

SKID ROW

Do not use lines Cannon and Linnies, I wonder if words when speaking of them in his
be looked I will use Linnies words. I do not use them of any, though.

The denizens of the asphalt jungle had not finished with me. They came to my work place, six strong, to announce that Bill Jones, the truant paternal uncle, owed them \$36.00 which he had barrowed, and so they had come to collect it off me. "Is this not a bit irregular?", said I, in very business-like tones, wondering a little about what my co-workers might be thinking about my being visited by these unkept gentry -- from south of the railroad tracks -- and knowing that something "smelly" would of necessity grow out of any deduction. ~~THEY MIGHT MAKE~~

"Something smelly and far wide of the truth", thought I. "Roses do not grow out of ~~such~~ ^{unpromising} unfavorable soil." I, summing up for future reference. Said the leader of this ^{JNSAVORY} pack, saying, "It seems you are thinking we do not mean business. Or, maybe you do not care what happens to your husband's brother. . . or maybe you would chose what is commonly referred to as 'else'". After a long and reflective silence, I replied; "Else being the murder of young William Jones, I take it?" Therefore, be it said, this money you want could be termed ransom: "No? Yes? Still how do I know you have William Jones captive? And if so why is your price not higher? And do I have any reason to believe this will not heppen every day? Maybe three times a day?" One of the hefties stepped forward to snarl in my face, "We are honorable men!" "Shucks", sniffed I, "you are not even men. You think like streetwalkers. I'm told they are women! I will talk to Jones. Bring him here!" There was heavy intake of breath and its slow explusion, like the slow drip of blood. Goose pimples rose somewhat as this thought crossed my mind, though I'm quite sure my exterior registered no sign of "quaking or faltering". The twirp in center of the back seat drew a gun. It looked like a cannon, I wondered if it was loaded with lead or dung. I ^{OPENLY} jotted down the license number of their car. The remaining

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^{FOUR}
five worthies-- downed the armed man. As they careened around the corner toward the tracks and out of town - the gun gave with a loud blast-off and the town folk gathered from everywhere, especially from the garage on that corner, where the loafers habitually held forth, and gave with such learned matters as who was seen ^Nsneaking out of town to meet whose husband.

The undertaker^{message} addressed me saying; "are you having trouble ^{Mrs.}Miz Jones?" and I replied, "Never! Not a placid creature like myself! What trouble could I possibly have? In a quiet God-fearing town like this?"

"Oh!" said he, "one never knows, I hear your husband, chair and all, fell through the pool room floor last night. Seems the rats are weakening the timbers." ^{retained} "Jeepers! Is that a proper way to refer to potential customers?" said I, with ⁸feigned severity. ^{have legged} "W³a all go, ^{some time, 7 for 8 now.}

"Tis rodents ^{WHARF}(4 legged) that I refer to, ^{MRS.}Miz Jones. Seems they are numerous lately, ^{WHARF}Warf/rats, they are, and bent upon the destruction of the pool room, I'm Told."

"Get out of there Bill" said I. "Go into the house. Lock the doors. Go into your room and lock it also. Try to sleep off this wretched experience. You look very ill, I think" Tears trailed down his dirty face, leaving a clean trail against the surface grime. He answered, "I can not, Skinny." (that was his nick name for me). "They will kill me." I appeared to laugh long and loud. "These? Well, 'tis too bad I have not told them . . . how harmless a live person is compared to a ghost. Especially if it met its end by violence."

Bill did not obey me, so I figured something was restraining him. There was a look of griminess and pain in Bill's face. My housekeeper, Mrs. H., (a lady of eighty years and considerable poundage, was scrubbing my spacious front porch and training her very good ears upon this exchange of conversation.

