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Veronica and Louise

FALSE TEETH: From the Sky Pilot's Log, 2CH Broadcast.

This story was first written over 40 years ago and conditions have changed greatly since then. Roy was a half-caste. One of the tragedies of half-castes is that they often inherit all the longings and ambitions of the white man without much chance of ever being able to fulfil them. This story happened in Arnhem Land, Northern Territory, in the days before the gifts of the Aboriginal artists had been recognised or appreciated. And Roy was an artist. Oh, I don't mean that he was a clever painter or sculptor or anything like that. He had never been taught. But his father had been a man of outstanding artistic talents and creative ability that could have been put to better service than bringing an unfortunate half-caste into the world. And Roy had inherited his father's talents. Yet without training and opportunities this natural gift was a curse instead of a blessing to him.

Roy was a fine fellow in many ways, even if he was a bit of a dreamer. Anyhow, when George was knocked from his horse by a wild bull and was in danger of losing his life as he lay stunned on the ground, Roy ran in, with his bare hands as the only weapons, right between the bull and George. The bull turned its attention to Roy. The coloured boy ran like a startled wallaby, but the bull caught him and tossed him badly, breaking his leg. Fortunately Lefthand, one of the stockboys, galloped up at the moment and so saved a double tragedy. George was very grateful when he came to and was told the story. He came to me to see what he could do for Roy in return.

"You know, Smithy," he said, "that boy saved my life at the risk of his own. What can I do for him?"

"He's doing fine now, George. I set his leg and in a few weeks he'll be as good as ever again. I'm looking after him and he has everything he needs."

"Yes, I know that, Smithy, but I want to do somethin' worth while for him. Do you think he would like to be sent south to be trained in — well painting or sculpture or whatever he is interested in?"

"To begin with you couldn't afford it, George. In any case I don't think that would be a kindness. Roy has more ability than anyone I have seen in the Northern Territory, but if he went south I think there would be thousands of men who had as much ability as he has in that line."

"But," persisted George, "what if he was properly trained?"

"I still don't think he could make a living as an artist. That's the tragedy of his life. He has all the longings for creative art but I doubt if he has sufficient ability to compete with white men. And you know how sensitive he is. It would be cruelty to send him south."

"Well, what can I do for him? It will be Christmas in a few weeks; couldn't I get him somethin' worth while as a present?"

"I'll ask him, George, and let you know later. I know how you feel and I admire your desire to help him."

A little while later I spoke to Roy about it. "Look here, Roy," I said. "George is grateful to you for the very brave action on your part that saved his life, and he wants to know if there is anything you would like that he could get for you."

"It was nothing, Moningna. I didn't think. I would have done the same for anyone else; but it wasn't really brave, I just didn't think. I was properly scared when the bull chased me."

"Anyone would have been scared. All the same it was a very gallant action and I am proud of you. But about George. It would hurt him if you wouldn't let him do something for you. Is there anything you would like him to get you for Christmas?"

"Well — let me think — yes, I think so. It's this way, Moningna; I like carving figures in clay. I know they're not very good, but all the same I like doing it. But it's very hard, you know, to do the carving with just a pocket knife. Aren't there proper — well — tools to carve with? If they don't cost too much I would like a set of tools for carving in clay and — well — stone."

"All right, Roy, I'll see George and I'm sure he'll be glad to get them for you."

"Oh, thank you, Moningna! And tell George I'm glad he's all right; and I didn't really want anything for — well — what I did."

And so it was fixed up. On my next trip to the township I wired south for a complete set of sculptors' tools. I waited till I received the reply to say that they had been shipped.

I think George was as excited as Roy as we waited for the boat to arrive with the supplies. He seemed to anticipate all kinds of trouble.

"I say, Smithy," he asked, "are you sure you ordered the best that could be bought? I wouldn't want to give him anythin' — well — shoddy."

"I know that, George, and I ordered the best. When you get the account I think you will be

more than satisfied. It costs a lot for things like that, you know."

"I don't mind what they cost. But are you sure they won't miss the boat?"

"No, they wired me back to say the instruments were put on the boat in Melbourne."

"But they've got to change over the cargo twice on the way. Maybe they will get left behind at some port on the way."

"Oh, don't be silly, George. It's not one chance in a thousand. You're worse than an old woman. The boat will be here in a few days now."

"But it's the last boat before the wet. If anything should go wrong it would be six months before we could get anythin' through. Six months is a long time to a coloured boy."

"Well you can't do any good by worrying. Why can't you forget it? It'll be here all right, never you fear."

I had to go to the railhead once more before the boat arrived and I wired Thursday Island just to make sure all our cargo had been put on the other boat. When a reply came to say one case had been left behind by mistake I hardly knew how to break the news to George. He took it badly, as I had expected.

"There you are, Smithy, what did I tell you? After all the trouble and fuss the bloomin' things have been left behind and it will be six months before we get 'em."

"Oh, don't be silly, George. We are expecting over a hundred cases of cargo. There's not one chance in a hundred that the case left behind has your parcel in it."

All the same I began to feel anxious, especially as Roy was so excited about the gift. He spoke to me about it with shining eyes.

"Oh, Moningna, I can hardly wait till the boat comes. I have never had anything so wonderful before. I think I would die if the tools don't come. I am counting the days, even the hours, and every night I thank God for making George so kind to me."

"You deserve all that George can do for you, Roy, and I only hope that you are not disappointed."

"If the boat comes before Christmas will I have to wait till Christmas to see them?"

"Yes, Roy, all presents will be given out on Christmas day."

Well, the boat did arrive a few days before Christmas. George rode up as soon as the engine of the boat could be heard and together we opened case after case. It was a long job going through over a hundred cases. We worked all through the afternoon and well into the night.

