

# **Chapter 1 of: An Inconspicuous Mountie**

**Adventures of the First Woman Mountie**

**Book 2**

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This is a work of historical fiction, set in the mid-1970s. Although most of the historical references are accurate, a few are not, and names, characters, places, and incidents are either the product of the author's imagination or are used fictitiously. Any resemblance to actual persons, living or dead is entirely coincidental.

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**Spoiler Alert**

This chapter contains references to episodes described in Book 1 of the *Adventures of the First Woman Mountie Series*.

If you hate spoilers then you should read Book 1 first.

You've been warned.



## CHAPTER 1. A NEW POSTING

*“Will you do it?”*

*My name is Alexandra Houston. My friends call me Alex.*

*In the summer of 1974, I’d been 24 years old, and feeling like my career was at a standstill. I’d studied chemistry at university and liked it, but not enough to pursue science as a career. I’d reset my sights on police work next and had joined the Metropolitan Toronto Police force (‘Metro’). Although policing seemed like a better fit for me than science, my two years with Metro had mostly comprised routine administrative- and traffic duties. These assignments were important, and needed to be done by somebody, and done well. But for me, they didn’t fit the Hollywood vision of policing that I had developed, and I hadn’t found them to be very challenging.*

*They say you should be careful what you wish for.*

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Cst. Alexandra Houston

*My life soon changed drastically, beginning with an unexpected meeting. Without explanation, my Captain had sent me to go and see a Royal Canadian Mounted Police (RCMP) officer that wanted to meet me. My reaction to this was apprehension, and I wondered what I could possibly have messed-up so badly that it had caught the notice of our national police force.*

*That's how I first came to meet Assistant Commissioner George MacLeod. After a lengthy conversation that I belatedly realized was an interview, he told me that he had asked my Captain (his friend) to recommend one of his young officers for a special pilot project he had in mind. He wanted someone who wanted to accomplish things, someone eager and tenacious, someone chomping at the bit to be allowed to do some 'real' police work, and ... someone female. At this point he had shed his stern 'Mountie look,' relaxed his entire body, chuckled, and said that my Captain had recommended the "biggest pain in the butt" in his Division - **me**.*

*Assistant Commissioner MacLeod had explained that the Force had fallen behind the times and that its senior leadership wanted to build a more diverse police force. "We're going to be recruiting immigrants, visible minorities, maybe even people with some kinds of disabilities as well," he said, "But we have to start somewhere, and that somewhere is by engaging women." He wanted to try a first pilot test with a woman, but that the pilot test had to succeed as it would pave the way for an entire first troop of policewomen that would follow. He had thought of using someone that had already qualified as a policewoman, and simply re-train them in the "RCMP way."*

*That had brought me up to full attention. "Wait a minute! Do basic training all over again?"*

*"Yes!" he'd replied, "that's the only way you can possibly succeed. In the old days of the Northwest Mounted Police, a person could get appointed straight into the Force, even as a commissioned officer<sup>1</sup>, if they had the right political connections. No more. Now everyone starts out the same way, as a Constable, and by going through the same basic training. If you want to have any hope of being accepted, much less respected, that's how you have to begin."*

*So, that's what I'd done. I'd gone through training at the RCMP's Depot Division training centre in Regina, dealt with the good and the bad issues that came with being the first woman to train there, and survived to become the first woman Mountie<sup>2</sup>. I hadn't intended for it to happen, really. The opportunity just came and found me.*

*After training, or re-training if you like, I'd been posted to Radium City, a small town in very northern Saskatchewan that, in its early days, had been a great uranium mining centre. Although my new boss, Corporal Morrison, had told me that nothing interesting ever happened around there, he'd been wrong, and I'd had to rescue him from a mine collapse, run our entire detachment single-handed while he was confined to hospital for six weeks, get rescued by a strange dog from near-death, solve a mystery, and find and catch a murderer – all in only four months!*

