

Pa Paggett's Sure Cure

By Harriet O. LeRoy.

"PA, I DON'T see no other way but what you'll have to give Jimmie a whippin'. What do you think?" I caught him out there behind the barn a-smokin' a cigarette! To think a boy of mine—a boy that's been brought up as careful as Jimmie has—should be guilty of doin' a thing like that! My sakes! it does seem sometimes—"

Pa Padgett interrupted in his mild, good-natured voice. "There, now, ma, go a leetle easy," he said. "Mebby the boy won't reely need a lickin'. Mebby I can use moral suasion on him."

"Moral suasion nothin'!" exclaimed Ma Padgett. "After the way I've worked an' slaved to raise that boy an' keep his feet in the straight an' narrow path! Seems like—"

"Well, now," said Pa Padgett soothingly, "you jest forget it, Ma, an' I'll have a leetle interview with Jimmie. Jin ain't no angel—I never saw no feathers a-sproutin' on his shoulder blades yet, but he'll come out all right, see if he don't."

A little later, Pa Padgett, sitting in the sun on the wheelbarrow out in the back yard, saw his erring son at a distance.

"Jimmie, you come here," he called cheerfully. "Come an' set down, an' let's visit a leetle."

Jimmie complied with evident reluctance. His father smiled genially into his son's freckled face.

"Your ma's been a-tellin' things about you, Jimmie," he said. "I guess mebby she's mistaken, but she thought she saw you a-smokin' out there behind the barn. How 'bout it, son?"

Jimmie hung his head and began to draw lines in the dust with his bare toes. "I s'pose I did," he said sullenly.

Pa Padgett looked relieved. Whatever the boy's sins, he was at least truthful.

"Now, that's great!" he said heartily. "It's quite a spell since I quit smokin' an' laid my old pipe aside, but I reckon I could smoke again if I was to try. An' looky here, son—I never did smoke a cigarette in my life, an' I've always wondered how they'd taste. Now's my chance. What say to us havin' a nice sociable smoke together? Got some of 'em about you, hain't you?"

Jimmie shuffled his feet and looked uneasy.

"Yes, I got some," he said sulkily, "but I don't want to smoke no more." He placed his hand upon his stomach, and Pa Padgett noticed that the boy's face looked white under its freckles.

Pa Padgett's blue eyes twinkled.

"Stomach feel kind o' upset, son?" he asked. "Well, that's nothin'. That's the way my first cigar served me 'way back when I was about your age. But you'll get over that, you'll get over that."

"Now, let's see—how do you light 'em? Come on now, son, I'm game if you are. I'd like to try it once."

Jimmie fished a soiled package of cigarettes out of his pocket and handed it to his father. He eyed him curiously as he scratched a match and applied it.

"Light up, son, light up," urged Pa Padgett hospitably. "Blest if I'm going to set here an' smoke alone!"

And Jimmie, because there seemed no other way to do, obeyed.

But after a few whiffs the boy laid an eloquent hand upon his stomach. His father watched him closely.

"Feel kind o' squeamish, do you?" he said. "Well, now, that's nothin'. You keep right on an' you'll overcome that. Everybody feels that way while they're learnin', you know. Keep on, Jimmie, I can't say I reely like 'em myself, but you don't catch me fallin' down on a job like this. Go to it, son. Finish that one an' have another. Good land, boy, be game! Why, I heard a feller say the other day that he could smoke forty-seven a day—had to have 'em, in fact! Now, I don't believe you an' me would ever get so fond of 'em as that, but—here, son, yours has gone out. Light up again an' go to it. That leetle

queer feelin' in your stomach—pshaw, what's that!"

Jimmie rose suddenly and staggered out of sight around the corner of the shed. The sounds that ensued directly caused a broad smile to spread over Pa Padgett's face.

"Pore leetle feller!" he said to himself. "It's a tough dose, but it'll be worth while if it works, an' I believe it will."

In a few minutes Pa Padgett called him. "Come on back now, Jim. Guess you can risk another now, can't you? Here, I've got it lit for you. Come on now."

There was a determined note in his voice, and Jim, looking at him, came slowly back to the wheelbarrow and sat down weakly. He put the lighted cigarette between his pale lips.

Just then Ma Padgett came into view. Horror, consternation and wrath were depicted on her countenance.

"Pa Padgett!" she cried. "What—in all this—world! You a-learnin' that boy to smoke! You a-smokin' with him! Be you a crazy man!"

Jimmie threw his cigarette away and rose shakily. He turned on his father. "Come on an' lick me!" he cried. "You can kill me if you want to, but you can't make me smoke another cigarette, nor nobody else can't, either!"

He snatched the package from Pa Padgett's hand and threw it as far as he could. "Now you can lick me for smokin' or for not smokin', jest which you want, an' I'll take it!"

Pa Padgett looked at him. There was a sort of misty look in his kind blue eyes.

"No, son," he said. "I ain't goin' to lick you. I don't know what you need a lickin' for. I'm satisfied if you are."

That was ten years ago, when Jimmie was 13. His friends say Jim's a good fellow, but kind of old-fashioned in some respects—never smokes, for instance. But Jim Padgett and Pa Padgett know why.

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