

Soldiers Three

By

Rudyard Kipling

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THE GOD FROM THE MACHINE

Hit a man an' help a woman, an' ye can't be far wrong anyways.--

Maxims of Private Mulvaney.

The Inexpressibles gave a ball. They borrowed a seven-pounder from the Gunners, and wreathed it with laurels, and made the dancing-floor plate-glass, and provided a supper, the like of which had never been eaten before, and set two sentries at the door of the room to hold the trays of programme-cards. My friend, Private Mulvaney, was one of the sentries, because he was the tallest man in the regiment. When the dance was fairly started the sentries were released, and Private Mulvaney went to curry favour with the Mess Sergeant in charge of the supper. Whether the Mess Sergeant gave or Mulvaney took, I cannot say. All that I am certain of is that, at supper-time, I found Mulvaney with Private Ortheris, two-thirds of a ham, a loaf of bread, half a pate-de-foie-gras, and two magnums of champagne, sitting on the roof of my carriage. As I came up I heard him saying--

'Praise be a danst doesn't come as often as Ord'ly-room, or, by this an' that, Orth'ris, me son, I wud be the dishgrace av the rig'mint instid av the brightest jool in uts crown.'

'Hand the Colonel's pet noosance,' said Ortheris. 'But wot makes you curse your rations? This 'ere fizzy stuff's good enough.'

'Stuff, ye uncivilised pagin! 'Tis champagne we're dhrinkin' now. 'Tisn't that I am set ag'in. 'Tis this quare stuff wid the little bits av black leather in it. I misdoubt I will be distressin'ly sick wid it in the mornin'. Fwhat is ut?'

'Goose liver,' I said, climbing on the top of the carriage, for I knew that it was better to sit out with Mulvaney than to dance many dances.

'Goose liver is ut?' said Mulvaney. 'Faith, I'm thinkin' thim that makes it wud do betther to cut up the Colonel. He carries a power av liver undher his right arrum whin the days are warm an' the nights chill. He wud give thim tons an' tons av liver. 'Tis he sez so. "I'm all liver to-day," sez he; an' wid that he ordhers me ten days C. B. for as moild a dhrink as iver a good sodger tuk betune his teeth.'

'That was when 'e wanted for to wash 'isself in the Fort Ditch,' Ortheris explained. 'Said there was too much beer in the Barrack water-butts for a God-fearing man. You was lucky in gettin' orf with wot you did, Mulvaney.'

'Say you so? Now I'm pershuaded I was cruel hard trated, seein' fwhat I've done for the likes av him in the days whin my eyes were wider opin than they are now. Man alive, for the Colonel to whip me on the peg in that way! Me that have saved the repitation av a ten times better man than him! 'Twas ne-farious--an' that manes a power av evil!'

'Never mind the nefariousness,' I said. 'Whose reputation did you save?'

'More's the pity, 'twasn't my own, but I tuk more trouble wid ut than av ut was. 'Twas just my way, messin' wid fwat was no business av mine. Hear now!' He settled himself at ease on the top of the carriage. 'I'll tell you all about ut. Av coorse I will name no names, for there's wan that's an orfcer's lady now, that was in ut, and no more will I name places, for a man is thracked by a place.'

'Eyah!' said Ortheris lazily, 'but this is a mixed story wot's comin'.'

'Wanst upon a time, as the childer-books say, I was a recruity.'

'Was you though?' said Ortheris; 'now that's extry-ordinary!'

'Orth'ris,' said Mulvaney, 'av you opin thim lips av yours again, I will, savin' your presince, Sorr, take you by the slack av your trousers an' heave you.'

'I'm mum,' said Ortheris. 'Wot 'appened when you was a recruity?'

'I was a betther recruity than you iver was or will be, but that's neither here nor there. Thin I became a man, an' the divil of a man I was fifteen years ago. They called me Buck Mulvaney in thim days, an', begad, I tuk a woman's eye. I did that! Ortheris, ye scrub, fwat are ye sniggerin' at? Do you misdoubt me?'

