

How Stumpy Learned to Subtract

By ALEC BRUCE

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In Munkersville everybody agreed that Stumpy Dent was silly; not very much off, but off. Pa Dent himself did not deny it. Of course ma was an exception to the rule and vigorously denied everything and anything that touched on the softness of Stumpy. And toward pa, because of his sittin' on the fence attitude, she assumed a frigid front.

"Silence is jes' the same as consent, Dave Dent," she complained bitterly, eying her spouse with a shrewish look. "Shame on ye, an' him your own flesh an' blood!"

But Dave paid no heed to these outbursts. As a matter of fact, pa was past speaking to Stumpy. He had fought the good fight and failed. In time perhaps, he allowed, intelligence might penetrate to Stumpy's brain.

Good humored, fat and flabby, Stumpy had seen nine healthy summers. His eyes were blue and watery, his cheeks dimpled and red. Rain or shine he wore a hayseed hat two sizes too small for his abnormal crown, kept in place by an elastic so tight that it puckered and reddened his skin. His pants were drawn up three inches above his knees, and, though ma tried hard to prevent it, Stumpy's kneecaps were always exposed, for Stumpy had a weakness for curbstones and marbles, and rather than stand on his feet he hustled along on all fours.

In school work Stumpy was disappointing, two grades behind the times. Yet he could read, spell, add to the thousands and would attack millions if he dared. But, oh, subtraction, subtraction—not even a standing black-board example could enlighten Stumpy's mind!

His long suffering teacher, like pa, was nearing the exasperation point, when suddenly a happy thought occurred to her. She had observed Stumpy on the curbstone playing marbles. Sure! He must have marbles in his pocket. He did have them, a bulging pocketful, jealously guarded, and after a struggle she successfully extracted three. But it was all she could do to get them, and for days her soft, white hand retained evidence of the getting.

"Stumpy Dent," she cried, with blazing eyes, "now tell what I have done!" "Cobbed ma marbles," wailed the outraged pupil, with streaming eyes and waggling toes.

"Hush, hush, sonny. I'm going to give them all back to you. I'm only trying to show you what subtraction is. Now, how many marbles had you when you came to school?"

"Twelve," shouted Stumpy.

"How many have you now?"

One by one Stumpy counted them and considered.

"How many?" repeated the teacher. "Twelve when ye give 'em back t'me," calmly announced the hopeless one.

From pent up forms a roar of boyish laughter made sensitive Stumpy tearful and tight as a clam, and away went hope like the filmy wake of a dream.

Of course Pa Dent soon heard the story and looked sadly at his son. He himself had tried the practical illustration scheme, but the lad was unresponsive.

"Stumpy," he demanded, shaking the boy's fat hand a little roughly, "do you like school?"

"Yis," was the glib reply.

"Then you must do better or I'll take you away."

Now, Stumpy spoke the truth. He really loved his teacher. School was his heaven, and in his clumsy way he had tried hard to catch subtraction. But it wasn't pa's treat that awakened Stumpy. To Darby Peck, the town's leading grocer, must be given the credit. Darby had a way with him, such a way that for every customer, his rival, Bollinger, boasted, Darby could set up four, and Darby had just opened a branch near Stump's school.

"Naw, the laddies' trade ain't much," he admitted, "but A'm a-caterin' t'em jest the same."

Here hitherto Bollinger had held full sway. But Bollinger was mean, hard as nails; he didn't give marbles away with every five cent purchase. But Darby did, so Darby corralled the school. Bollinger tried hard to get it back. At half price, as a lure, he advertised squeakin' balloons and sticks of candy, the chowchow kind. Who wanted squeakin' balloons and chowchow candy? And again Darby went him one better:

FREE! FREE! FREE!

Five dollar bill to the boy or girl who guesses nearest the number of peas in this bottle.

His store was besieged. The school playgrounds were deserted. Troops of madly excited boys and girls flung frantic guesses at the delighted grocer. Ting-a-ling! Ting-a-ling! Vainly, across the way, the janitor swung his bell high above his head, then down to

his weak old knees, and the brass gave out its utmost.

"No, no, no; every guess must be written, and I will take none till 3 o'clock this afternoon," cried Darby, dismissing the disappointed mob.

But one boy, regardless of the janitor's peremptory mandate, remained glued to Darby's window, mumbling to himself, his chubby fists clutched tightly at the crimson sill, as he dumped his toughened knees against the freshly painted panel. It was Stumpy Dent, and he was thinking—yea, he was reasoning. Where had he seen a bottle just like that one with the peas? Ma had one just the same down in the cellar. Sure!

Suddenly, when the white aproned assistant peeped out of the door, Stumpy melted. Hookey? Fine he knew what hookey meant, and ma mustn't see him get the bottle—naw, nor the peas! And she didn't.

