

The Big-Town Round Up



by William MacLeod Raine

Illustrations by Irwin Myers

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CHAPTER XVII Continued.
if he could. That information gained, the man no longer interested him.
Suddenly Jerry left. There was no profit in jeering at Lindsay. He was too entirely master of every situation that confronted him.

Within the hour Clay was wakened from sleep by another guard with word that he was wanted at the office of the warden. He found waiting him there Beatrice and her father. The girl bloomed in that dingy room like a cactus in the desert.

She came toward him with hands extended, in her eyes gifts of friendship and faith.

"Oh, Clay!" she cried.
"Much obliged, little pardner." Her voice went to his heart like water to the thirsty roots of prickly pears. A warm glow beat through his veins. The doubts that had weighed on him during the night were gone. Beatrice believed in him. All was well with the world.



The Gang Politician's Insolent Eyes Went Up and Down Him. "I Didn't Come to See You."

He shook hands with Whitford. "Blamed good of you to come, sir."
"Why wouldn't we come?" demanded the mining man bluntly. "We're here to do what we can for you."
Little wells of tears brimmed over Beatrice's lids. "I've been so worried."
"Don't you. It'll be all right." Strangely enough he felt now that it would. Her coming had brought rippling sunshine into a drab world.
"I won't now. I'm going to get evidence for you. Tell us all about it."
"Why, there isn't much to tell that you haven't read in the papers probably. He came a-shootin' and was hit by a chair."
"Was it you that hit him?"
"Wouldn't I be justified?" he asked gently.
"But did you?"
For a moment he hesitated, then made up his mind, swiftly. "Yes," he told her gravely.
She winced. "You couldn't help it. How did you come to be there?"
"I just dropped in."
"Alone?"
"Yes."
He had burned the bridges behind him and was lying glibly. Why bring Bromfield into it? She was going to marry him in a few days. If her fiancé was man enough to come forward and tell the truth he would do so anyhow. It was up to him. Clay was not going to betray him to Beatrice.
"The paper says there was some one with you."
"Sho! Reporters sure enough have lively imaginations."
"Johnnie told me you had an engagement with Mr. Bromfield."
"Did you ever know Johnnie got anything right?"
"And Clarendon says he was with you at Maddock's."
Clay had not been prepared for this cumulative evidence. He gave a low laugh of relief. "I'm an awful poor liar. So Bromfield says he was with me, does he?"
"Yes."
He intended to wait for a lead before showing his hand. "Then you know all about it?" he asked carelessly.
Their eyes were on each other, keen and watchful. She knew he was concealing something of importance. He had meant not to tell her that Bromfield had been with him. Why? To protect the man to whom she was engaged. She jumped to the conclusion that he was still shielding him.
"Yes, you're a poor liar, Clay," she agreed. "You stayed to keep back Collins so as to give Clarendon a chance to escape."

"Did I?"
"Can you deny it? Clarendon heard the shots as he was running downstairs."
"He told you that, did he?"
"Yes."
"That ought to help a lot. If I can prove Collins was shootin' at me I can plead self-defense."
"That's what it was, of course."
"Yes. But Durand doesn't mean to let it go at that. He was here to see me this mornin'." Clay turned to the mining man, his voice low but incisive. His brain was working clear and fast. "Mr. Whitford, I have a hunch he's going to destroy the evidence that's in my favor. There must be two bullet holes in the partition of the rear room where Collins was killed. See if you can't find those bullet holes and the bullets in the wall behind."
"I'll do that, Lindsay."
"And hire me a good lawyer. Send him to me. I won't use a smart one whose business is to help crooks escape. If he doesn't believe in me, I don't want him. I'll have him get the names of all those pulled in the raid and visit them to see if he can't find some one who heard the shots or saw shooting. Then there's the gun. Some one's got that gun. It's up to us to learn who."
"That's right."
"Tim Muldoon will do anything he can for me. There's a girl lives with his mother. Her name's Annie Millikan. She has ways of finding out things. Better talk it over with her too. We've got to get busy in a hurry."
"Yes," agreed Whitford. "We'll do that, boy."
"Oh, Clay, I'm sure it's going to be all right!" cried Beatrice, in a glow of enthusiasm. "We'll give all our time. We'll get evidence to show the truth. And we'll let you know every day what we are doing."
"How about my going bail for you?" asked her father.
Clay shook his head. "No chance just yet. Let's make our showing at the coroner's inquest. I'll do fine and dandy here till then."
He shook hands with them both and was taken back to his cell. But hope was in his heart now. He knew his friends would do their best to get the evidence to free him. It would be a battle royal between the truth and a lie.