'Devil a doubt!' said Ortheris; 'but I've 'eard summat like that before!'

Mulvaney dismissed the impertinence with a lofty wave of his hand and continued--

'An' the orf'cers av the rig'mint I was in in thim days was orf'cers--gran' men, wid a manner on 'em, an' a way wid 'em such as is not made these days--all but wan--wan o' the capt'ns. A bad dhrill, a wake voice, an' a limp leg--thim three things are the signs av a bad man. You bear that in your mind, Orth'ris, me son.

'An' the Colonel av the rig'mint had a daughter--wan av thim lamblike, bleatin', pick-me-up-an'-carry-me-or-I'll-die gurls such as was made for the natural prey av men like the Capt'n, who was iverlastin' payin' coort to her, though the Colonel he said time an' over, "Kape out av the brute's way, my dear." But he niver had the heart for to send her away from the throuble, bein' as he was a widower, an' she their wan child.'

'Stop a minute, Mulvaney,' said I; 'how in the world did you come to know these things?'

'How did I come?' said Mulvaney, with a scornful grunt; 'bekase I'm turned durin' the Quane's pleasure to a lump av wood, lookin' out straight forninst me, wid a--a--candelabbrum in my hand, for you to

pick your cards out av, must I not see nor feel? Av coorse I du! Up my back, an' in my boots, an' in the short hair av the neck--that's where I kape my eyes whin I'm on duty an' the reg'lar wans are fixed. Know! Take my word for it, Sorr, ivrything an' a great dale more is known in a rig'mint; or fwat wud be the use av a Mess Sargint, or a Sargint's wife doin' wet-nurse to the Major's baby? To reshume. He was a bad dhrill was this Capt'n--a rotten bad dhrill--an' whin first I ran me eye over him, I sez to myself: "My Militia bantam!" I sez, "My cock av a Gosport dunghill"--'twas from Portsmouth he came to us--"there's combs to be cut," sez I, "an' by the grace av God,'tis Terence Mulvaney will cut thim."

'So he wint menowderin', and minanderin', an' blandandherin' roun' an' about the Colonel's daughter, an' she, poor innocint, lookin' at him like a Comm'ssariat bullock looks at the Comp'ny cook. He'd a dhirty little scrub av a black moustache, an' he twisted an' turned ivry wurrd he used as av he found ut too sweet for to spit out. Eyah! He was a tricky man an' a liar by natur'. Some are born so. He was wan. I knew he was over his belt in money borrowed from natives; besides a lot av other matthers which, in regard for your presince, Sorr, I will oblitherate. A little av fwat I knew, the Colonel knew, for he wud have none av him, an' that, I'm thinkin', by fwat happened aftherwards, the Capt'n knew.

'Wan day, bein' mortial idle, or they wud never ha' thried ut, the rig'mint gave amshure theatricals--orf'cers an' orf'cers' ladies. You've seen the likes time an' agin, Sorr, an' poor fun 'tis for them

that sit in the back row an' stamp wid their boots for the honour av the rig'mint. I was told off for to shif' the scenes, haulin' up this an' draggin' down that. Light work ut was, wid lashins av beer and the gurl that dhressed the or'cers' ladies--but she died in Aggra twelve years gone, an' my tongue's gettin' the bettther av me. They was actin' a play thing called Sweethearts, which you may ha' heard av, an' the Colonel's daughter she was a lady's maid. The Capt'n was a boy called Broom--Spread Broom was his name in the play. Thin I saw --ut come out in the actin'--fwhat I niver saw before, an' that was that he was no gentleman. They was too much together, thim two, a-whishperin' behind the scenes I shifted, an' some av what they said I heard; for I was death--blue death an' ivy--on the comb-cuttin'. He was iverlastin'ly oppressing her to fall in wid some sneakin' schame av his, an' she was thryin' to stand out against him, but not as though she was set in her will. I wonder now in thim days that my ears did not grow a yard on me head wid list'nin'. But I looked straight forninst me an' hauled up this an' dragged down that, such as was my duty, an' the or'cers' ladies sez one to another, thinkin' I was out av listen-reach: "Fwhat an obligin' young man is this Corp'ril Mulvaney!" I was a Corp'ril then. I was rejuced aafterwards, but, no matther, I was a Corp'ril wanst.