At 2 o'clock that same afternoon Pa Dent came unexpectedly upon his offspring. Pa seldom disturbed the stable loft till the evening, when he brought the horses in, and therefore had Stumpy chosen it as a fitting place for his operations. A newspaper spread lengthwise, the French prune bottle, a pyramid of peas, Stumpy carefully counting every pea he dropped into the bottle, and on the white margin of the newspaper a record of red chalk strokes—that was what pa saw when his head topped the open trap.

"Stumpy!" he cried sharply. "What are you doing? Why are you not at school?"

Taken in the act and breathless from the shock, Stumpy did not reply at once. Under such strong incriminating circumstances the grand impulse of the ordinary boy would have been instant confession and "take the consequences." Not so with Stumpy. A splendid evasion loomed up before him.

"Subtractin', pa," he gurgled, dabbing his finger on the last chalk mark so as not to forget his total.

"Ah, I see!" said pa.

Certainly the excuse was a feasible one. He had told the teacher to send Stumpy home if he became too dense. Left to himself, pa said, subtraction might come in a flash, but the jeering of his companions would make him worse. Sensible Miss Marlow had acted on his advice. Yes, that was it, and pa, quite satisfied, descended the ladder from the loft. When he disappeared Stumpy smiled and went on adding.

Came 3 o'clock, and Darby was again besieged. Every boy and girl in Munkersville had a guess to give in, and every slip had to be carefully examined. At last, amid breathless silence, Darby, beaming like a harvest moon, mounted a chair and in loud tones cried:

"Nine—two—two is the winning number, boys, and Stumpy Dent guesses nine—two—one! Stumpy gets the bill!"

Wild was the scene in Darby's. Up and out went Stumpy on the shoulders of the fifth grade gang. And pa, driving home in his buggy, felt a lump in his throat when he heard the loud cheers for Stumpy.

"How did you do it, sonny?" he asked when the demonstration was over and the boy safe at home.

"Jes' this way," whispered Stumpy. "I fetched ma's prune bottle from the cellar. Darby's was jes' the same in size an' w' the same wee red label on the neck. So I filled ma's bottle neat w' peas, emptied 'em out on the newspaper an' counted 'em as I filled it up ag'in. That gave nine—two—one."

"Ha, ha, ha!" laughed jubilant pa. "Come, Stumpy, lad," he cried, counting out five shining silver dollars for the bill; "come an' we'll put your money in a bank!"

It was a miniature iron bank, a penny in the slot affair, and the silver rattled and rang as it dropped to the little vault below.

"Now, Stumpy," said pa proudly, "that's your first deposit, an' it draws interest at 5 per cent in one month."

But when the month was up and pa pried open the lid only three shining dollars demanded 5 per cent. Stumpy had learned to subtract.

Applicant In the Wrong Room.

During the excitement of a physical examination of candidates for places on the police force in city hall a mild mannered man wandered into the room and somehow got mixed up with the aspirants for places on the force. He was instructed to remove his clothes partly, and in a few minutes was hard at work with the other men in the room, raising dumbbells, inflating his chest and undergoing a general physical examination.

"Run around the room," he was commanded, and, on a trot, he made the circuit of the room a dozen times.

Almost out of breath, he stopped then and inquired:

"Look a-here, what else have I got to do to get my license?"

"What license?" queried the surgeon, in surprise.

"Why, my marriage license. That's what I came in for," was the reply.

"Say," said the surgeon, "you're in the wrong room. I thought you wanted to be a policeman. The license bureau is downstairs."—Philadelphia Record.

After crosses and losses men grow humbler and wiser.—Franklin.

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No. 4 Express for Point du Chene	11.00
No. 26 Express for Point du Chene, Halifax and Pictou	11.45
No. 136 Suburban for Hampton	13.15
No. 8 Express for Sussex	17.15
No. 138 Suburban for Hampton	18.15
No. 134 Express for Quebec and Montreal	19.00
No. 156 Suburban for Hampton	22.40
No. 10 Express for Halifax and Sydney	23.25

TRAINS WILL ARRIVE AT ST. JOHN

No. 9 Express from Halifax and Sydney	6.25
No. 135 Suburban from Hampton	7.45
No. 7 Express from Sussex	9.00
No. 133 Express from Montreal and Quebec	12.50
No. 5 Mixed from Moncton	15.10
No. 137 Suburban from Hampton	15.30
No. 3 Mixed from Point du Chene	17.30
No. 25 Express from Halifax, Pictou and Moncton	17.15
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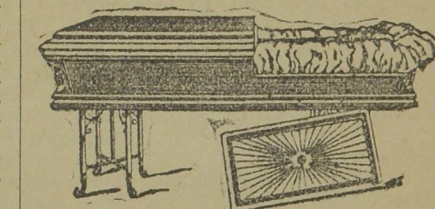
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