*The dog was named Silver. Investigating a mysterious series of break-ins had led me to some unusual places, including several abandoned uranium mines. In one such mine, I'd fallen through a trap and found myself hanging precariously over the sharp edge of a raise, a kind of vertical mine shaft. Unable to get out and tiring fast, I was saved by the almost magical appearance of what I first took to be a wolf, which gave me quite a scare, but turned out to be Silver, an Alaskan Malamute. Silver somehow sensed that I was in danger, had decided to help, and with his assistance I had been able to climb up and out of the raise. To make a long story short<sup>3</sup>, while I'd continued to investigate the case, he had attached himself to me, was eventually given to me, and we'd been close friends ever*

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<sup>1</sup> For example, Francis Dickens, son of British novelist Charles Dickens, was able to join the North West Mounted Police as a Sub Inspector in 1874, courtesy of political influence from his family.

<sup>2</sup> In real life, a first full troop of women began training in the RCMP in 1974, but for this fictional series, it all began with a single-woman pilot test.

<sup>3</sup> See *An Inconvenient Mountie* (ISBN: 978-1-9994940-0-1).

since.

*Sometime later I'd found myself in another surprise meeting with the same Assistant Commissioner MacLeod. Once again, a coffee meeting had turned into an interview and, once again, he had something new in mind for me. By this time, he'd become head of the Force's Security Service<sup>4</sup> and, unsurprisingly, he had some ideas he wanted to try out by way of some experimental pilot projects.*

*"Like me?" I'd asked.*

*"Exactly," he'd replied. It turned out that he now wanted me to go and work for him in the Security Service. Of course, he could have just ordered me to go, but he wanted me to go willingly, and immerse myself in his new plans.*

*Then, just like he'd said over a year previously in Toronto, "Will you do it?"*

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It was November 1975. Having wrapped-up things in my former Radium City detachment and having left Silver in the temporary care of Ruby, the local café-owner that had given Silver to me in the first place, I found myself flying off to Ottawa to learn about my next assignment.

Headquarters (HQ) Division in Ottawa comprises several large sprawling buildings on sweeping grounds that lie just outside the downtown-core area. Among these are a huge administration building, a sizeable building for Identification Services (which in any other police force would be called the crime or forensics lab), and another one that contained what at the time were called the Security Service, and the new Canadian Police Information Centre (CPIC). CPIC was just beginning to create and manage computer databases of digitized information like criminal records and even fingerprints. It wasn't all up and running yet, but it held a lot of promise for the future.

While getting acquainted with my new Security Service supervisor, Staff Sergeant Robert ("Call me Bob") G. Simpson, I discovered that he had a fascinating background. He'd grown up in the Okanagan Valley of British Columbia and then moved to northern Alberta. As a young man, he first found work as a deck-hand, helping barge prospectors' supplies on the Athabasca, Slave, and Mackenzie Rivers, and later, on Lake Athabasca, spanning both Alberta and Saskatchewan. This exposure had sparked an interest in prospecting, and he next joined-up with a mineral exploration company that was sending prospecting parties across the northern regions of all three prairie provinces, plus the Northwest Territories (NWT) and the Yukon.

One of Bob's fond memories was of spending several summers at prospective mineral resource locations, living in the wilderness, hiking, paddling, and blasting into the mineral showings as they looked for sizable deposits of gold, uranium, and nickel. In 1937 he joined the NWT Gold Rush to search for gold in the Yellowknife area, continuing to work there until 1939, when Germany invaded Poland, effectively beginning the Second World War.

With the outbreak of war in 1939, he'd wanted to do something "more worthwhile" but didn't share quite the same fervour as the teenagers that were rushing to sign-up for overseas military service. Fortunately, there was another option. With the war effort scaling-up, the RCMP had volunteered to create a military police company and send 120 Members overseas to form 1 Provost Company (of the 1<sup>st</sup> Canadian Infantry Division). This left the Force short-handed and, they'd had to increase their recruiting efforts to find replacements in the face of the active military recruiting campaign, which had also been increased. Simpson, who was by then twenty-four years old, offered his services to the RCMP and was accepted that same year.

