

1888

THE TAKING OF LUNGTUNGPEN

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 Taking of Lungtungpen (1888) - From "Plain Tales from the Hills," a collection of stories of life in India. En route to capture a town, a group of soldiers remove their clothes to cross a river and then must fight naked.

TAKING OF LUNGTUNGPEN

So we loosed a bloomin' volley, An' we made the beggars cut, An'
when our pouch was emptied out, We used the bloomin' butt, Ho!
My! Don't yer come anigh, When Tommy is a playin' with the
baynit an' the butt.

Barrack Room Ballad.

My friend Private Mulvaney told me this, sitting on the parapet of
the road to Dagshai, when we were hunting butterflies together.
He had theories about the Army, and coloured clay pipes perfectly.
He said that the young soldier is the best to work with, 'on account
av the surpassing innocinse av the child.' 'Now, listen!' said
Mulvaney, throwing himself full length on the wall in the sun. 'I'm
a born scutt av the barrack-room! The Army's mate an' dhrink to
me, bekaze I'm wan av the few that can't quit ut. I've put in
sivinteen years, an' the pipeclay's in the marrow av me. Av I cud
have kept out av wan big dhrink a month, I wud have been a
Hon'ry Lift'nint by this time- a nuisance to my betthers, a laughin'-
shtock to my equils, an' a curse to meself. Bein' fwat I am, I'm
Privit Mulvaney, wid no good-conduc' pay an' a devourin' thirst.
Always barrin' me little frind Bobs Bahadur, I know as much about
the Army as most men.' I said something here.

'Wolseley be shot' Betune you an' me an' that butterfly net, he's a
ramblin', incoherint sort av a divil, wid wan oi on the Quane an'
the Coort, an' the other on his blessed silf- everlastin'ly playing
Saysar an' Alexandrier rowled into a lump.

Now Bobs is a sinsible little man. Wid Bobs an' a few three-year-
olds, I'd swape any army av the earth into a towel, an' throw it
away aftherwards. Faith, I'm not jokin'! 'Tis the bhoys- the raw
bhoys- that don't know fwat a bullut manes, an' wudn't care av
they did- that dhu the work. They're crammed wid bull-mate till
they fairly wid good livin'; and thin, av they don't fight, they blow
each other's hids off. 'Tis the trut' I'm tellin' you. They shud be
kept on water an' rice in the hot weather; but there'd be a mut'ny
av 'twas done.

'Did ye iver hear how Privit Mulvaney tuk the town av
Lungtungpen? I thought not! 'Twas the Lift'nint got the credit; but
'twas me planned the schame.

A little before I was inviladed from Burma, me an' four-an'-twenty
young wans undher a Lift'nint Brazenose, was ruinin' our dijeshins
thryin' to catch dacoits.