At last only one case remained. George wiped the sweat out of his eyes.

"It's no good, Smithy, I have a feelin' in me bones that the parcel is in the box left behind."

"It might be in this case, George. It looks as if it has a lot of odds and ends in it — just the case they would be in."

"Well, look here, you always reckon God answers prayer. Why not prove it now? Will you pray that the parcel is in this last box?"

"All right, George. Let's pray together."

It would have looked strange to an outsider to have seen us kneeling on the rough floor of the store. The only light was from a flickering hurricane lantern hung from the ceiling. George locked rough and ready in his flannel shirt and moleskin trousers and the sweat was dripping from his forehead. But when I prayed he said: "Amen," in a way that touched my heart. I knew how much it meant to the simple minded old stockman and I just cried out to God not to let us down. Well, we opened the last case and threw the articles about recklessly. There were parcels of soap, bandages, toys and all sorts of things but no sign of the sculptors' instruments. At last there was only one parcel left. George and I straightened our backs and looked at each other in dismay.

George spoke first: "You open it, Smithy. I guess my nerves have given way. You prayed about it, you know."

I opened the last parcel and my heart sank. George was sitting on his heels on the floor. "Well," he said, "what is it, Smithy? You ain't sayin' anythin' so I guess it's no go. What's in the parcel?"

"There's a complete set of false teeth, a whole lot of other teeth on cards and a lot of dental and surgical instruments. I'm afraid that's all."

There was silence for a while. When George spoke it was little more than a whisper, but it cut into my heart.

"You **prayed** about it."

I couldn't reply; something seemed to choke me. George went outside without another word, caught his horse and went home. I couldn't sleep that night. In my heart I couldn't help saying: "Oh, God, you've let us down." I tried to fight against the thought but it kept coming into my mind again. The few days till Christmas passed like a nightmare. On Christmas eve I went down to George's hut and begged him to come to the mission.

"All right, Smithy, I'll come. I reckon it ain't your fault, you done all you could. I feel like a criminal, but I'll come and stand by you. But

God help us when poor old Roy opens his stockin'!"

Most of the mission natives expected presents on Christmas morning. We didn't put them in stockings — there were no stockings on the station — but we put them in sugar bags and hung them in the breakfast room with the native names on the bags. George was very worried. "I say," he asked, "What did you give Roy?"

"Just a few odds and ends like all the others and — and I put in the false teeth and the dental and surgical instruments."

"What in the name of fortune did you do that for? False teeth! What good are they to Roy?"

"I don't know why I did it. Something seemed to force me. I know it seems mad but . . . well, there it is."

As soon as breakfast was over I went in search of Roy, but I couldn't find him. George looked white when I told him.

"Poor kid! He must be broken hearted. I **promised** him, Smithy."

"I know, George. It was just an accident. It was no one's fault."

I felt like a hypocrite as I spoke. That voice seemed to echo in my heart: "Oh, God, you've let us down." I think I could have cried. Just before dinner Roy came to look for George and me. His face was shining with the joy of heaven. With wonder in our hearts we followed him and there by the river bank was a beautifully modelled human figure. It was so real it made us catch our breath. Roy spoke softly.

"I can never thank you enough, George. They were just the tools I had dreamed about, but better. Everything I have ever wanted was there. What do you think of my carving?"

"Roy, it looks real! I can hardly believe it. How did you do it?"

"It was the teeth, Moningna, real teeth. I've always had trouble making teeth out of clay. I never expected real teeth. I didn't tell you but I prayed God would help me get the teeth right when I was working, and He sent me real teeth."

Well, I guess Roy's carving or sculpture or whatever you call it wasn't up to academy standard; but it gave him all the joy of the creator. I looked from the coloured boy's shining face to George, and I'll swear there were tears in the old stockman's eyes. We had forgotten Roy didn't know what instruments were used in sculpture work and the old surgical and dental instruments were more than he expected. And the teeth . . . who would have thought of giving him false teeth except God? I felt I ought to apologise to God for thinking He had let us down. And

the words from Isaiah 55 kept ringing in my ears: "For my thoughts are not your thoughts, neither are your ways my ways, saith the Lord. For as the heavens are higher than the earth, so are my ways higher than your ways and my thoughts higher than your thoughts."

CHRISTMAS CARDS: We have had a quantity of Christmas Cards printed and these are on sale at 10 cents each, with envelopes. Please add postage for packet post if ordering. The cards are in full colour and show two Aborigines by a waterhole. On the front of the card there are also embossed holly leaves and the words "Christmas Greetings" in gold writing. On page three are the words "Greetings of the Season and best wishes for your happiness." The profit from the sale of these cards will help the Mission Farm.

BRUCE LANGFORD-SMITH: As announced earlier, Bruce Langford-Smith has returned from the Northern Territory to take over the management of the Farm. It is expected that he will commence work on the farm in October; meanwhile he has to obtain machinery and equipment for use on the farm. Mr. Ivan Hinton is continuing to manage the farm until Bruce is ready to take over. We are grateful to the Department of Agriculture which is checking soil samples and assisting with advice.

THE DARK CHILDREN: Jasmine and George have gone back to their parents after a stay of three years and four months at the Mission Farm. They are greatly missed but we are glad that their parents are now in a position to care for them. This, of course, is the ideal situation with children remaining with their parents when this is possible.

Cheryl, a little girl aged seven, has been admitted. Her two sisters, Veronica and Joanne, have been with us for four and a half years.

STAFF: In a work such as this a great deal depends on the staff. It is exacting work with long hours and a great deal of responsibility. We are fortunate in having such a fine staff, many members having been with us for some years. They should share in the credit for the success of this work. Above all we thank God that we have been able to maintain the Christian family atmosphere that has always marked our work.