

Diary of a Mountie - Part the Fourteenth Laying Foundations

by
Jessica McGeary
(based on COTY)

Day Twelve - Wednesday, August 19
London

We stayed at League headquarters last night, and in the morning J. summoned us around the table again. "I've read your reports," he said, "and your performance, while not entirely what we'd planned, is satisfactory. I see no reason for you not to continue your investigations of the Prufrock shipping company. The resources of the League are at your disposal for this purpose. All we ask is that you submit your reports on a regular and timely basis, and that you inform us before taking any extraordinary measures." He gave a smile at his choice of words. It didn't touch his eyes.

"Are we confined to London?" asked Tom.

J. shook his head. "You're not even confined to England," he said. "If your investigation takes you to the South Seas, you're free to go- but we need to know about it before you do. Whatever measures seem most appropriate to you are fair game."

Cranston leaned forward. "Then we are free to get other lodgings?" he inquired. J. nodded.

"My people can assist you in finding a place to let, if you like," chimed in Lord Wimsey.

"That's all right. I'll manage."

"Miss Gale," said J., "you'll be staying in the apartment provided for you. I hope it's satisfactory?"

"Oh, yes," said the girl. "I quite like it. It's much nicer than the asylum."

"I'm afraid you'll have to stay there, unless one of your companions here accompanies you out and about." J. steepled his fingers, looking up to us meaningfully. "London is no place for a little girl to go about alone. Dog or no."

"Oh, I don't think you have anything to worry about," said Lord Wimsey. "We'll

look after you- won't we, chaps?" At the general assent that went up, Lord Wimsey smiled. "There, you see?"

"Very well, then," said J., "unless there's anything else any of you wanted to mention..."

There wasn't, of course, so we were dismissed.

I'm going to be staying at the headquarters. I've got money, but there's no sense spending it on lodgings when there's a barracks available. There's going to be expenses enough in this investigation as it stands. I don't think I'm going to be doing much of the ordinary detective work here. This mess is tangled up in areas I've never had to deal with. I could learn quickly enough, I'm sure, but as it stands there are those among us who already know what to do. You couldn't ask for a more English sleuth than Lord Wimsey- when it comes to noticing what's right and what's wrong with a situation by local standards, he's the best one of us, I'm sure. Hugo Danner shows every sign of knowing the shipping trade from the inside; I imagine he must've worked at it before the Great War. And as for the underhanded nature of the Prufrock organization- well, let's just say that I expect Cranston knows that sort of thing the way I know tracking and survival, and leave it at that. I'm not going to jump their claim. I know when to cede the floor to someone else. No, I plan to go about this another way.

You see, every one of those maps and charts (except the looking-glass wardrobe- and I have my suspicions about that) came out of a children's story. A fortnight ago I would have written it off as sheer nonsense. I haven't got that luxury any more, not after the things I've seen. I have never in my life seen anything good of rushing into a case without learning the background of the situation first. The Prufrock people believe in the reality of fairy stories. So does J. Dorothy's been to the lands of one of them. Miss Poppins- well- I don't know what to think of her but if she's not an escapee from someone's tales of the strange I'll eat my hat. There might yet be a deception operating, but I'll never know unless I learn. As soon as I've finished this, I'm getting into my civilian clothes and looking for the best bookstores in London. Not just for children's stories, either. The kind of deception that the Prufrocks seem to be practicing calls for a certain measure of suspicion. Crowds have been deceived before. Whole governments have been deceived before- my mother told me the story of Princess Caraboo when I was a boy, and how she was received as royalty from Formosa before being unmasked as a common servant girl of England. I have no illusions about what I know and what I don't. I'd like to maintain that state. As long as I'm buying books, I'm looking up histories of frauds, forgeries, and hoaxes. I seem to recall a book by one Charles Mackay on the topic. That'll be a good place to start. There'll be others, I'm sure.

And one last thing... I have no intention of being caught off my guard again while I'm here. It's one thing to rely on Prince in the North Country, where the biggest danger is a second man with a gun. Prince is faster than most human eyes can follow when he makes up his mind to jump, but the Siren army had him pinned. I don't want to have a repeat of that situation. It seems to me that learning unarmed combat beyond the fisticuffs my father taught me would be a wise idea. As I recall, Sherlock Holmes was said to be trained in a fighting art called 'baritsu'. I don't remember whether he learned it in London or some other part of the world, but it can't hurt to look up a teacher as long as I'm here.