'Well, this Sweethearts' business wint on like most amshure theatricals, an' barrin' fwhat I suspicioned, 'twasn't till the dhress-rehearsal that I saw for certain that thim two--he the blackguard, an' she no wiser than she should ha' been--had put up an evasion.'

'A what?' said I.

'E-vasion! Fwhat you call an elopemint. E-vasion I calls it, bekaze, exceptin' whin 'tis right an' natural an' proper, 'tis wrong an' dhirty to steal a man's wan child she not knowin' her own mind. There was a Sargint in the Comm'ssariat who set my face upon e-vasions. I'll tell you about that--'

'Stick to the bloomin' Captains, Mulvaney,' said Ortheris; 'Comm'ssariat Sargints is low.'

Mulvaney accepted the amendment and went on:--

'Now I knew that the Colonel was no fool, any more than me, for I was hild the smartest man in the rig'mint, an' the Colonel was the best orf'cer commandin' in Asia; so fwhat he said an' I said was a mortal truth. We knew that the Capt'n was bad, but, for reasons which I have already oblitherated, I knew more than me Colonel. I wud ha' rolled out his face wid the butt av my gun before permittin' av him to steal the gurl. Saints knew av he wud ha' married her, and av he didn't she wud be in great tormint, an' the divil av a "scandal." But I niver sthruck, niver raised me hand on my shuperior orf'cer; an' that was a merricle now I come to considher it.'

'Mulvaney, the dawn's risin',' said Ortheris, 'an' we're no nearer 'ome than we was at the beginnin'. Lend me your pouch. Mine's all

dust.'

Mulvaney pitched his pouch over, and filled his pipe afresh.

'So the dhress-rehearsal came to an end, an', bekaze I was curious, I stayed behind whin the scene-shiftin' was ended, an' I shud ha' been in barricks, lyin' as flat as a toad under a painted cottage thing. They was talkin' in whispers, an' she was shiverin' an' gaspin' like a fresh-hukked fish. "Are you sure you've got the hang av the manewvers?" sez he, or wurrds to that effec', as the coort-martial sez. "Sure as death," sez she, "but I misdoubt 'tis cruel hard on my father." "Damn your father," sez he, or anyways 'twas fwat he thought, "the arrangement is as clear as mud. Jungi will drive the carr'ge afther all's over, an' you come to the station, cool an' aisy, in time for the two o'clock thrain, where I'll be wid your kit." "Faith," thinks I to myself, "thin there's a ayah in the business tu!"

'A powerful bad thing is a ayah. Don't you niver have any thruck wid wan. Thin he began sootherin' her, an' all the orf'cers an' orf'cers' ladies left, an' they put out the lights. To explain the theory av the flight, as they say at Muskthry, you must understand that afther this Sweethearts' nonsinse was ended, there was another little bit av a play called Couples--some kind av couple or another. The gurl was actin' in this, but not the man. I suspicioned he'd go to the station wid the gurl's kit at the end av the first piece. 'Twas the kit that flustered me, for I knew for a Capt'n to go trapesing about the impire wid the Lord knew what av a truso on his arrum was nefarious, an'

wud be worse than easin' the flag, so far as the talk aftherwards wint.'

"Old on, Mulvaney. Wot's truso?' said Ortheris.

'You're an uncivilised man, me son. Whin a gurl's married, all her kit an' 'coutrements are truso, which manes weddin'-portion. An' 'tis the same whin she's runnin' away, even wid the biggest blackguard on the Army List.

