

# THAT SKINNER BOY.

He Is Sent on an Errand of Mercy and Sorrow.

COMES ACROSS WATKINS BOY.

Explains to Friend the Nature of His Message and Is Called a Hero. Humpy Is Given a Lift by a Large and Liberal Foot.

[Copyright, 1905.]

Humpy Skinner had his books under his arm and was on his way to school when he passed a house painter standing on a ladder at work with his brush. Just then the ladder broke, and the man came down and broke a leg. A crowd quickly gathered, the ambulance was summoned, and the policeman who took charge of things looked around and then said to Humpy: "Boy, this poor painter is to be taken to the Ninth Street hospital."

"Yes, sir."

"He will probably die of his injuries."

"Yes, sir; he will."

"His wife ought to be notified. Here is her address, and I wish you would



A LARGE AND LIBERAL FOOT HELPED HIM OFF THE STEP.

go to the place and tell her what has happened. The poor thing ought to know it at once."

"But I am on my way to school, sir."

"Never mind that. Here is an errand of mercy and sorrow. If your father should break his leg today, would not your mother feel grateful to the boy who came to tell her? Suppose this painter should die without seeing his wife again. You'd always have it on your conscience, and his ghost would haunt you. Take the address and trot right along."

It was the threat about the ghost that decided Humpy. He didn't want any painter's ghost walking in on him at midnight, and he left his school books in a grocery and started on the errand. When he had gone a couple of blocks he met the Watkins boy, and of course the latter asked where he was going and what for. When the nature of the errand had been explained to him, he looked wise and said:

"Hump Skinner, I have read the lives of Washington, Madison, Henry Clay and Corporal Tanner, and not one of 'em was ever sent to tell a wife that her husband had broken his leg. Do you realize that you are a hero?"

"Am I?"

"Of course you are. Buffalo Bill is not in it with you. Yes, sir, you are a regular hero, and you want to act like one. Don't rush into the house when you get there and scare that poor woman half to death, but break the news gradually. Lead up to the matter gradually and easily. If some boys had your chance they'd make that wife think it was a good thing that her husband broke his leg. Go on and be a hero."

Humpy went on. He hadn't even looked at the address yet. He had been told that it was Beech street, and Beech street was a mile away. He had got within four or five blocks of the street when he felt for the address, to find that he had lost it. He halted in his steps and was about to turn when he recalled that some one had said that the injured man's name was McGuire. With that in his mind and feeling that Providence might guide him, he reached the corner of Beech street to meet an old woman hobbling along, and he accosted her with:

"Ma'am, do you know a family on this street named McGuire?"

"Bless your heart, I do," was the reply. "You have only to go to the fourth house on the right. I have known Mrs. McGuire for these many years, and I can say that she's a perfect lady."

Humpy was in luck. He passed along to the fourth house and rang the bell, and as he stood waiting he remembered that he must be a hero. Mrs. McGuire herself answered the bell, and her greeting was not exactly cordial. Her voice was as cold as ice as she asked what was wanted.

"I wanted to ask if your husband went huckleberrying today," replied Humpy, who started in to break the sad news gently.

"What! Are you here to give me impudence?"

"No, ma'am. If your husband went huckleberrying and fell out of a hickory tree and was bitten by a snake—"

Has a Narrow Escape.

"Away with you!" shouted the woman as she grabbed for the broom

behind her. "What's this talk about my husband when I've been a widow for the last seven years?"

"Do you know any other McGuires

around here?" called Humpy from the other side of the gate.

"There's one right across the road, but I'm not saying that she does her duty by her children gadding around as she does every day in the week."

Humpy took a long look at the house opposite and then crossed the street and rang the bell. Again it was Mrs. McGuire who came to the door, and not seeing a parcel in his hand, she broke out with:

"I paid a dollar ten for a corset yesterday, and it was to come up before night. It's not here yet, and you tell the girl who sold it to me and gave me her solemn promise that I'm getting dressed to waltz down there and give her a bit of my mind."

"I'm not a parcel boy, ma'am," replied Humpy.

"No? Then who are you?"

"Have you got a husband, ma'am?"

"I have."

"Does he ever climb ladders?"

"He does. He'll climb anything from a glass of beer to the steeple of a church. He's been trying for the last five years to climb into office, but it makes his head dizzy."

"Ma'am, I have to tell you—that is, I was sent here to say—that is—"

"That is, that my man Joe is drunk again and the police have got him this time and will give him thirty days. All right. I was that McGuire across the street that sent you, and do you go back and tell her that she's no lady."

"But, ma'am—"

"Get a move on you!"

Humpy moved. Half a block down the street he stopped beside a carpenter repairing a fence and asked him if there were any other McGuires on the street.

"About ten others," was the reply. "Try the next door."

It was tried. Mrs. McGuire came to the door with a feather duster in her hand and a scowl on her face and wanted to know why Humpy was trying to pull the doorbell out by the roots.

"You have got a husband, haven't you?" he queried in reply.

"You impudent sassbox, would I be living with a man for the last twenty years and he not my husband?"

"Your husband went away this morning feeling all right, didn't he?"

Humpy Gets Nervous.

"He did that. How else should he feel when he's got the best wife on the street? What do you stand there swallowing your tongue for? Has my man been throwing another car off the track and dislocating the conductor's shoulder? If he has, then he can pay his own fine."

"Madam, I regret to be the bearer—the bearer—"

"And what is it that you are bearing? If it's the ice or milk bill, out with it! I've got something to do besides standing here chinning with a boy that can't speak English."

"Well, then, your husband fell from a ladder down on Arch street and broke his leg and has been sent to the hospital."

"Oh, he has?" smiled the woman. "My son, step inside a minute. Do you see that sleeping form on the lounge there? That's what they call a recumbent attitude. That's the man we have been talking about. That's my husband. He was out on a spree last night."

Humpy turned to flee, but he was not quite quick enough. He was hit on the head with a duster, and a large and liberal foot helped him off the step. The man who was repairing the fence advised him to try three or four other houses, but the boy had become discouraged. He headed for home and didn't stop until he got there. As he entered the house his mother asked:

"Why, Humpy, how does it happen that you got out of school so early?"

He explained, and when he had finished she said:

"Poor boy, you did not find the right Mrs. McGuire. I am the one, and now if you will kindly step into the wood shed with me we'll find out who fell down a ladder and who fell up one!"

M. QUAD.

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