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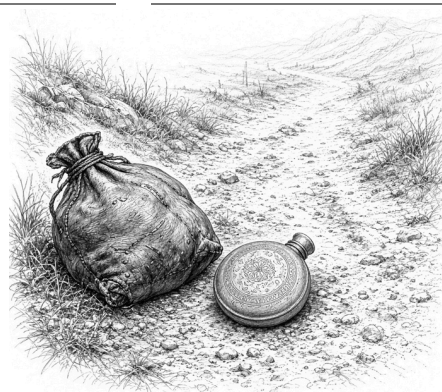
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Gunga Din

by Rudyard Kipling

Grades 9–12 · Common Core RL.9–10.6, RL.9–10.4, RL.9–10.3

“Gunga Din” appeared in 1890 and was collected in *Barrack-Room Ballads* (1892). It is a dramatic monologue in the Cockney dialect of a British private serving in India. A bhisti carried water for the troops. Readers should notice both the soldier’s racist language and contempt and the way the poem turns that contempt against him.



THE POEM

You may talk o’ gin and beer
When you’re quartered safe out ‘ere,
An’ you’re sent to penny-fights an’ Aldershot it;
But when it comes to slaughter
5 You will do your work on water,
An’ you’ll lick the bloomin’ boots of ‘im that’s got it.

Now in Injia’s sunny clime,
Where I used to spend my time
A-servin’ of ‘Er Majesty the Queen,
10 Of all them blackfaced crew
The finest man I knew
Was our regimental bhisti, Gunga Din.

He was “Din! Din! Din!
You limp in’ lump o’ brick-dust, Gunga Din!
15 Hi! slippery hitherao!
Water, get it! Panee lao!
You squidgy-nosed old idol, Gunga Din.”

The uniform ‘e wore
Was nothin’ much before,
20 An’ rather less than ‘arf o’ that be’ind,
For a piece o’ twisty rag
An’ a goatskin water-bag
Was all the field-equipment ‘e could find.

When the sweatin’ troop-train lay
25 In a sidin’ through the day,
Where the ‘eat would make your bloomin’ eyebrows crawl,
We shouted “Harry By!”
Till our throats were bricky-dry,
Then we wopped ‘im ‘cause ‘e couldn’t serve us all.

30 It was "Din! Din! Din!
 You 'eathen, where the mischief 'ave you been?
 You put some juldee in it
 Or I'll marrow you this minute
 If you don't fill up my helmet, Gunga Din!"

35 'E would dot an' carry one
 Till the longest day was done;
 An' 'e didn't seem to know the use o' fear.
 If we charged or broke or cut,
 You could bet your bloomin' nut,
 40 'E'd be waitin' fifty paces right flank rear.
 With 'is mussick on 'is back,
 'E would skip with our attack,
 An' watch us till the bugles made "Retire",
 An' for all 'is dirty 'ide
 45 'E was white, clear white, inside
 When 'e went to tend the wounded under fire!
 It was "Din! Din! Din!"
 With the bullets kickin' dust-spots on the green.
 When the cartridges ran out,
 50 You could hear the front-files shout,
 "Hi! ammunition-mules an' Gunga Din!"
 I shan't forgit the night
 When I dropped be'ind the fight
 With a bullet where my belt-plate should 'a' been.
 55 I was chokin' mad with thirst,
 An' the man that spied me first
 Was our good old grinnin', gruntin' Gunga Din.
 'E lifted up my 'ead,
 An' he plugged me where I bled,
 60 An' 'e guv me 'arf-a-pint o' water-green:
 It was crawlin' and it stunk,
 But of all the drinks I've drunk,
 I'm gratefulest to one from Gunga Din.
 It was "Din! Din! Din!"
 65 'Ere's a beggar with a bullet through 'is spleen;
 'E's chawin' up the ground,
 An' 'e's kickin' all around:
 For Gawd's sake git the water, Gunga Din!"

'E carried me away
70 To where a dooli lay,
An' a bullet come an' drilled the beggar clean.
'E put me safe inside,
An' just before 'e died,
"I 'ope you liked your drink", sez Gunga Din.
75 So I'll meet 'im later on
At the place where 'e is gone—
Where it's always double drill and no canteen;
'E'll be squattin' on the coals
Givin' drink to poor damned souls,
80 An' I'll get a swig in hell from Gunga Din!
Yes, Din! Din! Din!
You Lazarushian-leather Gunga Din!
Though I've belted you and flayed you,
By the livin' Gawd that made you,
85 You're a better man than I am, Gunga Din!

VOCABULARY

bhisti — a water-carrier for the army in India

clime — climate; region

regimental — belonging to a regiment of soldiers

goatskin water-bag — the bag Din used to carry water

mussick — a leather water-bag (dialect)

dooli — a covered stretcher for carrying the wounded

canteen — a soldiers' shop selling drink

flayed — whipped hard; stripped the skin

DISCUSSION QUESTIONS

1. How do the soldiers treat Gunga Din in the first half of the poem? Quote two lines.

2. What does the speaker mean when he says Din “didn’t seem to know the use o’ fear”?

3. What happens on “the night / When I dropped be’ind the fight”?

4. How does the refrain “Din! Din! Din!” change in meaning from the start to the end of the poem?

5. Why is the last line surprising? Does it undo the speaker’s earlier prejudice, or only partly?

WRITING PROMPT

Rewrite one stanza from Gunga Din’s point of view, in plain modern English, describing the soldiers who order him around.

Gunga Din — Answer Key

1. They insult and beat him: “You limpin’ lump o’ brick-dust” and “Then we wopped ‘im ‘cause ‘e couldn’t serve us all.” Also “Though I’ve belted you and flayed you”.
2. He is brave under fire, waiting “fifty paces right flank rear” and going “to tend the wounded under fire”.
3. The speaker is shot; Din gives him water, carries him “To where a dooli lay”, and is killed by “a bullet” just after.
4. At first it is an impatient shout for service; by the end it is an admiring cry of gratitude and respect.
5. He admits the servant he looked down on was the better man. It reverses the earlier contempt, but he still uses insulting language (“white, clear white, inside”), so his change is incomplete. Accept supported answers.

Read the full poem online: poetrycatalog.com/gunga-din-rudyard-kipling/