'So I made my plan av campaign. The Colonel's house was a good two miles away. "Dennis," sez I to my colour-sargint, "av you love me lend me your kyart, for me heart is bruk an' me feet is sore wid trampin' to and from this foolishness at the Gaff." An' Dennis lent ut, wid a rampin', stampin' red stallion in the shafts. Whin they was all settled down to their Sweethearts for the first scene, which was a long wan, I slips outside and into the kyart. Mother av Hivin! but I made that horse walk, an' we came into the Colonel's compound as the divil wint through Athlone--in standin' leps. There was no one there excipt the servints, an' I wint round to the back an' found the girl's ayah.

"Ye black brazen Jezebel," sez I, "sellin' your masther's honour for five rupees--pack up all the Miss Sahib's kit an' look slippy! Capt'n Sahib's order," sez I. "Going to the station we are," I sez, an' wid that I laid my finger to my nose an' looked the schamin' sinner I was.

"Bote acchy," says she; so I knew she was in the business, an' I

piled up all the sweet talk I'd iver learnt in the bazars on to this she-bullock, an' prayed av her to put all the quick she knew into the thing. While she packed, I stud outside an' sweated, for I was wanted for to shif the second scene. I tell you, a young gurl's e-vasion manes as much baggage as a rig'mint on the line av march! "Saints help Dennis's springs," thinks I, as I bundled the stuff into the thrap, "for I'll have no mercy!"

"I'm comin' too," says the ayah.

"No, you don't," sez I, "later--pechy! You baito where you are. I'll pechy come an' bring you sart, along with me, you maraudin'"-niver mind fwhat I called her.

'Thin I wint for the Gaff, an' by the special ordher av Providence, for I was doin' a good work you will ondersthand, Dennis's springs hild toight. "Now, whin the Capt'n goes for that kit," thinks I, "he'll be throubled." At the end av Sweethearts off the Capt'n runs in his kyart to the Colonel's house, an' I sits down on the steps and laughs. Wanst an' again I slipped in to see how the little piece was goin', an' whin ut was near endin' I stepped out all among the carr'ges an' sings out very softly, "Jungi!" Wid that a carr'ge began to move, an' I waved to the dhriver. "Hitherao!" sez I, an' he hitheraoed till I judged he was at proper distance, an' thin I tuk him, fair an' square betune the eyes, all I knew for good or bad, an' he dhropped wid a guggle like the canteen beer-engine whin ut's runnin' low. Thin I ran to the kyart an' tuk out all the kit an' piled it into the carr'ge,

the sweat runnin' down my face in dhrops. "Go home," sez I, to the sais; "you'll find a man close here. Very sick he is. Take him away, an' av you iver say wan wurrd about fwhat you've dekkloed, I'll marrow you till your own wife won't sumjao who you are!" Thin I heard the stampin' av feet at the ind av the play, an' I ran in to let down the curtain. Whin they all came out the gurl thried to hide herself behind wan av the pillars, an' sez "Jungi" in a voice that wouldn't ha' scared a hare. I run over to Jungi's carr'ge an' tuk up the lousy old horse-blanket on the box, wrapped my head an' the rest av me in ut, an' dhrove up to where she was.

"Miss Sahib," sez I; "going to the station? Captain Sahib's order!" an' widout a sign she jumped in all among her own kit.

I laid to an' dhruv like steam to the Colonel's house before the Colonel was there, an' she screamed an' I thought she was goin' off. Out comes the ayah, saying all sorts av things about the Capt'n havin' come for the kit an' gone to the station.

"Take out the luggage, you divil," sez I, "or I'll murther you!"

The lights av the thraps people comin' from the Gaff was showin' across the parade ground, an', by this an' that, the way thim two women worked at the bundles an' thrunks was a caution! I was dyin' to help, but, seein' I didn't want to be known, I sat wid the blanket roun' me an' coughed an' thanked the Saints there was no moon that night.