An' such double-ended divils I niver knew! 'Tis only a an' a Snider that makes a dacoit. Widout thim, he's a peaceful cultivator, an' felony for to shoot. We hunted, an' we hunted, an' tuk fever an' elephints now an' again; but no dacoits. Evenshually, we wan man. "Trate him tunderly," sez the Lift'nint. So I tuk him away into the jungle, wid the Burmese Interprut'r an' my clanin'-rod. Sez I to the man, "My peaceful squireen," sez I, "you shquot on your hunkers an' dimonstrate to frind here, where frinds are whin they're at home?" Wid that I introjuced him to the clanin'-rod, an' he comminst to jabber; the Interprut'r inteprutin' in between, an' me helpin' the Intilligince Departmint wid my clanin'-rod whin the man misremimbered. 'Prisintly, I learn that, acrost the river, about nine miles away, was a town just dhrippin' wid dahs, an' bohs an' arrows, an' dacoits, an' elephints, an' . "Good!" sez I; "this office will now close!" "That night, I went to the Lift'nint an' communicates my information. I never thought much of Lift'nint Brazenose till that night. He was shtiff wid books an' the-ouries, an' all manner av thrimmin's no manner av use. "Town did ye say?" sez he. "Accordin' to the the-ouries av War, we shud wait for reinforcements."- "Faith!" thinks I, "we'd betther dig our graves thin"; for the nearest throops was up to their shtocks in the marshes out Mimbu way. "But," says the Lift'nint, "since 'tis a speshil case, I'll make an excepshin. We'll visit this Lungtungpen tonight." "The bhoys was fairly woild wid deloight whin I tould 'em; an', by this an' that, they wint through the jungle like buck-rabbits. About midnight we come to the shtrame which I had clane forgot to minshin to my orficer. I was on ahead, wid four bhoys, an' I thought that the Lift'nint might want to the-ourise. "Shtrip bhoys!" sez I. "Shtrip to the buff and shwim in where glory waits!"- "But I shwim!" sez two av thim. "To think I should live to hear that from a bhoy wid a board-school edukashin!" sez I. "Take a lump av thimber, an' me an' Conolly here will ferry ye over, ye young ladies!" 'We got an ould tree-trunk, an' pushed off wid the kits an' the rifles on it. The night was chokin' dhark, an' just as we was fairly embarked, I heard the Lift'nint behind av me callin' out. "There's a bit av a here, Sorr," sez I, "but I can feel the bottom already." So I cud, for I was not a yard from the bank.

"Bit av a Bit av an eshtuary!" sez the Lift'nint. "Go on, ye mad Irishman! Shtrip bhoys!" I heard him laugh; an' the bhoys begun shtrippin' an' rollin' a log into the wather to put their kits on. So me an' Conolly shtruck out through the warm wather wid our log, an' the rest come on behind.

'That shtrame was miles woide! Orth'ris, on the rear-rank log, whispers we had got into the Thames below Sheerness by mistake.

“Kape on shwimmin’, ye little blayguard,” sez I, “an’ don’t go pokin’ your dirty jokes at the Irriwaddy.” “Silince, men!” sings out the Lift’nint. So we shwum on into the black dhark, wid our chests on the logs, trustin’ in the Saints an’ the luck av the British Army.

‘Evenshually, we hit ground- a bit av sand- an’ a man. I put my heel on the back av him. He skreeched an’ ran.

“ we’ve done it!” sez Lift’nint Brazenose. Where the Divil Lungtungpen?” There was about a minute and a half to wait. The bhoys laid a hould av their rifles an’ some thried to put their belts on; we was marchin’ with fixed baynits av coorse. Thin we knew where Lungtungpen was; for we had hit the river-wall av it in the dhark, an’ the whole town blazed wid thim messin’ an’ Sniders like a cat’s back on a frosty night. They was firin’ all ways at wanst; but over our hids into the shtrame.

“Have you got your rifles?” sez Brazenose. “Got ‘em!” sez Orth’ris. “I’ve got that thief Mulvaney’s for all my back-pay, an’ she’ll kick my heart sick wid that blunderin’ long shtock av hers.”- “Go on!” yells Brazenose, whippin’ his sword out. “Go on an’ take the town! An’ the Lord have mercy on our sowl!” ‘Thin the bhoys gave wan divastatin’ howl, an’ pranced into the dhark, feelin’ for the town, an’ blindin’ an’ stiffin’ like Cavalry Ridin’ Masters whin the grass pricked their bare legs. I hammered wid the butt at some bamboo-thing that felt wake, an’ the rest come an’ hammered contagious, while the was jingling, an’ feroshus yells from inside was shplittin’ our ears. We was too close under the wall for thim to hurt us.

‘Evenshually, the thing, whatever ut was, bruk; an’ the six-an’-twenty av us tumbled, wan after the other, naked as we were borrun, into the town of Lungtungpen. There was a av a sumpshus kind for a whoile; but whether they tuk us, all white an’ wet, for a new breed av divil, or a new kind av dacoit, I don’t know.

