

IF

Joseph Rudyard Kipling, the writer of the poem "If" died at midnight 18th January 1936. His wife Carrie, an American, made an entry in the diary she'd kept ever since she became his wife : *"Rud died at 12.00. Our wedding day"*. They'd been married for exactly forty-five years.

Kipling nearly died in 1899 when he and Josephine, the elder of his two little daughters, both came down with severe pneumonia brought on by a bitterly cold and stormy voyage to New York. The six year old Josephine, whom he adored, died. It left an open wound in his heart for the rest of his days.

Both of Kipling's grandfathers were Methodist ministers, probably accounting for Rudyard's tendency to preach. His father, John Lockwood Kipling, was an artist and sculptor as well as an accomplished writer. His mother Alice also *dabbled in writing and poetry. They first met on the shores of Lake Rudyard in Staffordshire.*

Later, they sailed for India where John had been appointed a professor at the new School of Art in Bombay. Rud, or Ruddy as his parents called him, was born there. Six years later he was sent back to England to be educated.

His mother couldn't go with him; she didn't have enough to pay for the voyage. John's salary was low. Several aunts offered to look after him in England but his mother refused. Others thought his mother was afraid he would love one of his aunts more than her.

Rudyard was boarded with a stranger who eked out her husband's pension by boarding children from distant parts of the empire. He was told to call her Aunty Rosa.. She took an instant dislike to Rudyard: he'd been spoiled by his parents' Indian servants.

One of Aunty Rosa's punishments was to forbid Rudyard to read. She'd discovered his passion for books, his only escape from the harsh reality he was facing. Rudyard read by stealth, usually in bad light, using a stolen candle-end. This strained his eyesight so badly in later years he could only read something within an inch or two of his nose.

Rudyard was to be with Aunty Rosa for six years but after five his mother hurried back to England. One of his aunts had written to her of his treatment. His mother found the noisy six year old she had left behind had become a thin, wary, half-blind boy of eleven.

He was sent to a public school, the United Services College at Westward Ho! In Devon. He was nicknamed "Gig-lamps", or "Gigger", because of his thick-lensed glasses. But here his writing talent became evident. The headmaster made him editor of the school magazine.