

The Diary of a Nobody

by MaryPat Campbell

Ursula

I'm different from the rest of them. They are all nonentities. Unlike me, the third daughter of Edward and Mary Smallwell, my father the current Bishop of London. I say that with pride, but it's not true. I say it so that I can hold my head high above the poor souls I live with in this God forsaken place, while hating the rotten holy man who cast me aside and had me sent me here to Bedlam. My only sin was being unladylike and so very different from my sisters. I was and am, unable to live as they do.

A new man has arrived, he looks like a brown bear. I make sure to bump into him at least twice every day. His handsome hairy face draws me to him, his dark eyes have a constantly puzzled look coming through them. He's not afraid of me. I discovered this recently when I spat on him and to my surprise he didn't shout and curse me to hell and back. The following day I accidentally dropped one of my maps beside him on that bench he likes to sit on, where the early evening sun slants through the window and makes the world look beautiful occasionally.

I ran away quickly, just in case, and found a hiding place behind a pillar at the far end of the hall from which to spy on him. He picked up my map eagerly and studied it with interest, and held it in his big rough hands. I wondered about those hands, as if they were used to heavy work with metals or the like. He looked at my map almost lovingly, traced its routes and pathways with his finger, almost as if he treasured it.

Brown Bear Man

People in here think they're somebody. We're not, that's why we are here. But I've heard that Ursula Smallwell is somebody. She's the daughter of the bishop of London who banished her here when she was only twelve years old, before she came into her womanhood. I suspect she's here because they thought her mad, uncouth and unmanageable. The only other option would have been to send her to a nunnery. Who ever heard of a nun scurrying noisily about with her hair flying, spitting at folk, provocative, and always up to mischief.

I like this about Ursula. Despite the reasons people like her and me end up in here, and what happens to us over the long years spent here, she remains the somebody she clearly is. Ursula might not have her mind in order, or her father deign to visit, but she's got her wits about her. I've never seen such beautiful draughtsmanship, such making of maps. She maps a kind of inner world I think I might share with her alongside real places of worship, St. Mary Axe for instance, not a stone's throw from where we nobodies reside here in Bedlam.

Her inner world seems full of knowledge of fine architecture, stained glass and gardens, for she draws them with such accuracy and abandon at the same time on these crumpled pages she leaves lying around. I have a suspicion that she doesn't just happen to drop them near me. Perhaps she wants me to read them, and wonder about them, and her. What can I hope to share with this woman, mad though she is, with my background of molten metal, bell making and working at the foundry? I will have to try and find a way to communicate with her, if only she will sit still long enough beside me to speak, and converse together.