

The Big-Town Round Up

by William MacLeod Raine Illustrations by Irwin Myers

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CHAPTER XI Continued

Followed a long silence. Durand was resolved to wait until his enemy grew restless and betrayed himself.

The delay became a test of moral stamina. The contest was not one of grit, but of that unflinching nerve which is so much the result of perfect physical fitness.

Clay was cool, quite master of himself. Before the fight had gone three minutes he knew that, barring a chance blow, some foul play, or a bit of bad luck, he would win.

Clay covered up, letting the pugilist wear himself out, and taking only the punishment he must.

But Durand, used to the fetid atmosphere of barrooms and to the soft living of the great city, found his nerve beginning to crack under the strain.

What kind of a man was his enemy to lie there in the black silence and not once give sign of where he was, in spite of crashing bullets?

It was possible that he could have killed the fellow at the first shot? The comfort of this thought whispered hope in the ear of the ex-prize-fighter.

A chair crashed wildly. Durand fired again and yet again, his nerves giving way to a panic that carried him to swift action.

Durand tried to close with him. An uppercut jolted him back. He plunged forward again. They grappled, knocking over chairs as they threshed across the room.

When they went down Clay was underneath, but as they struck the floor he whirled and landed on top.

The man below fought furiously to regain his feet. Clay's arm worked like a piston rod with short-arm jolts against the battered face.

Gasping for breath, Durand suddenly collapsed. Clay got to his feet and waited for him to rise.

His enemy rolled over and groaned. "Had enough?" demanded the west-erner.

No answer came, except the heavy, irregular breathing of the man on the floor, who was clawing for air in his lungs.

"I'll ask you once more where Kitty Mason is. And you'll tell me unless you want me to begin on you all over again."

The beaten pugilist sat up, leaning against the wall. He felt ashamed and disgraced by his defeat. Life for him had lost its savor, for he had met his master.

"She—got away." "How?" "They turned her loose, to duck the bulls," came the slow, sullen answer.

Johnnie Comes Into His Own. When Clay shot off at a tangent from the car and ceased to function as a passenger, Johnnie made an effort to descend and join his friend, but already the taxi was traveling at a speed that made this dangerous.

He leaned out of the open door and shouted to the driver. "Say, lemme out, doggone you. I wanta get out right here."

The chauffeur paid not the least attention to him. He skidded round a corner, grazing the curb, and put his foot on the accelerator. The car jumped forward, sweeping down the wet street, now and again skidding dangerously.

It swung into Fourth avenue, slowing to take the curve. At the widest sweep of the arc Johnnie stepped down. His feet slid from under him and he rolled to the curb across the wet asphalt.

Slowly he got up and tested himself for broken bones. He was sure he had dislocated a few hips and it took him some time to persuade himself he was all right, except for some bruises.

But Johnnie, free, had no idea what to do. He was as helpless as Johnnie imprisoned in the flying cab. Of what Clay's plan had been he had not the remotest idea.

Yet he could not go home and do nothing. He must keep searching. But where? One thing stuck in his mind. His friend had mentioned that he would like to get a chance to call the police to find out whether Kitty had been rescued.

He was anxious on that point himself. At the first cigar store he stopped and was put on the wire with headquarters. He learned that a car supposed to be the one wanted had been driven into Central park by the police a few minutes earlier.

Johnnie's mind carried him on a straight line to the simplest decision. He ran across to Fifth avenue and climbed into a bus going uptown. At the Seventy-second street entrance Johnnie left the bus and plunged into the park.

The implacable gods who delight in turning upside down the best-laid plans of mice and men were working overtime tonight. They arranged it that a girl cowering among the wet bushes bordering an unfrequented path heard the "Hi—y—y!" of Arizona and gave a faint cry for help.

That call reached Johnnie and brought him on the run. A man beside the girl jumped up with a snarl, gun in hand.

But the runt had caught a sight of Kitty. A file of fixed bayonets could not have kept him from trying to rescue her. He dived through the brush like a football tacker.

A gun barked. The little man did not even know it. He and the thug went down together, rolled over, clawed furiously at each other, and got to their feet simultaneously.

But the cowpuncher held the gun now. The runt glared at him for a moment, and bolted for the safety of the bushes in wild flight.

Johnnie fired once, then forgot all about the private little war he had started. For his arms were full of a sobbing Kitty, who clung to him while she wept and talked and exclaimed all in a breath.

"I knew you'd come, Johnnie. I knew you would—you or Clay. They left me here with him while they got away from the police. Oh, I've been so scared. I didn't know—I thought—"

Clay had no intention of giving his name just now to any casual stranger. He laughed and hummed the chorus of an old range ditty.

"I've got an edge on myself, sort of." "Not really?" murmured Clay politely.

"Surest thing you know. Say, was it a good scrap?" "I'd hate to mix in a better one."

"Wish I'd been there." The student fumbled for a card. "Didn't catch your name?"

