Doin' the Gutta's

One of the things that can bring a father and his son together is work. Maybe its the challenge to finish a task together, like when he and I run in local races. We always run together and help each other out. We are Team Quinn and we always race down the difficult roads like pros. When we finish, we always have won between us. Maybe work is just doing the man's job. The lawnmower, as I watched my dad ride gloriously on it when I was little, was a symbol of power and being the head of the household. Now that I get to ride it, I'm my dad's own vice president, his own assistant director to help him when in trouble. Work is the father teaching the son, being an example to the son, and stepping aside for the son to climb up the ladder.

With my dad, though, there is just one catch. He has a wild mind but a tame body which is struggling to keep up. He always has wanted to escape the doctor's office and play soccer or mow lawns for a living. Well, it just so happens that two days ago me and my dad had some work to do.

Having just finished a whole weekend during Thanksgiving of seeing who could stuff themselves full of the most food, both of us were eager to settle down and somewhat refocus. My dad is a doctor, and don't ask what type cause its some long name I can't explain. Anyway, our task was to clean out the gutters from the roofs of some rental properties that we inherited from my uncle. And with the thermometers being a little empty and the wind chill ready to refrigerate both of us, we had to pack warm. So my dad with his jeans and coat and me with my sweats and a stocking cap set out. He looked like he wanted a hat to cover his ears but my offers were only denied for some unexplainable reason. We drove over there in a small orange truck that we also inherited from my uncle along with a big expandable 50 ft. ladder in the
We headed over to one of the many rental houses to be cleaned near Belmont University. As we drove over there, he informed me of the ever important art of "Doin' the Gutta's." Being smart guys, we came equipped with those thin, wet gardening gloves instead of the thick padded gloves we needed to scoop the cold, wet, and frozen mixture of leaves and "other stuff." He said he would climb up the ladder, crawl to the back of the house, and cover that part, while I tackled the front gutters. So, almost without thinking, I pulled out the ladder and set it up on the sturdy concrete porch of this house. He began to unfold the trash bags where we were going to put the leaves. And, methodically, he climbed up the ladder and began to peer at the roof while I shook my trash bag to get it to open.

"Boy these puppies are full," he said, as two boys from the adjacent yard came outside to play with their rubber band guns, heard him, and peered through the bushes.

And then, as it always has been played through again and again in my mind, the bottom of the ladder slipped out from under him while he was admiring our work ahead of us on the top step. It pulled him down a little until he was knocked off the gutter to fall at least twenty feet onto the awaiting grasp of the ladder. The worst part about it was that I saw it all. And right then and there, those two wide-eyed little boys next door saw the crash, gripped their guns, and held tight to the ground with their shoes. I didn't know if anything was broken at best or if he had hurt his spinal chord or something. Just like that, our bond was put to the test. Now I was the doctor, something I always pretended but not really wanted to be.

My first reaction was to get him off of that ladder because even the pavement would have been better at this point than the rusted spikes of the ladder, but he waived me off. I had seen him cut his hand or something like that before, but he is getting old and a fall like that is definitely not a good thing. He just lay there, shocked and what appeared to be paralyzed, its nothing like with your mom or your sibling,
but your dad is the guy you turn to when no one understands, the guy you hunt and
fish with, and who is not as snappy as mom. Whenever part of my day or week
doesn't go well, my dad is always there to make me feel like a person, a son, and
maybe even the vice president again.

After a while, he slowly started to get up and walk back and forth across the
porch. The worst was not his body or his cuts but the look on his face. He didn't cry
or yell but he just frowned and gave an expression like he was about to blow up
inside. The fact that now I saw my leader and captain down scared me. After a while,
after both he and I recovered from temporary shock, he appeared to not be that bad, or
so it seemed. If I knew my dad well enough he didn't show enough pain when he
really needed to.

We both somehow realized and communicated that I should pack up the ladder
and somehow get him to a hospital because he began to nurse his left hand which was
limp and lifeless at his side. And in even more pain, I helped him into the car. With
our luck, I hadn't learned how to drive a stick shift yet, so I ended up leaning over
from the passenger side and turning the wheel while he shifted. And with the grace of
God, we made it down some of the busiest streets in Nashville, now a team and a unit
more than ever, coaching each other along especially on those sharp turns. We arrived
at the finish line in one piece and somehow parked the truck with that ladder at the
ER of Centennial Hospital, where he does most of his work. He was in the same
condition but now more than ever his voice was growing weaker when he talked and
his breaths shorter and quicker. We walked right up to the front desk and he
confronted one of the nurses he worked with.

She began to lead him to an ER room, but as I worriedly watched once more,
he collapsed onto a nearby chair. Now, a whole myriad of nurses, seeing that my dad
was not exactly the doctor that day, wheeled him into a room and onto a bed. I was
told to wait in the waiting room and register him. But even as I sat in some corner
with a congested group of rowdy people wanting to see their loved ones, I still heard
and somehow felt the pain of my dad. As I was invited into his room and saw him
there, as weak and curled up as ever, I never wanted him to die, ever. I just tried to
imagine life without my president and captain but I couldn't do it.

Well, anyway, to pass up all the hospital stuff, he's fine and now realizes what
his patients must feel like. I still think about why he fell: maybe it was the slippery
porch, maybe it was the stupid ladder, or maybe it was because he didn't wear the hat
I offered. I know, however, if I had been the first one on the ladder, a most likely
possibility, or if he had landed at a slightly different angle, things would have been
much worse. So, now, as we have hired professionals to clean our gutters, my dad is
very miserably sitting in his office, staring out the window, and dreaming about
adventure and some more men's work he can do, So, maybe some day as I'm
recounting old memories with my old dad at a family reunion or something, we will
talk about the time I learned to drive a stick shift and we won the biggest race we
have ever been in.

On my honor as a gentleman, I have neither given nor received aid on this
work.