

1888

THE DAUGHTER OF THE REGIMENT

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 Daughter of the Regiment (1888) - From "Plain Tales from the Hills," a collection of stories of life in India. A private tells why Sergeant Jhansi McKenna, Old Pummeloe's daughter, is called the daughter of the regiment.

DAUGHTER OF THE REGIMENT

Jain 'Ardin' was a Sargint's wife, A Sargint's wife wus she.
 She married of 'im in Orlershort An' comed acrost the sea.
 'Ave you never 'eard tell o' Jain 'Ardin'? Jain 'Ardin'? Jain 'Ardin'?
 'Ave you never 'eard tell o' Jain 'Ardin'? The pride o' the Compan -
 Old Barrack Room Ballad.

'A GENTLEMAN who doesn't know the Circasian Circle ought not to stand up for it- puttin' everybody out.' That was what Miss McKenna said, and the Sergeant who was my looked the same thing. I was afraid of Miss McKenna. She was six feet high, all yellow freckles and red hair, and was simply clad in white satin shoes, a pink muslin dress, an apple-green stuff sash, and black silk gloves, with yellow roses in her hair. Wherefore I fled from Miss McKenna and sought my friend Private Mulvaney, who was at the cant- refreshment-table.

'So you've been dancin' with little Jhansi McKenna, Sorr- she that's goin' to marry Corp'ril Slane? Whin you next conversh wid your lorruds an' your ladies, tell them you've danced wid little Jhansi. 'Tis a thing to be proud av.' But I wasn't proud. I was humble. I saw a story in Private Mulvaney's eye; and besides, if he stayed too long at the bar, he would, I knew, qualify for more pack-drill. Now to meet an esteemed friend doing pack-drill outside the guardroom is embarrassing, especially if you happen to be walking with his Commanding Officer. 'Come on to the parade-ground, Mulvaney, it's cooler there, and tell me about Miss McKenna. What is she, and who is she, and why is she called "Jhansi"?' 'D'ye mane to say you've niver heard av Ould Pummeloe's daughter? An' you thinkin' you know things! I'm wid ye in a minut' whin me poipe's lit.' We came out under the stars. Mulvaney sat down on one of the artillery bridges, and began in the usual way: his pipe between his teeth, his big hands clasped and dropped between his knees, and his cap well on the back of his head. 'Whin Mrs. Mulvaney, that is, was Miss Shad, that was, you were a dale younger than you are now, an' the Army was dif'rint in sev'ril e-senshuls. Bhoys have no call for to marry nowadays, an' that's why the Army has so few rale, good, honust, swearin', strap-agin', tinder-hearted, heavy-futted wives as ut used to have whin I was a Corp'ril. I was rejuiced afterwards- but no matter- I was a Corp'ril wanst. In thim times, a man lived died wid his rigiment; an' by natur', he married whin he was a . Whin I was Corp'ril- Mother av Hivin, how the rigimint has died an' been borrunsince that day!- my Colour-Sar'jint was Ould McKenna, an' a married man tu. An' his woife- his first

woife, for he married three times did McKenna- was Bridget McKenna, from Portarlinton, like mesilf.

I've misremembered fwhat her first name was, but in B Comp'ny we called her "Ould Pummeloe," by reason av her figure, which was entirely cir-cum-fe-renshill. Like the big dhrum! Now that woman- God rock her sowl to rest in glory!was for everlastin' havin' childher; an' McKenna, whin the fifth or sixth come squallin' on to the musther-roll, swore he wud number thim off in future. But Ould Pummeloe she prayed av him to christen them after the names av the stations they was borrun in. So there was Colaba McKenna, an' Muttra McKenna, an' a whole Presidincy av other McKennas, an' little Jhansi, dancin' over yonder.

Whin the childher wasn't bornin', they was dyin'; for, av our childher die like sheep in these days, they died like flies thin. I lost me own little Shad- but no matther. 'Tis long ago, and Mrs. Mulvaney niver had another.

'I'm digresshin. Wan divil's hot summer, there come an order from some mad ijjit, whose name I misremember, for the rigimint to go up-country. Maybe they wanted to know how the new rail carried throops. They knew! On me sowl, they knew before they was done! Old Pummeloe had just buried Muttra McKenna; an', the season bein' onwholesim, only little Jhansi McKenna, who was four year ould thin, was left on hand.

'Five childher gone in fourteen months. 'Twas harrd, wasn't ut? 'So we wint up to our new station in that blazin' heat- may the curse av Saint Lawrence conshume the man who gave the ordher! Will I iver forget that move? They gave us two wake thrains to the rigimint; an' we was eight hundher' and sivinty strong. There was A, B, C, an' D Companies in the secon' thrain, wid twelve women, no orficers' ladies, an' thirteen childher. We was to go six hundher' miles, an' railways was new in thim days. Whin we had been a night in the belly av the thrain- the men ragin' in their shirts an' dhrinkin' anything they cud find, an' eatin' bad fruit-stuff whin they cud, for we cudn't stop 'em- I was a Corp'ril thin- the cholera bruk out wid the dawnin' av the day.

'Pray to the Saints, you may niver see cholera in a throop-thrain! 'Tis like the judgmint av God hittin' down from the nakid sky! We run into a rest-camp- as ut might have been Ludianny, but not by any means so comfortable. The Orficer Commandin' sent a telegrapt up the line, three hundher' mile up, askin' for help.