Graduating from basic training in 1940, he was posted to a series of small-town detachments in

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<sup>4</sup> At this point in time, it was still part of the RCMP. Years later, in 1984, the Security Service was spun-out to create the present-day Canadian Security Intelligence Service (C.S.I.S.).

southern Saskatchewan and Alberta. He'd moved to the RCMP security intelligence service in 1945, initially focusing on Cold War-era anti-espionage, then moving to other domestic issues. All his promotions had been during his time in the Security Service, and he'd clearly seen and done a lot in his time there so far.

At this point in his narrative, I'd become really curious. Spies, counter-espionage, anarchists, and terrorists? Surely, we didn't have any of those in Canada? I'd asked.

"We did, and we do," he'd answered, and with that, he started telling me some 'intelligence' stories.

"Like you, most of us thought we were safe here in Canada" he began. "After all, the last war fought on our own soil had taken place nearly 150 years earlier, when we'd beaten the Americans in the War of 1812." He paused then as if considering how best to proceed.

"Our first wake-up call came when the Second World War had just ended. We didn't even realize it yet, but the Cold War had begun immediately after that. In September of 1945, a cipher clerk from the Soviet embassy in Ottawa defected to Canada."

Bob explained that he had sat in on the cipher clerk's first interview with the RCMP, during which it developed that not one, but several Soviet espionage rings were operating in the country and that they had already penetrated some highly sensitive government positions, including the Chalk River Nuclear Laboratories. Apparently, that got everyone's attention. In those days, Canada was one of the leading nations in nuclear research, as much of the U.S.-U.K.-Canada nuclear research had been conducted in Canada during The Second World War.

"The biggest surprise," Bob concluded, "was that the Soviets – our former allies – had been actively spying on us and we'd been caught 'with our pants down' as it were. Naturally, we resolved never to be caught out like that again, and that's how the RCMP got into the counter-intelligence game."

I'd never heard of this before and said so. "Have there been many cases like that?"

"More than you'd guess," Bob sighed, "That first one and a few others made the news, but most of them have remained secret."

Bob said that a few years later, in 1951, a KGB agent had snuck in and settled quietly into Verdun, Quebec. From there he set up a small network of agents to search-out classified information on military projects like the CF-105 Avro Arrow jet fighter program.

"We only found out about him because he fell in love with a Canadian woman who convinced him to turn himself in – and he actually went ahead and did it!" Bob said, with some satisfaction. "We were able to convert him into a double agent, working for us and sending disinformation back to the Soviet Union ... Then, in 1957, we discovered that we had a home-grown spy in our diplomatic service. That case resolved itself, as he committed suicide once he learned that we were on to him."

There was silence for a moment, as Bob was clearly caught-up in old memories. Then, he shook himself and came back to the present, "Anyway, those are just examples. Last year we did a thirty-year retrospective review and found that we'd successfully concluded just over thirty espionage cases, an average of one per year not counting the many files that are still open. Those thirty cases resulted in twenty cases of people being charged with espionage offences under the Official Secrets Act, and forty diplomats being expelled for espionage-related activities, all between 1945 and last year. I'll show you the summary report and a few specific cases, that I think you should read up on. Some of them make spy fiction books look tame," he added, dryly.

"I'm starting to imagine," I said, and then paused as a new thought struck, "So it's all counter-espionage then?"

"Oh no, that's just what got the RCMP involved back in the Cold War, and of course such things continue today, but we have our share of domestic issues to worry about too. Remember the FLQ Crisis?"

“Of course!” I sat up straight.