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"I knew you'd come, Johnnie. I knew you would—you or Clay. They left me here with him while they got away from the police. Oh, I've been so scared. I didn't know—I thought—"

She nestled closer, and Johnnie's heart lost a beat. He had become aware of a dull pain in the shoulder and of something wet trickling down his shoulder.

But what is one little bullet in your geography when the sweetest girl in the world is in your arms?

"I ain't nothin' but a hampered-down 'I' haysed of a cowpuncher," he told her, his voice trembling. "An' you're awful pretty an'—an'—"

A flag of color fluttered to her soft cheeks. The silken lashes fell shyly. "I think you're fine and dandy, the bravest man that ever was."

"Do you—figure you could?— I—I—I don't reckon you could ever—"

He stopped, abashed. To him this creature of soft curves was of heavenly charm. All the beauty and vitality of her youth called to him.

It seemed to Johnnie that God spoke through her. Which is another way of saying that he was in love with her.

She made a rustling little stir in his arms and lifted a flushed face very tender and appealing. In the darkness her lips slowly turned to his.

Johnnie chose that inopportune moment to get sick at the stomach. "I—I—I'm goin' to faint," he announced, and did.

When he returned to his love-story Johnnie's head was in Kitty's lap and a mounted policeman was in the foreground of the scene.

His face was wet from the mist of fine rain falling. "Don't move. Some one went for a car," she whispered, bending over him so that flying tendrils of her hair brushed his cheek.

He snorted. "I'm a false alarm. Nothin' a-tall. He jes' creased me." "You're so brave," she cried, admiringly.

He had never been told this before. He suspected it was not true, but to hear her say it was manna to his hungry soul.

The cab stopped at the house of a doctor and the shoulder was dressed. The doctor made one pardonable mistake.

"Get your wife to give you this sleeping powder if you find you can't sleep," he said.

"Y'betcha," answered Johnnie cheerfully. Kitty looked at him reproachfully and blushed. She scolded him about it after they reached the apartment where they lived.

Her new fiance defended himself. "He's only a day or two prema-chure, honey. It wasn't hardly worth while explainin'," he claimed.

"A day or two. Oh, Johnnie!" "Sure. I ain't gonna wait. Wha's the matter with tomorrow?"

"I haven't any clothes made," she evaded, and added by way of diversion. "I always liked that kinda golden-down on your cheeks."

"The stores are full of 'em. An' we ain't talkin' about my whiskers—not right now."

"You're a nice old thing," she whispered, flashing into unexpected dimples, and she rewarded him for his nice-ness in a way he thought altogether desirable.

A crisp, strong step sounded outside. The door opened and Clay came into the room.

He looked at Kitty. "Thank heaven, you're safe," he said. "Johnnie rescued me," she cried. "He got shot—in the shoulder."

The men looked at each other. "Bad, Johnnie?" "Nope. A plumb 'I'll scratch. Wha's the matter with you?"

A gleam of humor flitted into the eyes of the gentleman. "I ran into a door."

"Say, Clay," Johnnie burst out, "I betcha can't guess." His friend laughed in amiable derision. "Oh, you kids in the woods. I knew it soon as I opened the door."

He walked up to the girl and took her hand. "You got a good man, Kitty. I'm wishin' you all the joy in the world."

Her eyes flashed softly. "Don't I know I've got a good man, and I'm going to be happier than I deserve."

Tim Muldoon, in his shirt-sleeves, was busy over a late breakfast when his mother opened the door of the flat to let in Clay Lindsay.

"With his gang?" asked Tim. "No; I waited till they had gone. I locked myself in a room alone with him. He took eight shots at me in the dark and then we mixed."

"You bated him! I can see it in your eye!" cried Muldoon, pounding the table so that the dishes jumped.

"You'll have to ask him about that." Clay passed to more important facts. "When I reached home Kitty was there. They had dropped her in the park to make a safe getaway."

"That's good." "But Tim—when Annie Millikan gave me the address where Jerry Durand was, the driver of my taxi saw her. The man was 'Slim' Jim."

Muldoon sat up, a serious look on his face. "Man, yuh split the beans that time. How'd you ever come to do it? They'll take it out on Annie, the dogs." The eyes of the policeman blazed.

"Unless we stand by her. First we've got to get her away from there to some decent place where she'll be safe."

Mrs. Muldoon spoke up. "And that's easy. She'll just take our spare bedroom and welcome. Sure the girl needs a mother and a home. An' I don't doubt that she'll pay her way."

"Then that's settled. Will you see Annie, Tim? Or shall I?" "We'll both see her. But there's another thing. Will she be safe here?"

"I'm goin' to have a talk with 'Slim' Jim and try to throw a scare into him. I'll report to you what he says."

They took a trolley to the lodging house where Annie lived. The girl looked pale and tired. Clay guessed she had slept little. The memory of "Slim" Jim's snarling face had stood out in the darkness at the foot of her bed.

