

Diary of a Mountie - Part the Sixteenth Bartitsu

by
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(based on COTY)

Day Thirteen - Late Evening

The shops Mr. Ffolliott recommended were extremely helpful, which is more than I can say for the Bartitsu school. (I've been spelling it wrong. It's been a while since I last saw the word.) First things first, though- the books. I've got several days' worth of reading material here- Peter Pan and two volumes of Lewis Carroll from one shop, something called The Water-Babies from another (it seems to be about mermaids), and The Wonderful Wizard of Oz from a third. That last shop was as good as gold, I must say! The owner, an older woman named Mrs. Wetherall, offered to look up the rest of the Oz books for me. Apparently there's fourteen of the things. There was an awkward moment when she asked me who I was buying them for... they're not exactly the sort of thing you can call research material, now, are they? Children's books, I mean? I said something about looking after a young orphan girl who happened to be named Dorothy herself. That seemed to be enough, but it left a bad taste in my mouth not to be entirely straight with her. I promised to check back in a few days and headed out to the Bartitsu school straightaway.

Now there was a disappointment. Apparently it was the last school of its kind left in London. Seems the art's been dying out for a long time. That might explain why the teacher I saw insisted on being paid first, even though all I got was an hour's lecture and a demonstration that taught me nothing. It's essentially a combination of wrestling, boxing, and the use of feet and sticks. Really, it looked like a fancy name for the kind of dirty-fighting tricks I had to deal with back home. Not what I'd expected at all. So much for Conan Doyle, eh?

The instructor must've seen the look on my face, because he broke off what he was saying and left two of his students to continue the demonstration. "Something wrong, Mr.....?"

I didn't bother giving him my name. "I suppose you could say that. Apparently I had the wrong expectations when I came here."

He leaned back on his heels, looking me over with narrowed eyes. "And just what were you expecting?" he inquired.

I shrugged. "Something different. This isn't anything I haven't seen before-"

"Oh, really." He crossed his arms. "Where?"

There was something about his stance that I didn't like. He reminded me of a dog fight I'd seen once, the two animals circling each other, growling and snapping and trying to look as dangerous as possible. It didn't sit well with me. "In the saloons of the Yukon Territory."

"Sir, this is a system of self-defence designed to render anyone acquainted with it practically impregnable against all forms of attack, however dangerous and unexpected-

"Stop right there. I've heard enough." It was the same stuff he'd been talking about for an hour and I was getting tired of it.

"Oh, you have, have you?" He'd turned an interesting shade of red. "Think you could do as well?"

I could sense where the conversation was headed, and I didn't like it. "No," I said. "No, probably not. I couldn't do most of what you've done... but I don't think this is what I wanted to learn."

That deflated him a little, but he was still pretty angry. "Try the Nips, then," he said.

"Excuse me?"

"305 Oxford Street. Japanese School of jiu-jitsu. Run by Yukio Tani and Masutaro Otani. Maybe that'll be a bit more to your liking. Come back when you want to learn how real men fight, though," he said with a jerk of his head.

I left him to his lessons and went back to the street. Yes, he'd been a disappointment, but at least I got something out of him. I'm going to Oxford Street tomorrow night. I haven't got anything to lose, and Messrs. Tani and Otani might be more helpful.