CHAPTER XVIII
Bromfield Makes an Offer.
A youth with a face like a fox sidled up to Durand in the hotel lobby and whispered in his ear. Jerry nodded curtly, and the man slipped away as furtively as he had come.
Presently the ex-prize-fighter got up, sauntered to the street and hailed a taxi. Twenty minutes later he paid

lectured a cigar. He grinned with evil mirth.
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"Go easy, Mr. Bromfield," snarled Jerry. "If you do, where do ye think you'll get off at?"
"I'll go to the police and tell them your hired gunman was shooting at us."
"Will you now? An' I'll have plenty of good witnesses to swear he wasn't." Durand bared his teeth in a threat. "That's not all, either. I'll tie you up with the rube from the West and send you up to Sing Sing as accessory. How'd you like that?"
"If I tell the truth—"
"You'll be convicted of murder in place of him and he'll go up as accessory. I don't care two straws how it is. But you'd be a d—d fool. I'll say that for you."
"I'm not going to let an innocent man suffer in my place. It wouldn't be playing the game."
Durand leaned forward and tapped the table with his finger-tips. His voice rasped like a file. "You can't save him. He's goin' to get it right. But you can hurt yourself a h—l of a lot. Get out of the country and stay out till it's all over with. That's the best thing you can do. Go to the Hawaiian Islands, man. That's a good healthy climate an' the hotel cooking's a lot better than it is at Sing Sing."
"I can't do it," moaned the clubman. "My G—d, man, if it ever came out—that I'd paid money to—to ruin his reputation, and that I'd run away when I could have saved an innocent man—I'd be done for. I'd be kicked out of every club I'm in."
"It won't ever come out if you're not here. But if you force my hand—well, that's different." Again Jerry's grin silt his colorless face. He had this poor devil where he wanted him, and he was enjoying himself.
"What do you want me to do, then?" cried Bromfield, tiny beads of perspiration on his forehead.
"You'll do as I say—beat it out the country till the thing's over with."
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Bromfield sweated blood as he walked up and down the room looking for a way out of his dilemma. He had come to the parting of the road again. If he did this thing he would be a yellow cur. It was one thing to destroy Lindsay's influence with Beatrice by giving her a false impression. From his point of view their friendship was perilous anyhow and ought to be wiped out. At most the cattleman would have gone back unhurt to the Arizona desert he was always talking about. Nobody there would care about what had happened to him in New York. But to leave him, an innocent man, to go to his death because he was too chivalrous to betray his partner in an adventure—this was something that even Bromfield's atrophied conscience revolted at. Clay was standing by him, according to Durand's story. The news of it lifted a weight from his soul. But it left him, too, under a stronger moral obligation to step out and face the music.
The clubman made the only decision he could, and that was to procrastinate, to put off making any choice for the present.
"I'll think it over. Give me a day to make up my mind," he begged.
Jerry shrugged his heavy shoulders. He knew that every hour counted in his favor, would make it more difficult for the tortured man to come forward and tell the truth. "Sure. Look it over upside and down. Don't hurry. But, man, what's there to think about? I thought you hated this guy—wanted to get rid of him."
"Not that way. G—d, no! Durand, I'll give you any sum in reason to let him go without bringing me into it. You can arrange it."
Jerry slammed down a flat heavily on the table. "I can, but I won't. Not if you was to go fifty-fifty with me to your last cent. I'm goin' to get this fellow. See? I'm goin' to get him good. He'll be crawlin' on his hands and knees to me before I'm through with him."
"What good will that do you? I'm offering you cold cash just to let the truth get out—that Collins was trying to kill him when he got hit."
"Nothin' doin'. I've been layin' for this boob. I've got him now. I'm goin' to turn the screws on and listen to him holler."
Bromfield's valet stepped into the room. "Mr. and Miss Whitford to see you, sir."

"You Rotten Traitor! Get Out of My Room or I'll Call the Police!"
The driver, turned a corner and passed into an apartment house for bachelors. He took the elevator to the third floor and rang an electric bell at a door which carried the name "Mr. Clarendon Bromfield."
From the man who came to the door Mr. Bromfield's visitor learned that he was not well and could receive no callers.
"Just mention the Omnium club and say I'm here on very important business," said Jerry with a sour grin. The reference served as a password. Jerry was admitted to meet a host quite unable to control his alarm. At sight of his visitor Bromfield jumped up angrily. As soon as his man had gone he broke out in a subdued scream.
"You rotten traitor! Get out of my room, or I'll call the police."
Durand found a comfortable chair, drew a case from his pocket and se-



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