

## *My Orderly*

Let me first state that this Orderly of mine (No. 1) is a strong, stout, apparently unsentimental fellow. For the rest, an honest or braver man never breathed. After some hardships and dangers encountered during the day, we were sitting round a large fire of sandal-wood, a luxury you can't afford in England. Lying upon the ground at night, half starved by day, we can often enjoy a fire that our queen might envy; for this wood, when burning, gives out a delicious odor.

And now My Orderly (No. 1) speaks.

"I had a mate in Californy. I won't tell his surname, sir. Many bad characters were there, and for self-defense, Harry and I kept much to ourselves. So I got to know him well, and to love him well, too, for he was a man in every way. We were very fortunate, and made a pile, when one day Harry said to me:

"Tom, old man, I'll go home and marry Peggy."

"This brought me up standing, for I didn't see how I could part with him. I took the pipe out of my mouth, and looked at him without speaking. I think he saw how it was, for he said, immediately:

"I'll bring her out, you know, old fellow, to whatever part of Australey you go to, as we're going to leave this."

"Not on my account, Harry," I says.

"No," says he, "but on my own account; on Peggy's account. Old man, I know you, and we don't part so easy." Ah, he were so good-hearted, were Harry.

"Well, sir, the short and the long of it was, that we squared up. I saw him on board ship in no time—for it was a long engagement with Peggy—and I helped him to hurry away. This was, I think, in '48 or '49. I had told him I was bound for Sydney, and to direct letters to the post-office there. I went off to Sydney, had a try at the Bathurst diggins; came down after a long while, and found a letter waiting for me from Harry. He wasn't an educated man, sir, but I declare I have read in grand books things not half so good as what I have read in his letters. He told me of his meeting with Peggy. Shall I tell you of that, sir?"

"Of course, my man," I said, "tell me all you can of Harry."

"When Harry, on his return to Ireland, reached the town of Caven, where Peggy was born, and where" (here My Orderly, No. 1, hesitated in an odd way), "and where," he went on, "I was born, too. What did Harry do but put on his old digger's clothes that he had kept safe, makes inquiries whether the old curmudgeon, Peggy's father, was still alive, and all that, finds he *is* alive, and goes at dusk to the little cottage outside the town.

“They didn’t know him at first, for the sun out here doesn’t improve a man’s complexion; but he soon made himself known, and Peggy fell into his arms in a dead faint. Her father was in an awful passion. He had always opposed the courtship most bitter.

“‘What,’ says he, ‘are you come back, you vagabond, to steal about my place again by night, as you did long ago, when you wanted my child to run away with you?’

“‘No sir,’ says Harry, ‘don’t you see I am coming openly now? I haven’t been able to forget Peggy, and she hasn’t forgot me; so now, Mr. Hickey, will you give her to me?’

“‘Why, you madman,’ says Hickey, ‘am I likely to give my child to a man in rags? What a hopeless profligate you must be not to be able to have done better in Californy than to come home in the clothes you’re in.’

“‘Mr. Hickey,’ says Harry, ‘I am willing to work hard for your daughter as an honest man, and we love each other, and can’t get over it. Will you give her to me or no?’

“‘Begone, you beggar,’ shouts the other, ‘or I may forget myself in my own house.’

“‘All right, sir,’ says Harry; ‘but you’ll be sorry for this.’

“Two days after, Peggy walked out quietly, and was married to the man of her choice.

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“Exactly one week after this, an old man was shown into a comfortable sitting-room in a neighboring town. Harry and his wife had just dined. Peggy started up.

“‘Don’t speak to me now, Peg,’ said the old man, who seemed to have a sore throat. ‘Go into another room for a minute or two.’

“She looked anxiously at her father and her husband for a second, was satisfied, and walked away.

“‘O Harry, O dear Harry,’ said the old man, ‘on my knees I ask your forgiveness. I couldn’t do it before my child, but do you know *all* you have done? My poor wife and myself would have been driven out upon the highway only for you.’

