

Diary of a Mountie - Part the Thirteenth The Painting

by

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(based on COTY)

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The rest of our trip back to London was as uneventful as they come. Aside from a little bit of midair rocking I don't think anything happened on the dirigible that couldn't just as easily have happened on a train, or the better classes of passenger ships. I still don't much like flying, of course, but the fact that we've so far crossed Canada, part of the United States, the Atlantic Ocean, and a good stretch of the United Kingdom is reassuring. For me, anyway. Prince has decided that his den is under the couch in the sitting room. I've warned Danner not to sit there without looking- he's more compact than you'd think. I'd rather he not accidentally fire a couch spring into my dog, thanks.

Miss Poppins had most of her official report composed long before we came within sight of London; it seemed like a good idea to follow her example. That's the advantage of keeping a running log on a case like this- you don't have far to go when the time comes to report to other people. As we'd decided, I left out mention of the paperwork we found at the Prufrock offices. If it were a straight criminal case I'd have real trouble with that idea. Reporting the maps to fairy countries where no one ever dies or gets old to a Crown official- why, you might just as well mention in a saloon that you buried a man with a map showing the way to the biggest gold strike in the Yukon under his head and expect the grave not to be dug up. There was plenty to speak of in the report as it stands. If J. manages to prove that it's in the best interests of Oz to have real contact with the British Empire I'll be the first to admit that I was wrong, but for now the burden of proof is on him.

Before I forget, though- there was a funny thing about those papers. I was reading through them as we crossed into England, and ran across something that made no sense at all. Here were all these charts of sea routes, fairy lands, and London skies, just the kind of thing any invading general could ever want, and in among them was... a set of plans for a wardrobe. Yes, a wardrobe! There wasn't any other thing it could possibly be. The plans called for a looking-glass set in the door and two rods for hanging coats on; they were neat enough for any carpenter with a halfway decent eye to follow. I'd say they must've gotten there by mistake, but how

do you make a mistake like that? It makes no sense at all.

At any rate, most of us composed official reports to J. and attached them to Miss Poppins' report. When we returned to the meeting-room in the League's headquarters, he was waiting for us. Seemed pleased enough with the summary Miss Poppins had made on the first page, that's always a good sign... He didn't say much, really. Comments were going to have to wait until he'd had a chance to read the whole thing over, he said. I suppose that's sensible. It gave us a little time to breathe, anyway.

While he was looking over the summary, though, Dorothy- who didn't have a finished report of her own, mostly because she and Lord Wimsey had worked on theirs together- got up and wandered away from the table that ran down the center of the room. There were pictures hanging on the walls- group pictures, mostly- I had seen them before but hadn't bothered to look closely. She moved from picture to picture, looking at them with this odd intensity, as if she expected to spot something in particular. All at once she let out a cry- "Oh! Oh, it is him! It's the Wizard!"

That's a fast way to get attention, all right. I think half of us were up and on our feet as soon as the word died out of the air. Miss Poppins excused herself from Jay and came to Dorothy's side. "What do you mean, dear?" she asked.

Dorothy pointed excitedly to the painting in front of her. "Look, Miss Poppins, it's him! Right there, with the others in the picture! Oscar Zoroaster Phadrig Isaac Norman Henkle Emmannuel Ambroise Diggs. That's the Wizard's name, he told me so!"

The others had looks on their faces ranging from skeptical disbelief to a suppressed urge to laugh. Danner's lips were moving as he turned over the names; under his breath I heard him murmur, "Oz Pinhead?"

Dorothy caught that, but it didn't upset her in the slightest. "That's 'zackly right, Mr. Danner! He told me his father gave him all those names, only he didn't like being called Pinhead, so he called himself Oz. Oh, Miss Poppins, do you think he still remembers me?"

"Oh, I'm sure he does, Dorothy," said Miss Poppins thoughtfully. "But he's awfully young in this painting, wouldn't you say? He was an old man by the time you met him."

Dorothy frowned a little at that. "I s'pose," she said. I guess it hadn't occurred to her.

"Nevertheless," continued Miss Poppins, "I shall see if that is the case. Gentlemen, would you be so kind as to stand back, please?" We looked at each other and

backed up half a step. "Thank you," she said- and jumped into the picture.

No, I am not joking. Without so much as batting an eye Miss Poppins simply leaped into the air, vanished from in front of us, and appeared in the painting. It was the most eye-wrenching thing I think I've ever seen, and I haven't got the words to describe it. I had to look away from the painting proper for a bit while the others exclaimed over what'd just happened. As I did that my eye fell on a small brass plaque set into the frame. It read:

LEAGUE OF EXTRAORDINARY GENTLEMEN
1875

... all right, it read more than that- there were names- but I couldn't remember a single one of them if my life depended on it. 1875? Why, the Northwest Mounted Police were only founded in 1873! How old was the League, anyway? How-

I probably could have asked then, or gone and looked at the other paintings, but as I was making up my mind to do so Miss Poppins hopped out of the painting as serene as you please. "I'm sorry, Dorothy," she said, "but this was done when he was a very young man. This version of the Wizard doesn't know you yet, and can't say where the Wizard you know might be."

"Oh," said Dorothy, a bit crestfallen. Then she brightened up. "Well, that's all right. We'll find him anyway, I know we will."

"That's right," said Miss Poppins. She glanced over at J. as she said this, and the man nodded very slowly. "That's right."