

Diary of a Mountie - Part the Twenty-Sixth Lessons Learned

by

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(based on COTY)

Day Forty-One
Later Evening
110A Picadilly

The trouble with telegrams is that once they're sent, you have to wait for a reply. Since Miss Thompson was in the United States, the telegram we sent would be arriving during the evening meal. So far as I could tell, that meant a long wait for us. Mostly it meant sitting about Lord Peter's flat and discussing things we already knew, but my heart wasn't in it. Something had been nagging at me ever since we raised the possibility of going to Oz.

When I approached Masutaro Otani about jiu-jitsu lessons, he warned me that the practice wasn't something you could take lightly. That was part of why he spent the first evening the way he did: he wanted me to understand what I was getting myself into. Apparently he'd had a lot of men come to him for lessons, only to drop out as soon as they found out how difficult it really was. I've seen it before myself, since a lot of the time the only thing keeping men in the Yukon is the difficulty of going back home. That's why the Mounties at the border near Skagway won't let anyone in without a year's worth of supplies to tide them over.

Mr. Otani didn't have that option. He did something else instead. Anyone who came to him for lessons had to sign a pledge. It was an agreement not to use what he taught them for improper purposes, or to teach anyone else until he said they were ready. That reminded me a little bit of a doctor's Hippocratic Oath, but there was another part to it. We- I- had to promise not to abandon the study of jiu-jitsu until I'd completed the training.

Now, I'd told Mr. Otani that I wasn't going to be living in England for a fixed length of time, and that there weren't even any Japanese living in my part of Canada, let alone jiu-jitsu instructors. For some reason that hadn't seemed to faze him. It bothered me, though. It bothered me enough that once we went the telegram off to Miss Thompson (I believe it said Dorothy was with us, or something to that effect), I gathered up Prince's leash and indicated that I was going out for a while.

It's a little over a mile from Lord Peter's apartments to Oxford Street. Didn't take

long to get there at all, although getting around Picadilly Circus was a nightmare. As usual, Prince seemed happy to stay outside and wait for me. He seemed to know the School was no place for a dog. Inside, most of the other students had already finished for the day; I waited for the last few stragglers to clear away before approaching Mr. Otani.

For some reason, he didn't seem surprised to see me. "Good evening, Sergeant," he said as he started to tidy up. "Please forgive me, but I must get this done... What brings you here tonight? Not a lesson, I think."

I shifted my weight a little. For some reason, his calm manner didn't seem quite in line with what I had to say. "I'm afraid not," I said. "Although it does have to do with lessons, in a way."

"Ah?" He glanced up at that. "Go on."

I would've liked to sit, but that wasn't an option. "I have to stop my lessons for a while. I don't know for how long. I'm sorry."

"I see." He still sounded unsurprised. "Have you any idea at all?"

"Afraid not. I have to leave England, and I haven't been told how long it's going to take..."

"But you are coming back." He said it as if it were any other statement.

"Well- yes, unless something happens."

"Where are you going, if I may ask?"

I hesitated, then said, "I'm afraid I can't tell you." Not so much because of anything to do with the League, as because I had no desire for him to think I was going insane- or worse, lying to him. "It's part of why I'm in England in the first place. I didn't intend to drop out when I signed up, but-"

"Sergeant Preston." Mr. Otani held up one hand. "You do not need to explain further."

"But the pledge-"

"Is not a problem." He gave a very faint smile. "You are going to return, and unless I miss my guess, you are probably going to practise everything I have taught you all the while that you are gone..."

I stared at him. "How do you know that?"

He shrugged. "Because of who you are," he said simply.

"Excuse me?"

"Sergeant Preston, I live in London. Do you think that because I am not an Englishman, I do not know who you are? Everyone who crosses my doorstep has heard of you. Even if they had not, I have eyes and ears as good as any Englishman. I read the Times. You are a man of your word."

Even though I knew it was rude, I couldn't help but stare at him. First the police constable, and now this.

He paused in his tidying. "Is something wrong?"

"I'm still trying to get used to the idea that people halfway around the world know who I am," I confessed.

He nodded. "Modest," he said, half to himself. "That is well... Sergeant, you have already learned what is the hardest for most Englishmen who come through my door. Discipline, dedication, respect- these things take many years to teach. Very few of my students understand what it is to dedicate their lives to a task, or to properly respect another person as an equal even when he is an enemy. They look for the fight and they have already lost..."

"You never said anything about that."

"I did not have to. I saw for myself that you already knew." He reached for a broom and started sweeping the floor. "The warrior spirit of the art of jiu-jitsu is what is hardest of all to learn. To conquer your enemy with the least force possible, to the greatest effect- even when the enemy who must be conquered is your own base impulse- that is what is hardest to teach. I think, from what I have seen in these classes, that what I have heard is true."

"And what's that?"

"You already followed such a path before you ever came to me." He gave another suppressed smile. "Even if you do not understand it."

"No," I admitted, "I don't."

"It does not matter. One day you will. For now, go and fulfil your duty. Come back when you are in London again."

I thanked him and went back to Picadilly. I don't think I'll ever understand the Japanese as long as I live.