



He -- I'll call him Reginald for a change -- was one of those broken-down-swell-coves, the worst kind of mate one can pick up with on the track. Dick had chummed in with him -- or better, he had chummed in with Dick somewhere down the Flinders. He couldn't, or wouldn't, bake a damper, light a fire, or try to catch a fish. All he'd do on reaching a hut would be to look at the writings and charcoal sketches on the walls, pick up and read every bit of paper he could find, and blow about his wealthy relations while eating the supper Dick had cooked for him.

They were both hard-up, and depending upon the squatters' generosity for an existence. But Reginald wouldn't even go up to a station for his rations.

"Upon my honor, Dick," he would say. "I can't do it. I couldn't beg -- I'm too sensitive."

Dick was sorely full of feeding and working for him, but hadn't the moral courage to "open out" and tell him so.

"I'll wait for an opportunity," he thought, and "I might get a job soon."

An opportunity came sooner than expected. One day, about dinner-time on the Darling Downs, they sighted a selector's place about two hundred yards off the road. They'd walked eleven miles that morning without breakfast.

"You'd better go down there and ask for tucker," said Dick, "it's ten miles yet to the station, and I'm as hungry as a wolf."

But it was no use.

"Really, upon my soul," whined the man of rich relations,

“I’m . . . .”

“There, that’s enough,” snarled Dick, as he chucked down his swag and walked towards the house.

Just as he reached the back-door the missus of the house left the front to go into the paddock and call her husband for dinner. There wasn’t a soul about. The kitchen door was wide open. The table was laid, and near the fire place stood a camp-oven full of beautifully-scented onion stew. The temptation was too strong. Before Dick quite knew what he was about, he found himself facing his mate — camp-oven in one hand and a loaf of home-made bread in the other. A thought struck him.

“My word,” he said to Reginald, “they are good people down there. You were foolish not to go. They’re the kindest people I ever met. Why, the missus asked me to sit down and have dinner with them, and when I told her I had a mate awaiting up here, she got quite angry because I didn’t bring you along. Anyway, she gave me this for our dinner, and she took me to the dairy and gave me a drink of fresh milk. When I left she said, said she: “Now be sure and tell your mate to come down for a drink of milk. It’ll do him good, poor fellow!””

The bread and stew were soon devoured, and Reginald agreed to take back the empty oven and get that drink of milk.

In the meantime the burly selector had come home. He had split fifty-two posts that morning, and got into a terrible fury when he found himself minus dinner.

He was at the height of his performance — and he could perform — when Reginald arrived on the scene with a fascinating smile on his face.

“Sir,” he said, “I’ve come to return the empty camp-oven, and I beg to express my deepest grati. . . .”

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Dick could hardly recognise him when he returned to the camp. He never uttered a syllable, but gave Dick a piercing, black look, picked up his bundle and vanished out of sight.