'Whin all was in the house again, I niver asked for bukshish but dhruv tremenjus in the opp'site way from the other carr'ge an' put out my lights. Presintly, I saw a naygur man wallowin' in the road. I slipped down before I got to him, for I suspicioned Providence was wid me all through that night. 'Twas Jungi, his nose smashed in flat, all dumb sick as you please. Dennis's man must have tilted him out av the thrap. Whin he came to, "Hutt!" sez I, but he began to howl.

"You black lump av dirt," I sez, "is this the way you dhrive your gharri? That tikka has been owin' an' fere-owin' all over the bloomin' country this whole bloomin' night, an' you as mut-walla as Davey's sow. Get up, you hog!" sez I, louder, for I heard the wheels av a thrap in the dark; "get up an' light your lamps, or you'll be run into!" This was on the road to the Railway Station.

"Fwhat the divil's this?" sez the Capt'n's voice in the dhark, an' I could judge he was in a lather av rage.

"Gharri dhriver here, dh drunk, Sorr," sez I; "I've found his gharri sthrayin' about cantonmints, an' now I've found him."

"Oh!" sez the Capt'n; "fwhat's his name?" I stooped down an' pretended to listen.

"He sez his name's Jungi, Sorr," sez I.

"Hould my harse," sez the Capt'n to his man, an' wid that he gets

down wid the whip an' lays into Jungi, just mad wid rage an' swearin' like the scutt he was.

'I thought, afther a while, he wud kill the man, so I sez:--"Stop, Sorr, or you'll, murdher him!" That dhrew all his fire on me, an' he cursed me into Blazes, an' out again. I stud to attenshin an' saluted:-- "Sorr," sez I, "av ivry man in this wurruld had his rights, I'm thinkin' that more than wan wud be beaten to a jelly for this night's work--that niver came off at all, Sorr, as you see?" "Now," thinks I to myself, "Terence Mulvaney, you've cut your own throat, for he'll sthrike, an' you'll knock him down for the good av his sowl an' your own iverlastin' dishgrace!"

'But the Capt'n niver said a single wurrd. He choked where he stud, an' thin he went into his thrap widout sayin' good-night, an' I wint back to barricks.'

'And then?' said Ortheris and I together.

'That was all,' said Mulvaney; 'niver another word did I hear av the whole thing. All I know was that there was no e-vasion, an' that was fwhat I wanted. Now, I put ut to you, Sorr, is ten days' C. B. a fit an' a proper tratement for a man who has behaved as me?'

'Well, any'ow,' said Ortheris, 'tweren't this 'ere Colonel's daughter, an' you was blazin' copped when you tried to wash in the Fort Ditch.'

'That,' said Mulvaney, finishing the champagne, 'is a shuparfluous an' impert'nint observation.'

OF THOSE CALLED

[Footnote: 1895]

We were wallowing through the China Seas in a dense fog, the horn blowing every two minutes for the benefit of the fishery craft that crowded the waterways. From the bridge the fo'c'sle was invisible; from the hand-wheel at the stern the captain's cabin. The fog held possession of everything--the pearly white fog. Once or twice when it tried to lift, we saw a glimpse of the oily sea, the flitting vision of a junk's sail spread in the vain hope of catching the breeze, or the buoys of a line of nets. Somewhere close to us lay the land, but it might have been the Kurile Islands for aught we knew. Very early in the morning there passed us, not a cable's-length away, but as unseen as the spirits of the dead, a steamer of the same line as ours. She howled melodiously in answer to our bellowing, and passed on.

'Suppose she had hit us,' said a man from Saigon. 'Then we should have gone down,' answered the chief officer sweetly. 'Beastly thing to go down in a fog,' said a young gentleman who was travelling for pleasure. 'Chokes a man both ways, y' know.' We were comfortably