I’d been immersed in my studies at Carleton University during the FLQ Crisis of 1970, but living in Ottawa at the time, no one could have missed that one. All of Canada had been brought to attention and affected by the events, in which the militant arm of the Front de libération du Québec (FLQ) had kidnapped two prominent politicians and murdered one of them. The federal government had reacted swiftly, invoking the War Measures Act, calling out the army, and temporarily expanding police powers. In the end, the FLQ had been shut down and the kidnappers exiled to Cuba, but it had shattered forever our illusion that terrorist attacks ‘couldn’t happen here’ in Canada.

“That gave the RCMP quite a black eye, didn’t it?” I asked, tentatively.

“It sure did,” Bob explained, “I want to go through that with you too. We made some mistakes and have tried to learn from them. You can learn from them too, so that’s going on your reading list as well.”

Bob next moved to modern-day criminal threats which, beyond, counter-intelligence and local anti-government movements, also included a variety of special-interest groups that might be motivated to resort to civil disobedience or worse tactics.

“So, this means spying on our own people?” I’d asked at one point.

“Not in the ‘Big Brother’ sense,” Bob explained. “Don’t forget, if someone’s thinking about committing a crime, but doesn’t do anything illegal, then we don’t have the authority to do anything, and we won’t. As you know very well, we don’t have the time and resources to worry about such people even if we wanted to, and we don’t. By the same token, we’re not interested in people or groups that have a cause, or an issue, and are lawfully complaining and/or protesting. We **are** interested in the ones that ‘cross the line’ into law-breaking, but, as you know, it isn’t usually very easy to distinguish who’s who until it’s too late.

“There are some groups that it’s obvious we have to keep an eye on, like agents of foreign powers, organized crime groups, self-declared anarchists, and political groups that publicly espouse violence to further their causes. Mostly what it comes down to, though, is simply intelligence gathering. If we can anticipate that someone is going to commit a crime, then we can better position to try to catch them in the act and convict them. Or, in very dangerous situations, we can take steps to prevent the crimes themselves. For example, a pattern of suspicious events might trigger an investigation by us to see if crimes are being committed, or even if they’re likely to be committed, and if so, why and by whom. If something major is underway, like a planned bombing, for example, then we’ll try to prevent the bombing to save lives, even if it means not catching or convicting the bomber or bombers.

“Finally, there’s also a new kind of national security threat. This one isn’t international, or military though. As Canada starts to develop more major industries, some of it is happening in small communities that aren’t used to all the new people, the new activities, and the changes to their town, the landscape, and their way of life. Some see it as an opportunity and want the economic development, while others see it as a threat and want to prevent or stop the development. Some of these kinds of tensions are building up where there are new or changing industries in different parts of the country. So, we have to keep an eye on those too.”

As if all this wasn’t enough to set my head spinning, he gave me a bunch of cases to read as a supplement to the other orientation and training I’d be doing for the next few weeks.

The cases were an eye-opener in the sense of so many things having happened in Canada that I’d never heard about on the news, or even imagined. Not all of them were criminal, or anarchist, or foreign-agent type incidents, of course.

One interesting case concerned the heavy water plants in Nova Scotia. Canada’s nuclear reactor

development program had focused on natural uranium fuel, moderated by heavy water<sup>5</sup>. The reactor designs were called CANDU (for CANadian Deuterium Uranium system). To build CANDU reactors, our nuclear industry needed uranium (which was mined in Saskatchewan and refined in Ontario), and heavy water.

The heavy water was going to come from two large plants on Cape Breton Island in Nova Scotia, one in Glace Bay and one in Port Hawkesbury. The reasons these sites were chosen were partly technical (availability of suitable water and power) and partly political (economic development). The second reason had unintended consequences, because these plants created a lot of jobs for construction workers from the two small towns and their nearby communities, at a time in the late 1960s when their economies were really struggling. They not only provided jobs but relatively high paying jobs, especially when overtime was required, which happened more and more frequently as the projects fell behind schedule. The Port Hawkesbury plant started-up in 1970, not far behind schedule, but the Glace Bay plant continued to suffer setbacks. Ultimately, a series of suspicious construction and equipment failures had caused so much alarm that Atomic Energy of Canada Ltd. (AECL) and the Province of Nova Scotia had both asked the RCMP to investigate the possibility of sabotage. Naturally enough, the RCMP was concerned that this could be a new chapter of Cold War type activity.