“‘Father-in-law,’ says Harry, ‘you know I would have done it for *her* sake alone; but I declare, I think I would have done it even for the sake of showing to an old man that there’s a better way of using money than hoarding it.’

“Harry had found out that Hickey had got into unlucky entanglements, that the screw was about to be applied; so he went to the creditors, paid them, and sent the receipts to Hickey for one thousand one hundred pounds.

“Some time after this,” continued My Orderly (No. 1), “I heard of great diggings in Port Philip, and I wrote to Harry, telling him I intended to go there. Off I started, reached Bendigo, pitched my tent on Eagle Hawk Gully, and was getting any amount of gold. Why, sir, you couldn’t believe it unless you was there.”

“I *was* there,” I said, “and at the earliest period, so go on.”

“I had left directions,” continued My Orderly (No. 1), “with a friend in Melbourne to forward my letters to the Bendigo post-office, and one day I got a letter telling me that Harry, and Peggy, and their little girl would be in Melbourne almost as soon as the letter would reach me.

“O, how I did ride down to Melbourne! They hadn’t arrived, though, and I had to wait for more than a week, but this gave me means to have everything comfortable for them when they should arrive. For what an awful place it was! Tender ladies continually landing, and from want of room in Melbourne, compelled to go into tents; and their little children almost starving, and eaten alive with mosquitoes and vermin—upon my soul, sir, I don’t like to talk about it.

“They came at last, and—well, well, I suppose I must confess it, but it was the only time that ever a woman told *me* not to—not to—feel a thing so much. You’re not laughing at me, sir?” said My Orderly (No. 1), interrupting himself.

“No, I am not, indeed, Tom. Go on.”

But I must inform the reader that here Tom showed great reluctance to go on; and before he *did* go on he gave utterance to sobs, so exceedingly like sobs suppressed in a manly way, that I felt my own feelings considerably touched, because I knew his character so well.

“Their little girl, now between three and four years of age—what is the use of my trying to describe her? She was like an old woman in sense, but was as gay, and light-hearted, and full of childish sport, as the queen of the fairies herself. Such talk as hers was! But then, you see, Peggy was a good and true woman, Harry was a good and true man, so she was kept from evil example. I assisted them in what they did for her.”

Here there was another pause of some length.

“I will tell you a secret, sir, that I didn’t intend to tell. Peggy and I had been reared together, and she was the only being I ever loved in the same way. It was me that brought Harry and her together. I saw, too late, that they could only be happy with each other. I knew what a good fellow he was. It was me that put it in his head to go to Californy, and I went with him to help him make his fortune and marry her. For, you see, it was a hopeless cause for me, and why shouldn’t I do all I could for two such dear friends?

“Well, when they all got out, Harry would have it that wife and child must go with him and me to Bendigo. I wished them to be left in some respectable lodging-house, but Harry was obstinate.

“It’s no use talking, Tom,’ says he; ‘I will not leave them in this rowdy place. Things are bad, indeed, as you say, at Eagle Hawk, but I’ll have a first-rate marquee for them, and I’ll pitch it always near where we work; so they’ll be all right.’

“We went up to Bendigo in a spring wagon, well roofed, and arrived in safety. The marquee was pitched quite close to our ‘claims,’ and in a short time Peggy was as happy as possible. Her life was not laborious, as you may guess, sir; for we even got washing done for her, which is much to say in the case of a digger’s wife.

“I really do think that the happiest days I ever spent in my life were the days I spent there, working hard with Harry for a few hours, and spending most of my evenings with Peggy, the little girl, and Harry. My God! what a queer power some children have over a man! I’ll give you an instance.

“One evening little Lizzy was sitting on my knee, very silent; all at once, she says:

“Do oo ever say oor prayers?”

