

Rudyard Kipling (1865-1936)

4 *The Ballad of Minepit Shaw*

(“The Tree of Justice” — *Rewards and Fairies*)

About the time that taverns shut
And men can buy no beer,
Two lads went up to the keepers’ hut
To steal Lord Pelham’s deer.

Night and the liquor was in their heads — 5
They laughed and talked no bounds,
Till they waked the keepers on their beds
And the keepers loosed the hounds.

They had killed a hart, they had killed a hind,
Ready to carry away, 10
When they heard a whimper down the wind
And they heard a bloodhound bay.

They took and ran across the fern,
Their crossbows in their hand,
Till they met a man with a green lantern 15
That called and bade ’em stand.

“What are ye doing, O Flesh and Blood,
And what’s your foolish will,
That you must break into Minepit Wood
And wake the Folk of the Hill?” 20

“Oh, we’ve broke into Lord Pelham’s park,
And killed Lord Pelham’s deer,
And if ever you heard a little dog bark
You’ll know why we come here.

“We ask you let us go our way, 25
As fast as we can flee,
For if ever you heard a bloodhound bay
You’ll know how pressed we be.”

“Oh, lay your crossbows on the bank 30
And drop the knives from your hand,
And though the hounds be at your flank
I’ll save you where you stand!”

They laid their crossbows on the bank, 35
They threw their knives in the wood,
And the ground before them opened and sank
And saved ’em where they stood.

“Oh, what’s the roaring in our ears
That strikes us well-nigh dumb?” 40
“Oh, that is just how things appears
According as they come.”

“What are the stars before our eyes
That strike us well-nigh blind?”
“Oh, that is just how things arise 45
According as you find.”

“And why’s our bed so hard to the bones
Excepting where it’s cold?”
“Oh, that’s because it is precious stones
Excepting where ’tis gold. 50

“Think it over as you stand,
For I tell you without fail,
If you haven’t got into Fairyland
You’re not in Lewes Gaol.”

All night long they thought of it, 55
And, come the dawn, they saw

They'd tumbled into a great old pit,
At the bottom of Minepit Shaw.

And the keeper's hound had followed 'em close,
And broke her neck in the fall; 60
So they picked up their knives and their crossbows
And buried the dog. That's all.

But whether the man was a poacher too
Or a Pharisee so bold —
I reckon there's more things told than are true, 65
And more things true than are told!

1910

(From *Rudyard Kipling's Verse*. Definitive edition.
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