

Diary of a Mountie - Part the Twenty-Second Richmond Park

by

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(based on COTY)

Day Twenty-Five

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Richmond Park, London

I felt a bit guilty about falling behind in my research today. After all, just now reading these books is the only thing I can do that no one else in the League seems to be able or willing to do. I still didn't like the idea of sitting around the building as if I were some kind of college student, so I packed up several of the books I hadn't gotten to yet and headed across the city to Richmond Park.

I think I'm beginning to understand how people can survive in a place like London. Once you're inside the wall, Richmond Park is big enough that you can almost convince yourself you're not trapped in a city. The Park Keeper I met said it used to be a hunting grounds for Charles I, and that there's still fallow and red deer there. I believe it. Most of the people I saw there today were traveling on bicycles, or by motorcar. Twenty-five hundred acres is a bit much for city dwellers to handle on foot, I suppose. I admit, I wouldn't have minded having Regina along, but I haven't sat a horse since before I left Canada anyway.

It took me a while but I eventually found a spot under some of the older Park trees, out of the way. After what happened yesterday at the Zoo, I thought I'd better start reading about Oz first. Peter Pan could wait. I took out my copy of The Wonderful Wizard of Oz. For some reason, I can't think of why, I opened it not to the first page of the story but to the copyright page. I don't know what I was looking for, but I know what I found: a copyright date of 1900.

That threw me for a minute. 1900. That was... why, I was barely eighteen then. I'd just joined the Northwest Mounted Police that year. If the numbers were to be believed, I was just learning to drive a dog team when Dorothy was off melting witches and talking to lions. I put the book down for a minute and looked at it again- no, it didn't seem to be a mistake on my part. 1900, all right.

I'll admit there was a moment I'm not proud of; I caught myself thinking for just a second that Dorothy had been taken in by an asylum. Under ordinary circumstances, I'd have latched onto that thought pretty hard. I couldn't do that, though. I'd seen too much already. Sirens with impossible numbers of teeth.

Mermaids who went from fish-women to nearly human females. Magic belts that turned dogs invisible and Lords into lightbulbs, babies that hatched out of eggs, wolves that cowered at reprimands from young girls... I simply didn't have room in my brain for the possibility that Dorothy's story was anything but true, any more. Why, after encountering the Mermaid Queen, the idea that Oz might be a land where no one aged seemed almost scientific! There were all kinds of fairy stories where a hundred years passed in a single night, I knew that. From what Dorothy had said, it wasn't like that in Oz. People who went to Oz simply didn't get any older, or die. It was a little strange, but next to everything else that'd happened, it made a certain amount of sense. Maybe the magic that kept people from dying there acted like the cold does to Yukon wood-frogs. I couldn't imagine they were any physically different when they get out of the ice in spring; if anything about them had changed, they'd have died in the ice for sure. Perhaps it was like that.

It wasn't exactly the most reassuring idea, but it was the best I could come up with. Nothing that I knew fit with the idea that Dorothy might be anything but a sane, if very unusual, little girl. She might be nearly as old as I, objectively speaking, but when it came right down to it she was still essentially twelve years old. No matter when the book had been published.

I've since finished the book, along with Peter Pan. That's another one where no one gets any older. I have my suspicions about James Hook, and where he might be now, but that's all they are at the moment- suspicions. I'll probably have to read the book again a few times. Both of the books, actually. I'm not exactly suited for a scholar's life, but this is the first piece of real investigation I've been able to do since we left Glasgow, and I'm not going to make a hash of it.