“Now this took me quite aback, for I had promised my mother, many years before, never to neglect *this*. I didn’t know what to answer, so I said:

“Why do you ask me that, Liz?” And her answer was stranger:

“Because I like oo, Tom, and because I want God to like oo. God wont like oo, if oo don’t say oor prayers.’

“And then the little thing slid down from my knee, knelt on the ground, and said:

“Pray God make Tom good; pray God like Tom; pray God make Tom say his prayers.”

There was a tremendous pause after this. My Orderly seemed to have swallowed one of those confounded mosquitoes, and was trying hard for a long time to get it up. I made a remark to encourage him, and he went on.

“We had to shift our quarters, at last, from want of water, so we went to another gully at some distance, where there was much deeper sinking. We sunk several holes, and did pretty well for some time.

“When here, I met a man that I felt at once a deadly hatred to. It’s not my nature, and it was a very strange thing. I met him at a grog-shop; for I wasn’t a saint, and used to take my glass now and then. This fellow was a tall, lanky, black-browed fellow, with a scowl—well, when he tried to laugh, why, of the two, I preferred the scowl.

“He seemed to dislike every human being except little Lizzie, but he really acted as though he liked her. Every time he passed our camp, and saw her, he would try to make her take a small

nugget, or a few raisins, or currants, or walnuts. The child always refused his gifts. She shuddered when he spoke to her, and used to run up to Harry and me for protection.

“Harry shared with me this feeling of hatred, for it was nothing else; and when persons have such feelings as these, it does not take much to make a quarrel; so a quarrel did take place between Harry and this man Cornish, and Harry gave him an awful hammering. As Cornish was leaving the place, he held up his finger in a threatening way to Harry, and gave him such a devilish look out of his battered eyes, as I shall never forget to my dying day. Harry only laughed at him, and asked him if he wanted any more? But I well remembered a similar gesture that I read of in Sir Walter Scott’s tale of the ‘Two Drovers,’ and I felt very uneasy.

“At length the gully began to thin. Men left their claims, and no others came in their place. Our hole was cleared out, and there was nothing for it but to go ‘prospecting.’

“Harry and I started one morning, intending to be back at nightfall. Little Lizzy clung to me, and besought me ‘not to tarry long.’ But on our way back we got bewildered in a dense scrub, and it was far in the night before we got clear of it.

“Don’t believe them, sir, that laugh at forebodings of evil. I was as sure there was something wrong as I was of my existence. Yes, and there *was* something wrong. When we got back, Peggy was surrounded by the few women of the place, quite insensible. Harry turned sick, and was going to fall. He could only say to me, as I held him up, ‘Ask, ask.’

“‘What is all this, Mrs. Murphy?’ I asked.

“‘Och, Tom dear, poor little Lizzy. The Lord be good to me;’ and she sobbed in genuine sorrow.

“I was trembling all over, and felt very giddy, but I managed to gasp out:

“‘Will no one here, in God’s name, tell us what has happened?’

“‘She’s lost, Tom. Every one’s hunting for her everywhere. She’s lost since sundown.’

“Harry rose up as cool as a man could be, assisted the women to restore his wife to her senses, and then, after fearful explosions of grief, we learned that Peggy had gone down to the creek for water, leaving Lizzy asleep in the marquee. The creek was some distance off, and as she did not feel well, she sat down many times to rest. When she got back, Lizzy was gone.”

Here My Orderly (No. 1) appeared to have swallowed about a dozen mosquitoes, and somehow my Other Orderlies began to complain what an infernal nuisance “them beasts of horse mosquitoes were.”

“‘Cheer up, my girl,’ says Harry; ‘all’s not lost that’s in danger. Tom and I must go and see about this?’

“We went outside, and, before we mounted our horses, Tom [Harry] came up to me, and said:

“Let me feel your hand, Tom. Right, you are all there, I see. I want to say one word to you, Tom. I am a very wicked man.’

“Are you a lunatic, Harry?’ says I. ‘Has this turned your brain, after all?’

