

1888

THE ARREST OF LIEUTENANT GOLIGHTLY

Rudyard Kipling

Kipling, Rudyard (1865-1936) - An English novelist, short-story writer, and poet who spent most of his youth in India, and is best known for his children's classics. In 1907, Kipling was the first English writer ever to be awarded the Nobel Prize in literature. The Arrest of Lieutenant Golightly (1888) - From "Plain Tales from the Hills," a collection of stories of life in India. An officer is caught in a rainstorm, mistaken for a deserter, and arrested by three enlisted men.

ARREST OF GOLIGHTLY

'I've forgotten the countersign,' sez 'e.

'Oh! You 'ave, 'ave you?' sez I.

'But I'm the Colonel,' sez 'e.

'Oh! You are, are you?' sez I.

'Colonel or nor Colonel, you waits 'ere till I'm relieved, an' the Sarjint reports on your ugly old mug.,' sez I.

An' s'elp me soul, 'twas the Colonel after all! But I was a recruity then.

IF there was one thing on which Golightly prided himself more than another, it was looking like 'an Officer and a Gentleman.' He said it was for the honour of the Service that he attired himself so elaborately; but those who knew him best said that it was just personal vanity. There was no harm about Golightly- not an ounce. He recognised a horse when he saw one, and could do more than fill a cantle. He played a very fair game at billiards, and was a sound man at the whist-table. Every one liked him; and nobody ever dreamed of seeing him handcuffed on a station platform as a deserter. But this sad thing happened.

He was going down from Dalhousie, at the end of his leave- riding down. He had run his leave as fine as he dared, and wanted to come down in a hurry.

It was fairly warm at Dalhousie, and, knowing what to expect below, he descended in a new suit- tight fitting- of a delicate olive-green; a peacock-blue tie, white collar, and a snowy white helmet. He prided himself on looking neat even when he was riding post. He did look neat, and he was so deeply concerned about his appearance before he started that he quite forgot to take anything but some small change with him. He left all his notes at the hotel. His servants had gone down the road before him, to be ready in waiting at Pathankote with a change of gear. That was what he called travelling in 'light marching-order.' He was proud of his faculty of organisation- what we call .

Twenty-two miles out of Dalhousie it began to rain- not a mere hill-shower, but a good, tepid, monsoonish downpour. Golightly bustled on, wishing that he had brought an umbrella. The dust on the roads turned into mud, and the pony mired a good deal. So did Golightly's gaiters. But he kept on steadily and tried to think how pleasant the coolth was.

His next pony was rather a brute at starting, and, Golightly's hands being slippery with the rain, contrived to get rid of Golightly at a

corner. He chased the animal, caught it, and went ahead briskly. The spill had not improved his clothes or his temper, and he had lost one spur. He kept the other one employed. By the time that stage was ended, the pony had had as much exercise as he wanted, and, in spite of the rain, Golightly was sweating freely. At the end of another miserable half-hour Golightly found the world disappear before his eyes in clammy pulp.

The rain had turned the pith of his huge and snowy into an evil-smelling dough, and it had closed on his head like a half-opened mushroom. Also the green lining was beginning to run.

Golightly did not say anything worth recording here. He tore off and squeezed up as much of the brim as was in his eyes and ploughed on. The back of the helmet was flapping on his neck and the sides stuck to his ears, but the leather band and green lining kept things roughly together, so that the hat did not actually melt away where it flapped.

Presently, the pulp and the green stuff made a sort of slimy mildew which ran over Golightly in several directions- down his back and bosom for choice. The colour ran too- it was really shockingly bad dye- and sections of Golightly were brown, and patches were violet, and contours were ochre, and streaks were ruddyred, and blotches were nearly white, according to the nature and peculiarities of the dye. When he took out his handkerchief to wipe his face, and the green of the hat-lining and the purple stuff that had soaked through on to his neck from the tie became thoroughly mixed, the effect was amazing.

Near Dhar the rain stopped and the evening sun came out and dried him up slightly. It fixed the colours, too. Three miles from Pathankote the last pony fell dead lame, and Golightly was forced to walk. He pushed on into Pathankote to find his servants. He did not know then that his had stopped by the roadside to get drunk, and would come on the next day saying that he had sprained his ankle.

When he got into Pathankote he couldn't find his servants, his boots were stiff and ropy with mud, and there were large quantities of dust about his body. The blue tie had run as much as the . So he took it off with the collar and threw it away. Then he said something about servants generally and tried to get a peg. He paid eight annas for the drink, and this revealed to him that he had only six annas more in his pocket- or in the world as he stood at that hour.

