

"And you know all about him,—the whole story?" The tramp nodded again. "By god," cried Deverell. "If you've come here to trade on what you know, you've chosen the wrong place and the wrong man."

The tramp smiled, "I have not come to trade upon what I know," said he quietly, repeating the other's expression with simple sarcasm. "Now that I've seen you, I can go back the way I came; no need to go on to Dandong now. I came because my old mate asked me to find you out and wish you well from him: that was all. "He went in for life," said Deverell, reflecting bitterly. I have the vaguest memories of him; it happened when I was so very young. Is he well?" "He was." "And you have been in goal together?"

"And you know what brought him there, the whole story?" Curiosity crept into the young man's tone, and made it less bitter. He filled a pipe. "For my part I never had the right of that story," he said.

"There were no rights," said the convict, "it was all wrong together, your father robbed the bank of which he himself was manager; he had lost money in mining speculations; he took to the bush and fought desperately for his life."

"I'm glad he did that," exclaimed Deverell.

The other's eyes kindled, but he only said: "It was what anyone would have done in his place." "Was it?" answered Deverell scornfully. "did you, for instance?"

The old man shrugged his shoulders. Deverell laughed aloud. His father might have been a villain, but he had not been a coward. That was one consolation. A silence fell between the two men. There were no more flames from the fire, but only the glow of red hot embers. This reddened the face of Deverell, but it did not reach that of the old man. He was thus free to stare at Deverell as hard and as long as he liked, and his eyes never left the young man's face. It was a sufficiently handsome face, with eyes as dark as those of the old man, only lightened and brightened by an expression altogether different. Deverell's pipe had soothed him. He seemed as serene now as he had been before he knew that his companion had been also the companion of his father in prison. After he had grown up with the knowledge that his father was a convicted felon; to be reminded of it casually, but also privately, could not wound him very deeply. The tramp, staring at him with a fierce yearning in his eyes, which the young man could not see, seemed to divine this, but said:

"It cannot be pleasant for you to see me. I wouldn't have come, only I promised to see you, I promised to let him hear about you. It would have been worse, you know, had he got out on ticket of leave and come himself."

"It would so," exclaimed Deverell sincerely.

In the dark, the old man grinned like one in torment.

"It would so," Deverell repeated, unable to repress a grim chuckle. "It would be the most awkward thing that could possibly happen to me—especially if it happened now. At present I call myself the happiest man in the Colony; but if my poor father were to turn up—"

Deverell was not interrupted—he stopped himself.

"You are pretty safe," said his companion in an odd tone which he quickly changed. "As your father's mate I am glad you are so lucky, it is good hearing."

Deverell explained how he was so lucky. He felt that the sentiments he had expressed concerning his father's possible appearance on the scene required some explanation, if not excuse. This feeling growing upon him as he spoke, led him into explanations that were very full indeed, under the circumstances. He explained the position he had obtained as manager of Dandong; and the position he was about to obtain through his marriage was quite as clearly—though unintentionally—indicated.

It was made clear to the meanest perception how very awkward it would be for the young man, from every point of view, if the young man's father did turn up and ostentatiously reveal himself. While Deverell was speaking the swagman broke branches from the nearest pines and made on the fire; when he had finished the faces of both were once more illu-

minated; and that of the old man was stern with resolve. "And yet," said he, "suppose the impossible, or at any rate the unlikely—say that he does come back. I know him well; he would not be a drag or a burden on you. He'd only just like to see you. All he would ask would be to see his son sometimes! That would be enough for him. I was his chum, mind you, so I know. And if he was to come up here, as I have come you could take him on, couldn't you, as you offer to take me?" He bent forward with sudden eagerness, his voice vibrated. "You could give him work, as you say you'll give me, couldn't you? No one would ever guess!"

"No!" said Deverell, decidedly. "I'll give you work, but my father I could not. I don't do things by halves. I'd treat my father as my father, and damn the odds! He had some pluck. I like to think how he was taken fighting! What ever he did, he had grit, and I should be unworthy of him—no matter what he did—if I played the coward. It would be worse than cowardly to disown your father, whatever he had done, and I wouldn't disown mine—I'd sooner shoot myself! No, I'd take him in and be a son to him for the rest of his days, that's what I'd do, that's what I *will* do, if ever he gets out on ticket of leave and comes to me."

The young man spoke with a feeling and intensity of which he had exhibited no signs before, leaning forward with his pipe between his fingers. The old man held his breath.

"But it would be devilish awkward!" he added frankly. "People would remember what they've been good enough to forget; and everybody would know what now next to none know. In this country, thank God, the man is taken for what the man is worth—his father neither helps nor hinders him, when once he's gone. So I've managed to take my own part, and to get on well, thanks to my own luck. Yes, it would be devilish awkward; but I'd stand by him, before Heaven, I would!"

The old man breathed hard.

"I don't know how I've come to say so much to you, though you did know my father," added Deverell, with a sudden change of tone. "It isn't my way at all. I needn't tell you that from to-morrow forward you're the same as any other man to me. And if you ever go to see my father you must not tell him all I have said to you about what, as you say, is never likely to happen. But you may tell him—you may tell him I am glad he was taken fighting!"

The old man was once more quite calm. "I shall never see your father again, no more will you," he said slowly and solemnly, "for your father is dead! I promised to find you out when my time was up, and to tell you. I have taken my way of breaking the news to you. Forgive me, sir, but I couldn't resist just seeing first of all if it would cut you up very badly!"

Deverell did not notice the quiet bitterness of the last words. He smoked his pipe out in silence. Then he said: "God rest him! Perhaps it's for the best. As for you, you've a billet at Dandong for the rest of your days, if you like to take and keep it. Let us turn in."

The worn moon rose very late, and skimmed behind the pines, but never rose clear of them, and was down before dawn. It shone faintly upon the two men lying side by side, packed up each in a blanket—Deverell in the better one. From the other blanket a hand would steal out from time to time, grope tremulously over Deverell's back, for a minute, and then be gently withdrawn. Long before dawn, however, the old man noiselessly arose and rolled up his swag. He packed up everything that he had brought everything except the better blanket. Over that he smiled, as though it was an intense pleasure for him to leave it behind wrapped round the unconscious form of Deverell. The worn moon glimmered through the pines upon them both. The faces were strangely alike; only Deverell's was smiling sweetly in his dreams, while the other's shone moist with something.

A few minutes later the gate in the Dandong boundary fence closed for the last time upon the gaol bird and tramp, and Deverell's father was dead indeed to Deverell. Lucky for Deverell of course. But then he was the luckiest man in the whole colony. Didnt he say so himself?

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