They ran as though we was both, an’ we wint into thim, baynit an’ butt, shriekin’ wid laughin’. There was torches in the shtreets, an’ I saw little Orth’ris rubbin’ his showlther ivry time he loosed my long-shtock Martini; an’ Brazenose walkin’ into the gang wid his sword, like Diarmid av the Gowlden Collar- barrin’ he hadn’t a stitch av clothin’ on him. We diskivered elephints wid dacoits under their bellies, an’, what wid wan thing an’ another, we was busy till mornin’ takin’ possession av the town of Lungtungpen.

‘Thin we halted an’ formed up, the wimmen howlin’ in the houses an’ Lift’nint Brazenose blushin’ pink in the light av the mornin’ sun. ‘Twas the most ondasint p’rade I iver tuk a hand in. Foive-an’-twenty privits an’ a orficer av the Line in review ordher, an’ not as

much as wud dust a fife betune 'em all in the way of clothin'! Eight av us had their belts an' pouches on; but the rest had gone in wid a handful av cartridges an' the skin God gave thim. was as nakid as Vanus.

"Number off from the right!" sez the Lift'nint. "Odd numbers fall out to dress; even numbers pathrol the town till relieved by the dressing party." Let me tell you, pathrollin' a town wid nothing on is an expayrience. I pathrolled for tin minutes, an' begad, before 'twas over, I blushed. The women laughed so. I niver blushed before or since; but I blushed all over my carkiss thin. Orth'ris didn't pathrol. He sed only, "Portsmith Barricks an' the 'Ard av a Sunday!" Thin he lay down an' rowled any ways wid laughin'.

'Whin we was all dhressed, we counted the dead- sivinty-foive dacoits, besides wounded. We tuk five elephints, a hunder' an' sivinty Sniders, two hunder' dahs, and a lot av other burglarious thruck. Not a man av us was hurt- excep' maybe the Lift'nint, an' he from the shock to his dasincy.

'The Headman av Lungtungpen, who surrinder'd himself, asked the Interprut'r- "Av the English fight like that wid their clo'es off, what in the wurruld do they do wid their clo'es on?" Orth'ris began rowlin' his eyes an' crackin' his fingers an' dancin' a step-dance for to impress the Headman. He ran to his house; an' we spint the rest av the day carryin' the Lift'nint on our showlthers round the town, an' playin' wid the Burmese babies- fat, little, brown little divils, as pretty as picturs.

'Whin I was inviladed for the dysent'ry to India, I sez to the Lift'nint, "Sorr," sez I, "you've the makin's in you av a great man; but, av you'll let an ould sodger spake, you're too fond of the-ourisin'." He shuk hands wid me and sez, "Hit high, hit low, there's no plasin' you, Mulvaney. You've seen me waltzin' through Lungtungpen like a Red Injin widout the war-paint, an' you say I'm too fond av the-ourisin'?"- "Sorr," sez I, for I loved the bhoys, "I wud waltz wid you in that condishin through , an' so wud the rest av the men!" Thin I wint downshtrame in the flat an' left him my blessin'. May the Saints carry ut where ut shud go, for he was a fine upstandin' young orficer.

'To reshume. Fwhat I've said jist shows the use av three-year-olds. Wud fifty seasoned sodgers have taken Lungtungpen in the dhark that way? No! They'd know the risk av fever and chill. Let alone the shootin'. Two hundher' might have done ut. But the three-year-olds know little an' care less; an' where there's no fear, there's no danger. Catch thim young, feed thim high, an' by the honour av

that great, little man Bobs, behind a good orficer 'tishn't only dacoits they'd smash wid their clo'es off- 'tis Con-tinental Ar-r-r-mies! They tuk Lungtungpen nakid; an' they'd take St. Pethersburg in their dhrawers! Begad, they would that!

'Here's your pipe, Sorr. Shmoke her tinderly wid honey-dew, afther letting the reek av the Canteen plug die away. But 'tis no good, thanks to you all the same, fillin' my pouch wid your chopped hay. Canteen baccy's like the Army. It shpoils a man's taste for moilder things.' So saying, Mulvaney took up his butterfly-net, and returned to barracks.

THE END