He went to the Station-Master to negotiate for a first-class ticket to Khasa, where he was stationed. The booking-clerk said something to the Station-Master, the Station-Master said something to the telegraph clerk, and the three looked at him with curiosity. They asked him to wait for half an hour, while they telegraphed to Umritsar for authority. So he waited and four constables came and grouped themselves picturesquely round him. Just as he was preparing to ask them to go away, the Station-Master said that he would give the a ticket to Umritsar, if the would kindly come inside the booking-office. Golightly stepped inside, and the next thing he knew was that a constable was attached to each of his legs and arms, while the Station-Master was trying to cram a mail-bag over his head.

There was a very fair scuffle all round the booking-office, and Golightly took a nasty cut over his eye through falling against a table. But the constables were too much for him, and they and the Station-Master handcuffed him securely. As soon as the mail-bag was slipped, he began expressing his opinions, and the head constable said, 'Without doubt this is the soldier-Englishman we required. Listen to the abuse!' Then Golightly asked the Station-Master what the this and the that the proceedings meant. The Station-Master told him he was 'Private John Binkle of the ___ Regiment, 5 ft. 9 in., fair hair, gray eyes, and a dissipated appearance, no marks on the body,' who had deserted a fortnight ago. Golightly began explaining at great length; and the more he explained the less the Station-Master believed him. He said that no Lieutenant could look such a ruffian as did Golightly, and that his instructions were to send his capture under proper escort to Umritsar.

Golightly was feeling very damp and uncomfortable and the language he used was not fit for publication, even in an expurgated form. The four constables saw him safe to Umritsar in an 'intermediate' compartment, and he spent the fourhour journey in abusing them as fluently as his knowledge of the vernaculars allowed.

At Umritsar he was bundled out on the platform into the arms of a Corporal and two men of the Regiment. Golightly drew himself up and tried to carry off matters jauntily. He did not feel too jauntily in handcuffs, with four constables behind him, and the blood from the cut on his forehead stiffening on his left cheek.

The Corporal was not jocular either. Golightly got as far as- 'This is a very absurd mistake, my men,' when the Corporal told him to 'stow his lip' and come along.

Golightly did not want to come along. He desired to stop and explain. He explained very well indeed, until the Corporal cut in with- ‘ a orficer! It’s the like o’ as brings disgrace on the likes of . Bloomin’ fine orficer you are! I know your regiment. The Rogue’s March is the quickstep where you come from. You’re a black shame to the Service.’ Golightly kept his temper, and began explaining all over again from the beginning. Then he was marched out of the rain into the refreshment-room and told not to make a qualified fool of himself. The men were going to run him up to Fort Govindghar. And ‘running up’ is a performance almost as undignified as the Frog March.

Golightly was nearly hysterical with rage and the chill and the mistake and the handcuffs and the headache that the cut on his forehead had given him. He really laid himself out to express what was in his mind. When he had quite finished and his throat was feeling dry, one of the men said, ‘I’ve ‘eard a few beggars in the clink blind, stiff and crack on a bit; but I’ve never ‘eard any one to touch this ‘ere “orficer.”’ They were not angry with him. They rather admired him. They had some beer at the refreshment-room, and offered Golightly some too, because he had ‘swore won’erful.’ They asked him to tell them all about the adventures of Private John Binkle while he was loose on the country-side; and that made Golightly wilder than ever. If he had kept his wits about him he would have been quiet until an officer came; but he attempted to run. Now the butt of a Martini in the small of your back hurts a great deal, and rotten, rain-soaked tears easily when two men are jerking at your collar.

Golightly rose from the floor feeling very sick and giddy, with his shirt ripped open all down his breast and nearly all down his back. He yielded to his luck, and at that point the down-train from Lahore came in, carrying one of Golightly’s Majors.

This is the Major’s evidence in full: ‘There was the sound of a scuffle in the second-class refreshment-room, so I went in and saw the most villainous loafer that I ever set eyes on. His boots and breeches were plastered with mud and beerstains. He wore a muddy-white dunghill sort of thing on his head, and it hung down in slips on his shoulders, which were a good deal scratched. He was half in and half out of a shirt as nearly in two pieces as it could be, and he was begging the guard to look at the name on the tail of it. As he had rucked the shirt all over his head, I couldn’t at first see who he was, but I fancied that he was a man in the first stage of D. T. from the way he swore while he wrestled with his rags.

When he turned round, and I had made allowances for a lump as big as a porkpie over one eye, and some green war-paint on the face, and some violet stripes round the neck, I saw that it was Golightly. He was very glad to see me, said the Major, 'and he hoped I would not tell the Mess about it. didn't, but you can, if you like, now that Golightly has gone Home.' Golightly spent the greater part of that summer in trying to get the Corporal and the two soldiers tried by Court-Martial for arresting an 'officer and a gentleman.' They were, of course, very sorry for their error. But the tale leaked into the regimental canteen, and thence ran about the Province.

THE END