“No, Tom,’ he said, ‘I am a villain in allowing certain thoughts to cross my mind.’

“What do you mean?’ I said.

“This,’ says he: ‘I believe Lizzy has been taken away, and is perhaps murdered.’

“Be a man, Harry,’ I answers. ‘Do you suspect any one?’

“He did not answer, but mounted his horse, and we rode away. That long night through we rode about ‘coocying,’ and many a narrow escape we had from tumbling down the deep holes. We met others, too, as busy as we were, on the same errand. But we all returned without success.

“That evening, as we sat in the marquee taking some refreshment, I said to Harry:

“You recollect what you said to me last night?’

“Says he, ‘And are you not of my mind?’

“Listen to me, Tom,’ I said. ‘Jimmy is now at Rooke’s station, about thirty miles off. He’s the best tracker in the colonies. Bring him into the marquee, and whoever took the child away, Jimmy will track better than a bloodhound.’

“No good, Tom,’ says he. ‘Look at the crowds of people that have been here since; every track of last night is gone.’

“Never mind,’ I answers. ‘Jimmy must be got. It’s our *only* chance.’

“Harry rode over, and got the black fellow. He could speak English very well, and understood in an instant what he had to do. It was very curious to see how he commenced his work. He spent at least an hour about the bunk that Lizzy had been sleeping on. Then he got up, and led the way slowly towards a scrub not more than two hundred yards off. We entered it; he went on until he came to a spot where he stopped, as though uncertain. After some time he went out of the scrub at right angles to our road into it, and led the way right to a deep-sunk hole that had been deserted some weeks before.

“I have often thought that Harry and I were in a kind of stupor all this time (although we saw and noted everything that was done), for it seems to me now that only a moment passed until I saw men letting the black fellow down by a rope, saw him come up again with something that had golden hair, hanging on his arm, heard my poor Harry utter a most awful scream of mortal agony that ever ran through my ears, and after that I didn’t hear any more.”

(Here the mosquitoes, confound them, were very hard at work.)

“Well, sir, there was an inquest—Willful murder against some person or persons unknown.

“The question was, who was the murderer? Harry and I had no doubt about it, and several were of our opinion. The suspected man had left the gully, it appeared, early on the day of the murder, although one woman had seen him coming back long after the others had seen him go. However, there was no shadow of law evidence against him, and we could do nothing. Rewards were offered, detectives sent up—all to no purpose. Peggy did not recover her senses for a long time, and she never was told the worst part of the case. Harry seemed to live only for the purpose of discovering his child’s destroyer. We took Peggy down to the sea-coast, got her the best medical advice, and, after we saw that she was mending, we determined to leave her with the kind, good people we lodged with, and to go to visit new diggings we had just heard of.

“And now, sir, I am going to tell you one of those things you read about in novels; but I often say that novels is foolish things compared with real life. The evening before we were to start, Peggy, with her poor weak hands, was rummaging among her packages for some things to give Harry for his journey. Suddenly she began to cry and sob so bitterly that Harry ran over to her, and says:

“‘What is the matter with you, my poor darling?’

“‘But Harry began to sob himself, for his wife had just taken out by mistake the little frock that the blessed child had been murdered in. He threw it down on the table to support his wife, and I heard something like metal strike the candle-stick. What made me pay attention to it, I cannot tell, but there, half hid by the little waist-belt, was something round and shining.

“‘Harry,’ says I, ‘come here for a moment. Do you recognize this?’

“‘Of course he did; so did I. It was the top of Cornish’s tobacco-pipe, of a style that no one could ever fail to notice.

“‘Tom,’ says Harry, as white as a sheet, ‘where did you get this?’

“‘It must have got entangled in the waist-belt,’ I said, in a whisper, ‘when he was carrying her, and got hidden between the belt and the frock. Your throwing it down made it come half out.’

