink of an eye, or as tame and friendly as a collie pup. Prince knows when people are talking about him, of course. When the dog turned to look at Cranston again I watched his face. I wouldn't be the least surprised if he turns out to be a master poker player. There was something to his expression that wasn't fear, but I couldn't tell you what it actually was. I told him not to worry, that Yukon Prince was trained and obedient, and expected to sit back and spend the rest of the ride over New York City in uncomfortable silence. Cranston, after all, had his portfolio from Miss Poppins to read through, and it was coming close to supper time.

Mr. Cranston, though, surprised me. As I was getting up from my chair to go and search for some coffee, he spoke- a quiet, low voice, more refined than the gold-hunters from the western United States. "Sergeant Preston... I've heard of you and your exploits."

That caught my attention, sure enough. I sat back down at once. "Then you have me at a disadvantage, sir. I'm afraid I've never heard of you."

He waved one hand at that, dismissing the problem with a sniff and a peculiar hint of a smile. "That's all right. I wouldn't have expected you to, up in... where is it, Whitehorse? Yellowknife?"

"Dawson City, actually. At least, before I took my current leave."

"Ah yes." He nodded sagely, hands in his lap as he watched my reaction. I knew that look, of course. I've used it myself. Can't help but wonder if it raises suspects' hackles the way it raised mine. "One wonders exactly how many of the stories are true. They do seem a bit- how shall I say this? Fantastic, perhaps."

It took me a moment to realize that the stream of stories flows both ways. There are always people who can't handle the frontier life, but I can't say I ever really stopped to think about what kind of tales they must have been spreading when they got back home. Oh, I'd been interviewed a few times by local reporters and the occasional enthusiast out of the provinces, but so what? All I ever told them was exactly what happened.

Then again, I was talking to Cranston with my hand on the head of a half-wolf who probably weighed more than I had when I joined the Northwest Mounted. People tend to take that kind of thing and blow it all out of proportion.

"Well," I said, scratching Prince lightly behind the ears, "if you'll tell me the ones that have you wondering, I can tell you how much of them is truth."

Cranston nodded again. "They say you always get your man," he began, leaning on the 'always' as if he expected some dispute.

"That's true. I do." I never brag. What Cranston said is true. I have never given up with a case still active, and for as long as I draw breath I never will. I've run every last thief, fraud, outlaw, and murderer who crossed my path to ground and brought them to justice, like a Mountie should. It's part of the job.

"And that you seem... ah... not very inclined to use- final methods." I thought I saw his grey eyes narrow a little bit at that. I know when I'm being sounded out, thank you.

"That, also, is true," I told him. "That's what judges and juries are for."

"You've never found a need to do more than arrest them? I'd think there would be circumstances..." He trailed off.

"Mr. Cranston." I sat back in the chair and rested my hands on my knees. Prince lay down with a quiet sigh. "I'm a man of the law, a police officer. That kind of decision isn't mine to make. I answer to the law."

"I see." He looked as if he might have wanted to ask some more, but held off, and that was the end of the conversation.

I don't like him.