"Is this a pinch?" she asked Tim, with a pert little tilt to her chin. "Yuh can call it that, Annie. Mother wants yuh to come and stay with us. You're not safe here. That gang will make yuh pay somehow for what yuh did."

"And if your mother took me in they'd make her pay. You'd maybe lose your job."

"I'd find another. I'm thinkin' of quittin', anyhow."

"I don't think they'd get Tim," put in Clay. "I'm goin' to see Collins and have a talk with him."

"You can't salve Jim with soft soap." "Did I mention soft soap?" "I heard some one most killed Jerry Durand last night," said Annie abruptly, staring at Lindsay's bruised face.

"Was it you?" "Yes," said the Arizonan simply. "Did you get the girl?" "They dropped her to save themselves. My friend found her with a man and took her from him."

"I hope you did up Jerry right!" cried Annie, a vindictive flash in her dark eyes.

"I haven't called him up this mo'n' in to see how he's feelin'," said Clay whimsically. "Miss Annie, we're worried some about you. Mrs. Muldoon is right anxious for us to get you to come and stay awhile with her. She's honin' to have a 'I'll' girl to mother. Don't you reckon you can go?"

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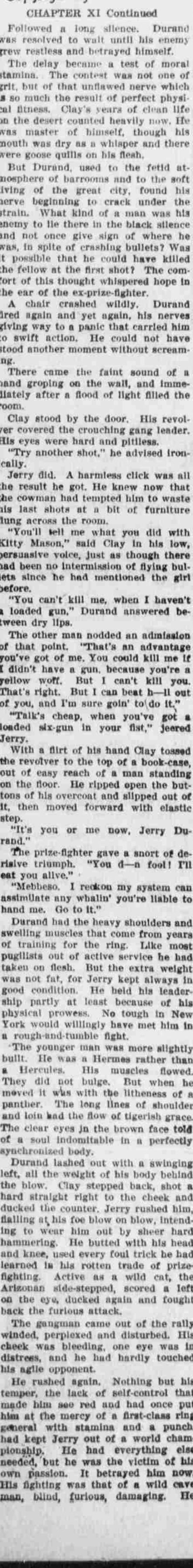
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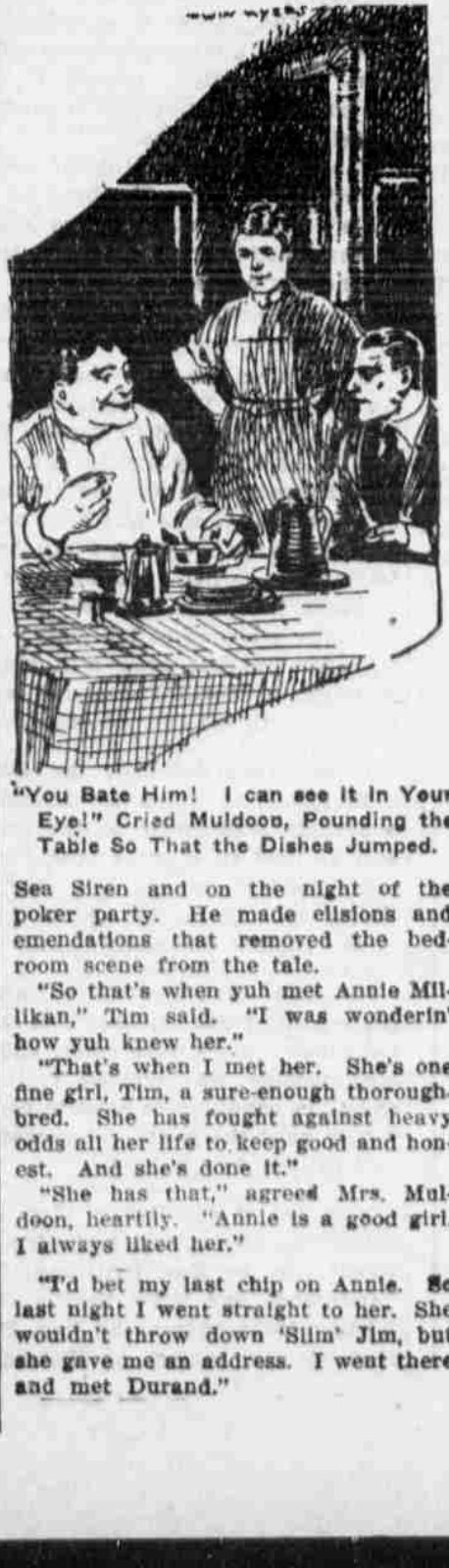
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He Threw Away His Science and His Skill in Order to Destroy the Man He Hated.



You Bate Him! I can see it in Your Eye! Cried Muldoon, Pounding the Table So That the Dishes Jumped.

Sea Siren and on the night of the poker party. He made elisions and emendations that removed the bedroom scene from the tale.

TO BE CONTINUED