Mrs. H., fortunately for me, was one to keep abreast of the trends of the winds. Once more I gave the order for Bill to dismount and enter the house. It was as if the whole group had been carved in rock. Nothing moved. Not even a nose twitched. Mrs. H. remarked ominously, "Let that boy loose." Not a muscle moved among the car occupants. Bill looked white and strained. His eyes looked frightened. My mind flew back to a time before I'd married into the family or hardly been born for that matter, when Bill was four and his mother at fifty-eight years lay a corpse. He'd refused to be moved from beneath her casket even after the remains were taken to the grave; he had lingered in that spot. Thereafter, he

"Jesus have mercy on God," leaned against an adjacent tree and allowed his asthma attack to have full sway with him while the garage loafers beat out the flame with coats, shirts and anything handy. But to my knowledge, his very productive strawberry patch never bore fruit again or even "flowered." It had produced a gratifying income for him in ~~the~~ its beginning days with berries larger than a man's thumb. It must be said of big Jim that he had a "green thumb." The culprits managed to reassemble. They mounted up and headed west. Ten minutes later I had a phone call from the owner of the local lumber yard.

"Eight big plug-uglies down here and another car with five or six men in it just joined them. They claim they are working for you and want about \$100 worth of lumber charged to you," said he.

"Tell 'em I'm a poor risk. Meantime, I'll call the ~~sheriff~~ sheriff and send him down to your place as if he just happened in to pass the time of day, etc." The man replied: "They appear mighty nervous. Doubt if the sheriff makes it before they leave."

I said "Meantime, watch it. These birds are ex-convicts for the most part. Methinks the charges were "murder." I think they are unarmed, now. I shall give the sheriff the nose count on them and the license number on the touring car. The eight are in a truck, you say?"

He verified that, and I said, I'd tell the sheriff to bring help along.

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It took some time to release young Bill from his bindings. His wrists were tightly bound. His ankles also, and all so cleverly attached that to struggle in one direction would have shut off his breathing. He could not have stood if his life had depended upon it. This was the work of hoté-mongers aided by malice aforethought. It was even more evil than I had thought. I urged the Joneses to press charges before they killed Bill Jones or me or both or maybe sought to punish me by making off with my child. I was about to make off to some strange place with my child.

Bill talked me out of it by saying, "He's safer and happier here. Those people are scared to death of you, really. They credit you with supernatural powers."

The Jones brothers wanted no part of rocking Skid Row's boat. Bill went to Skid Row. In a matter of hours he was dead. I've always thought that he knew this would happen and thought in this way he could save me from harm or Little Jim or both of us or all of us. I screamed for the Jones brothers and sisters to demand an investigation. They wanted no part of it for fear it would cast aspersions upon their family name. I investigated.

When I got close, the embattled ones up and decamped the country in the dark hours of the night, taking all their possessions with them. When

the high family leopards I figured that was all. 7

But to return to getting Bill out of his trussing
up, peeling potatoes for a leg rolling would have
been easier. They must have tied him with Skip's
hauser. We both, Mrs. H. and I, worked with sharp
long-knives, but it was the doings of Mrs. H.
that triggered my laughter to this good day.
At first I couldn't decipher her hi-jinks, but
she'd gathered every splinter of the broken cleaning
tools and patterned them like hieroglyphics. She
had bordered the strawberry patch with cross-bones,
hair, and feathers. It was obvious this God-
fearing woman was engaged in black magic, as
she muttered at intervals in a voice very unlike her
own: "Belzebub. If God ain't done it . . . maybe
you had better try it."

It was obvious that she was laying some sort of
curse on the Wild Breed down in Skid Row, and
highly unlikely that even the innocent could escape
it.

There was a tremendous barking and yelling in the
distance and young Jim was borne around the street
corner on the crest of a wave of dogs. In fact,
every dog in town. The raccoons' kitten rode on his
head voicing breathless "Whcc"s as the gallop
quickenened. Mrs. Goat and her young twins brought
up the rear. Beholding this out of the corner of

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his eyes, Bill, who had recently been operated for
appenticitus screamed: "My God! Do something Skinny!"
Panice!, I flung my body across his soft middle
and wore the hoof marks (three sets,) fully three
months thereafter.