

### Dad's Downfall.

Dad Summers was sobering up. He had spent the night on a wild, harmless tantrum and was now paying the idler in the little room below his paint shop. The old building, his home for fifteen years, stood back from the main street in the alley, a sort of deserted warehouse of former days, surrounded by discarded barrels, boxes, tin cans and buggy frames. It was of two stories, the lower one once a blacksmith shop, but now deserted, an ashpile and dusty worn-out bellows remaining, a few scraps of iron and rimless wheels hanging from the dusty rafters.

A broad stairway on the outside, with strips of boards as footrests in place of steps, led up to Dad's working room. Like most paint shops, it had never seen a coating of paint itself, except in spots where some enterprising youngster had daubed rude hieroglyphics with a stick.

It stood out, weather-blackened, dismal, forbidding, with never a sign of life except when a thin curl of smoke rose from the rusty old stovepipe that served as a chimney or when Dad swung wide the sliding doors at the head of the stairway to run out a newly painted wheel, which he carefully guided down the creaky old driveway.

Few people had seen the inside of Dad's living room. No one had ever seen him eat. His bill at the store ran something like this: "Crackers," "bologna," "cheese," and occasionally "sardines and oysters," "tea." He never bought much, never used milk, and in fifteen years had not had a new suit of clothes. Thus he had lived on, harmless, unmolested, regularly going on a tear doing odd jobs of painting and carpenter work and in the harvest time he ventured to stack wheat, at which, according to the testimony of farmers, he was an expert. But it was evident that he had seen better days. When some of the students who had had trouble with their Cicero went to him for help he started the principal by giving a perfect translation and he very much discomfited the science teacher by fixing up an apparatus that generated oxygen, which that young man, after several weeks' patient experimenting, had not been able to accomplish.

In his drunken revels, too, he swore in Latin, now and then throwing in a chemical term, "Caesar potassium," "sulphidus mehercule" being his favorites.

It was after one of these revels that I first saw Dad. Attracted to the door of the paint shop by the crowd gathered around it, I looked in. Dad sat in the ash pile, covered with dust, leaning forward, his hands on his knees. He was the picture of dejection and misery as he rose from the dirt and limped to an old wagon hub and putting his chin in his hands, stared sullenly ahead of him. He was slight, much below the medium size and wore an old faded greenish-black suit with splatters of green and white paint on the vest and trousers. A dirty, greasy red flannel shirt looked out from under the fringe of whiskers that covered his face and upper lip and below the flat-crowned little stiff hat that he always wore his tuffy white hair pushed itself.

The small boys remained behind the men and nudged each other and chuckled as Dad occasionally gave vent to a smothered groan. Finally Bobs, the huge drayman, walked over to him and said:

"Well, Dad, it's about time you were gettin' to bed, ain't it?"

"I'm all right," grunted Dad, settling himself back against the wall and hitching his old clothes about him.

"Come, come; it's cold here. Better get upstairs to bed, Dad."

The only answer was a grunt and a still further shrinking into his clothes. The drayman, like one accustomed to the situation, made a sign to one of the men and they seized the old man by the arms and legs to carry him.

Dad, however, resented this familiarity. The night's revel had not chilled all the fire from his bones. Doubling himself up, he struck viciously with arms, legs and head in all directions, at the same time hissing between his teeth "mehercule," "mehercule." The youngsters screamed with delight. Taken by surprise, the smaller man relaxed his hold and was hurled against the wall with the mark of Dad's boot on his jaw, and for a moment Dad furiously besieged the big, good-natured drayman with tooth and claw, but only for a moment. His bulky antagonist held his arms close to his body so that he couldn't move.

"Nervy old cuss," said the assistant as he approached Dad rather guardedly, fearing another wild-out outburst. But Dad had subsided. He suffered himself to be carried, limp as a rag, up the wide stairway, and the doors closed behind him.

"Old Dad'll have some hot tea and toast now pretty soon," remarked one of the youngsters. "Bobs allus gets Mrs. Bobs to get him a hunk o' toast and tea when he gets that way. He'd a died lots o' times if it hadn't been for them a sendin' him clothes and stuff to eat. Never gets nuthin' for it, neither."

"Better feed them eight kids of their 'stead o' throwin' stuff away on that old carcass," growled a stocky, well built man with a red face, stubby moustache and one glass eye. His slouch hat and belt gave him the appearance of a cowboy. He had just come up in time to hear the youngster's remark, but quickly started on again as the door of the shop opened and Bobs and the man came down.

"Huh," said a freckled-nosed little archin. "Guess old Gambler Pete don't want to meet Bobs. Remember's when Bobs choked him fer kickin' old Dad outen Dug's saloon. Pete said he'd get even, but he ain't done it. Lordy, Bobs would break his bones if he did anything to Dad."

Bobs walked quietly over to his own house, stepped inside a moment, then mounted his dray wagon and, applying the short blacksnake to the immense shaggy gray mules, hurried them off to meet the passenger train that came in at nine. Bobs had the task of bringing the four or five mail bags to the postoffice from the two passenger trains that the town boasted, one at nine in the morning, the other at 8:30 in the evening.

The little town was quiet for a week. Not even Dad ventured to break the quiet monotony. But it awoke on Friday in a blaze of excitement. Little knots of excited talkers gathered on the street. Business was almost sus-

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