It turned out that there had been acts of sabotage, but not from foreign agents. The Glace Bay sabotage was caused by some of the workers themselves, who wanted to keep the construction project alive for as long as they possibly could, to keep their jobs alive. The overtime pay issue hadn't been thought of in advance, but once it had become obvious that there was money for this, it just provided an extra inducement to continue to sabotage things. Ultimately, the RCMP had discovered the people behind the sabotage and foiled their plans but hadn't found enough evidence to be able to press charges. The files on the people concerned were kept open, but otherwise, the saboteurs lost their jobs but avoided prosecution. With construction progress restored, the Glace Bay plant was finally completed and had only just commenced production when I was reading the report (that is, in 1976, eight years behind schedule).

After some of my preliminary orientation and training in procedures had been completed, Bob got around to discussing me and my role. He explained that they were developing a few people that they could send out, inconspicuously, to investigate suspicious circumstances or patterns, in cases for which formal investigations, by regular Members, whether uniformed or plain-clothed, would be unproductive, or even counter-productive. From time to time, he said, I would probably get a chance to meet some of the others.

In my case, both Bob and Assistant Commissioner MacLeod were interested in the possibilities presented by the first female 'Mountie.' They were also interested in, and seemingly amused, by the potential of me having Silver along as a kind of side-kick.

"If that dog is going to go everywhere with you, then we should get him trained too," Assistant Commissioner MacLeod decided, on one of his periodic visits to see how my orientation was coming along.

"First, we'll get him trained as a regular police dog," Bob said. "You too, since we train dogs and their handlers together. But the idea is not for him to serve as a regular police dog. It might be an advantage for us that he doesn't look like a police dog. Despite the Hollywood image, it's pretty well known that all our regular dogs are German Shepherds, so having Silver trained could provide us with an undercover advantage.

"Our dogs usually go into training when they're about a year and a half old," Bob continued, "but,

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<sup>5</sup> Heavy water meaning water composed of deuterium (an isotope of hydrogen containing one proton and one neutron) and oxygen atoms rather than hydrogen and oxygen atoms.



in this case, we'll make an exception. In addition to his regular training, I'd like to see if Silver can be trained to detect explosives. In our line of work that could turn out to be very handy.

"The Dog Service Training Centre is part of Depot Division, but it's located at Innisfail, Alberta, which is about an hour's drive north of Calgary. Basic dog and handler training will take about four months, and along the way, we'll get him tested to see if he meets the requirements for explosives training. If he does, you two can stay on for that too."



Eventually, my orientation and initial training in the Security Service were complete. I wasn't issued a bunch of 'James Bond' or 'CIA-type' gadgets, although I supposed that they had access to such things. I was issued a snub-nosed Smith & Wesson .38 Special revolver, which I hadn't expected. It made sense though. It was much smaller, and easier to conceal than my regular-issue service revolver (which had a 5.5-inch barrel). It sure wasn't very accurate though. It was hard enough to shoot accurately with a long-barrel revolver. The snub-nosed version was lighter and easier to hold steady, but it was a close-range weapon at best. Anyway, Bob had two more surprises in store for me, which he'd held for our last face-to-face meeting before I left to head out west.

"Let's discuss your cover story," he'd said. That was the first surprise.

"My cover story?" I asked, "Do I need a cover story when I'm working with our own people?"

"Sometimes, yes," Bob said, firmly. "The fewer people that know what you're up to when you're working on cases, the better. It's safer for you that way too."

"But I don't even know what I'll be doing after the dog service training, so I can't very well spill the beans to anyone, can I?"