Faith, we wanted ut, for ivry sowl av the followers ran for the dear life as soon as the thrain stopped; an' by the time that telegrapt was

writ, there wasn't a naygur in the station exceptin' the telegraph-clerk- an' he only bekaze he was held down to his chair by the scruff av his sneakin' black neck. Thin the day began wid the noise in the carr'ges, an' the rattle av the men on the platform fallin' over, arms an' all, as they stud for to answer the Comp'ny muster-roll before goin' over to the camp. 'Tisn't for me to say what like the cholera was like. Maybe the Doctor cud ha' tould, av he hadn't dropped on to the platform from the door av a carriage where we was takin' out the dead. He died wid the rest. Some bhoys had died in the night. We tuk out siven, and twenty more was sickenin' as we tuk thim. The women was huddled up anyways, screamin' wid fear.

'Sez the Commandin' Orficer whose name I misremember, "Take the women over to that tope av trees yonder. Get thim out av the camp. 'Tis no place for thim." 'Ould Pummeloe was sittin' on her beddin'-rowl, thryin' to kape little Jhansi quiet. "Go off to that tope!" sez the Orficer. "Go out av the men's way!" "Be damned av I do!" sez Ould Pummeloe, an' little Jhansi, squattin' by her mother's side, squeaks out, "Be damned av I do," tu. Thin Ould Pummeloe turns to the women an' she sez, "Are ye goin' to let the bhoys die while you're picnickin', ye sluts?" sez she. "'Tis wather they want. Come on an' help." 'Wid that, she turns up her sleeves an' steps out for a well behind the restcamp- little Jhansi trottin' behind wid a an' string, an' the other women followin' like lambs, wid horse-buckets and cookin' pots. Whin all the things was full, Ould Pummeloe marches back into camp- 'twas like a battlefield wid all the glory missin'- at the hid av the rigimint av women.

"McKenna, me man!" she sez, wid a voice on her like grand-roun's challenge, "tell the bhoys to be quiet. Ould Pummeloe's comin' to look afther thimwid free dhrinks." 'Thin we cheered, an' the cheerin' in the lines was louder than the noise av the poor divils wid the sickness on thim. But not much.

'You see, we was a new an' raw rigimint in those days, an' we cud make neither head nor tail av the sickness; an' so we was useless. The men was goin' roun' an' about like dumb sheep, waitin' for the nex' man to fall over, an' sayin' undher their spache, "Fwhat is ut? In the name av God, is ut?" 'Twas horrible.

But through ut all, up an' down, an' down an' up, wint Ould Pummeloe an' little Jhansi- all we cud see av the baby, undher a dead man's helmut wid the chin-strap swingin' about her little stummick- up an' down wid the wather an' fwhat brandy there was.

'Now an' thin Ould Pummeloe, the tears runnin' down her fat, red face, sez, "Me bhoys, me poor, dead, darlin' bhoys!" But, for the most, she was thryin' to put heart into the men an' kape thim stiddy; and little Jhansi was tellin' thim all they wud be "betther in the mornin'." 'Twas a thrick she'd picked up from hearin' Ould Pummeloe whin Muttra was burnin' out wid fever. In the mornin'! 'Twas the iverlastin' mornin' at St. Pether's Gate was the mornin' for siven-an'-twenty good men; and twenty more was sick to the death in that bitter, burnin' sun. But the women worked like angils as I've said, an'the men like divils, till two doctors come down from above, and we was rescued.

'But, just before that, Ould Pummeloe, on her knees over a bhoys in my squadright-cot man to me he was in the barrick- tellin' him the worrud av the Church that niver failed a man yet, sez, "Hould me up, bhoys! I'm feelin' bloody sick!" 'Twas the sun, not the cholera, did ut. She misremembered she was only wearin' her ould black bonnet, an' she died wid "McKenna, me man," houldin' her up, an' the bhoys howled whin they buried her.

'That night, a big wind blew, an' blew, an' blew, an' blew the tents flat. But it blew the cholera away an' niver another case there was all the while we was waitin'- ten days in quarantin'. Av you will belave me, the thrack av the sickness in the camp was for all the wurruld the thrack av a man walkin' four times in a figurav-eight through the tents. They say 'tis the Wandherin' Jew takes the cholera wid him. I believe ut.

'An' ,,' said Mulvaney, illogically, 'is the cause why little Jhansi McKenna is fwhat she is. She was brought up by the Quartermaster Sergeant's wife whin McKenna died, but she b'longs to B Comp'ny; and this tale I'm tellin' you a proper appreciashin av Jhansi McKenna- I've belted into ivry recruity av the Comp'ny as he was drafted. 'Faith, 'twas me belted Corp'ril Slane into askin' the girl!' 'Not really?' 'Man, I did! She's no beauty to look at, but she's Ould Pummeloe's daughter, an' 'tis my juty to provide for her. Just before Slane got his promotion I sez to him, "Slane," sez I, "tomorrow 'twill be insubordinashin av me to chastise you; but, by the sowl av Ould Pummeloe, who is now in glory, av you don't give me your wurrud to ask Jhansi McKenna at wanst, I'll peel the flesh off yer bones wid a brass huk to-night. 'Tis a dishgrace to B Comp'ny she's been single so long!" sez I. Was I goin' to let a three-year-ould preshume to discoorse wid me- my will bein' set? No! Slane wint an' asked her. He's a good bhoys is Slane. Wan av these days he'll get into the Com'ssariat an' dhrive a buggy wid his-

savin's. So I provided for Ould Pummeloe's daughter; an' now you go along an' dance agin wid her.' And I did.

I felt a respect for Miss Jhansi McKenna; and I went to her wedding later on.

Perhaps I will tell you about that one of these days.

THE END