“‘What will you do with it?’ I said, again. ‘Hand it to the police, of course?’

“‘No fear,’ Harry answers. ‘The lawyers would be safe to get him off. They would make it out that the child found it, or that the guilty party put it there on purpose to divert attention from him, and many other things of the kind. No, Tom; I know two policemen who will find him.’ He looked very hard into my face as he said this.

“‘I think I know them too,’ I said. ‘When will they set out?’

“‘To-morrow morning, Tom, and no mistake.’

“The next morning the two policemen set out. One of them was called—O yes, he was called Griffin, and the other—call him Hobbs if you like. It did not take such experienced bush-constables long to find out that Cornish was living under another name, on the station of a Courtenay, as stockman. They steered in that direction, and in a day or two reached the station.

“They asked about a stockman named Walsh. He had left that very day. Would Mr. Courtney be kind enough to describe him? With pleasure; a tall, lank man, with large black eyebrows, and a bad expression of face. He had taken the road towards Bendigo.

“Towards Bendigo! The two constables looked at each other, and a curious look was exchanged between them. They put their horses to their mettle that day, but they did not overtake their man; still they heard on their way that he was ahead. They tied their weary horses up that night, and pulled up grass for them, not to lose time in the morning. At a very early hour they were on the road again, and about ten o’clock they saw a traveler before them, and they were sure he was their man. They slackened their speed that they might overtake him gradually, and at a convenient spot. They managed it so well, that at the same moment one was on each side of him on a lonely part of the road. He looked into the faces of both, and saw his fate there. He was about to make a desperate rush for it, when Griffin seized his bridle, and Hobbs clapped a revolver to his head.

“‘Come quickly with us at once, or you are a dead man.’

“The wretch let his hands drop helplessly down, while the constables led him off the road into the bush. When there, Griffin says to him:

“‘Do you know this?’ holding up the top of the pipe.

[“]The other muttered something.

“‘This was found, do you hear, in the frock of the child you murdered, and worse than murdered. Move on, and the first sound or movement you make, you are a corpse.’

“They went on. They were about twenty miles from Bendigo, but they kept quite in the bush, to avoid observation, and make a short cut. They had reached the place of our encampment long before nightfall, but they stayed in the scrub until long after the sun went down. They kept their prisoner sitting on the ground in front of them. Several times he had tried to ask them questions, but Griffin, in a terrible voice, told him to be silent.

“As soon as it became deep dusk, Griffin got up, put a large piece of wood in their prisoner’s mouth, and secured it by binding his own handkerchief over his mouth and round his head. He then bound his arms and hands very tightly with two saddle-straps, and led him along, pistol in hand. The fatal hole was soon found. The wretch made one convulsive spring backwards, and the noises that he made in attempting to scream were unearthly. But there was no escape. Griffin,

with superhuman force, plunged him into the hole, and they listened with grim pleasure to the splash he made in the water at the bottom.”

“Gracious heavens!” I exclaimed; “you don’t mean to tell me that you—that they deliberately murdered a man in that way?”

“I only tell you what occurred, sir,” replied My Orderly (No. 1); “but *I* don’t call it murder. They threw Cornish’s (alias Walsh) saddle and bridle into the hole, and they turned his horse loose. You may depend upon it, sir, there are few places that could make such revelations, if they could speak, as the deep old holes of Bendigo.”

“My good friend,” I began, “I am afraid that—” But just then the loud and wild corrobberie of black fellows was heard about two hundred yards off.

“Put fresh caps on your revolvers, men; they *may* come down upon us. Any one who is awake and hears them coming, will rouse the others.”

And so, with a brief prayer to Heaven for those who were far distant, and for protection throughout the night, I wrapped myself in my blanket, and lay down beside my boy-son (whom I am training to this life of adventure); nor was it long before the wild corrobberie chant, droning in my drowsy ear, grew fainter still, and then was lost.

*Flag of our Union*, January 5, 1867