"No, you can't," said Bob, chuckling, "and before you get mad, I don't know what your first real assignment will be either – we'll see what's going on in the world when the time comes. But, let's not give anyone too many ideas about you just yet."

"Here's your cover story: When you go out to Alberta, you can talk about everything up to and including your recent posting in Radium City. If you're pressed, you can say that you've been

transferred to HQ Division in Ottawa – that’s a bit misleading but still true. You’re going to get some questions about the Dog Service training. That’s unavoidable because we’re shoving you down their throats, outside of their normal selection process for dog handlers, and of course, Silver is obviously not our usual choice of breed. So, when the topic comes up, just say you’re a pilot project of Assistant Commissioner MacLeod’s, and that the idea is to have you and Silver be trained so that you can be used as an inconspicuous part of our diplomatic protective service.”

“Is that what we’ll be doing?” I asked.

“Who knows?” Bob replied, chuckling again. “For all I know, it could turn out to be true! Seriously, if you get questioned too closely, just play dumb and refer people to Assistant Commissioner MacLeod, or to me. That should shut them up.”

So, my next steps were going to be to head back to Saskatchewan, pack and pick-up Silver, and then the two of us would be ... “*Alberta bound*,” as they say.

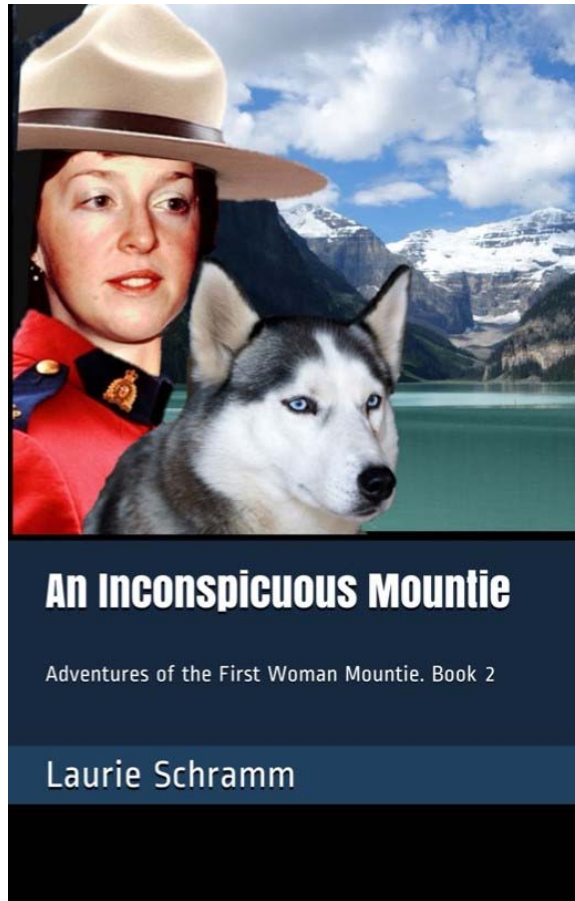
The second surprise? Oh, yes, Bob also gave me a bunch more historical cases to take away with me and read while travelling to my new posting in Alberta. Since the case summaries were all marked “Top Secret,” they were given to me in a special combination-locked briefcase that contained an explosive charge designed to incinerate the contents if anyone tried to force the locks. Bob then dryly suggested to me – really, I’m not making this up - that I take care not to enter the wrong combination, for my own safety!

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Alex’s adventures continue in: ***An Inconspicuous Mountie. Adventures of the First Woman Mountie Book 2***, by Laurie Schramm, 2019.

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## **ADVENTURES OF THE FIRST WOMAN MOUNTIE**

*Book 1: An Inconvenient Mountie*

*Book 2: An Inconspicuous Mountie*

*Book 3: An Indestructible Mountie*

*Book 4: An International Mountie*

*Book 5: An Inseparable Mountie*

*Book 6: An Indispensable Mountie*