

The Big-Town Round Up



by William MacLeod Raine

Illustrations by Irwin Myers

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CHAPTER XIX. Continued

"The person inside wouldn't take no, miss, for an answer.

"He was like us, wasn't he? Did he give his name?" asked the young woman.

"No, miss. Just said he was from the Omnum club."

Whitford and his daughter exchanged glances. "Same business we're on. Announce us and we'll go right in."

"They were on his heels when he gave their names."

Bromfield started up, too late to prevent their entrance. He stood silent for a moment, uncertain what to do, disregarding his fiancée's glance of hostile inquiry lifted toward the other guest.

The mining man forced his hand. "Won't you introduce us, Clarendon?" he asked bluntly.

Reluctantly their host went through the formula. He was extremely uneasy. There was material for an explosion present in this room that would blow him sky-high if a match should be applied to it. Let Durand get to telling what he knew about Clarendon and the Whitfords would never speak to him again. They might even spread a true story that would bar every house and club in New York to him.

"We've heard of Mr. Durand," said Beatrice.

Her tone challenged the attention of the gang leader. The brave eyes flashed defiance straight at him. A pulse of anger was throbbing in the soft round throat.

Inscrutably he watched her. It was his habit to look hard at attractive women. "Most people have," he admitted.

"Mr. Lindsay is our friend," she said. "We've just come from seeing him."

The man to whom she was engaged had been put through so many flutters of fear during the last twelve hours that a new one more or less did not matter. But he was still not shock-proof. His fingers clutched tighter the arm of the chair.

"W-what did he tell you?"

Beatrice looked into his eyes and read in them once more stark fear. Again she had a feeling that there was something about the whole affair she had not yet fathomed—some secret that Clay and Clarendon and perhaps this captain of thugs knew.

She tried to read what he was hiding, groped in her mind for the key to his terror. What could it be that he was afraid Clay had told her? What was it they all knew except Lindsay's friends? And why, since Clarendon was trembling lest it be discovered, should the Arizona, too, join the conspiracy of silence? At any rate she would not uncover her hand.

"He told us several things," she said significantly. "You've got to make open confession, Clary."

The ex-pugilist chewed his cigar and looked at her.

"What would he confess? That the man with him murdered Collins?"

"That's not true," said the girl quickly.

"So Lindsay's your friend, eh? Different here, miss. Jerry pieced together what the clubman had told him and what he had since learned about her. He knew that this must be the girl to whom his host was engaged. "How about you, Bromfield?" he sneered.

The clubman stiffened. "I've nothing against Mr. Lindsay."

"Thought you had."

"Of course he hasn't. Why should he?" asked Beatrice, backing up Clarendon.

Durand looked at her with a bold insolence that was an insult. His eyes moved up and down the long, slim curves of her figure. "I expect he could find a handsome reason if he looked around for it, miss."

The girl's father clenched his fist. A flush of anger swept his ruddy cheeks. He held himself, however, to the subject.

"You forget, Mr. Durand, that Lindsay was his guest last night."

Jerry's laugh was a contemptuous jeer. "That's right. I'd forgot that. He was your guest, wasn't he, Bromfield?"

"What's the good of discussing it here?" asked the tortured host.

"Not a bit," admitted Whitford. "Actions talk, not words. Have you seen the police yet, Bromfield?"

"N-not yet."

"What's he gonna see the police about?" Jerry wanted to know, his chin jutting out.

"To tell them that he saw Collins draw a gun and heard shots fired," retorted the mining man instantly.

"Not what he's been tellin' me. He'll not pull any such story—not unless he wants to put himself in a cell for life."

"Talk sense. You can't frighten Bromfield. He knows that's foolishness."

"Does he?" The crook turned de-

rive eyes on the victim he was torturing.

Certainly the society man did not look a picture of confidence. The shadow of a heavy fear hung over him.

The telephone rang. Bromfield's trembling fingers picked up the transmitter. He listened a moment, then turned it over to Beatrice.

"For you."

Her part of the conversation was limited. It consisted of the word "Yes," repeated at intervals and a concluding, "Oh, I'm so glad. Thank you." Her eyes were sparkling when she hung up.

"Good news, dad," she said. "I'll tell you later."

Durand laughed brutally as he rose. "Good news, eh? Get all you can. You'll need it. Take that from me, it's straight. Your friend's in trouble up to the neck." He swaggered to the door and turned. "Don't forget, Bromfield. Keep outa this or you'll be sorry." His voice was like the crack of a trainer's whip to animals in a circus.

For once Bromfield did not jump through the hoop. "Oh, go to the devil," he said in irritation, flushing angrily. "Better not get gay with me," advised Durand sourly.

After the door had closed on him there was a momentary pause. The younger man spoke awkwardly. "You can tell me now what it was Mr. Lindsay told you."

"We'd like to know for sure whether you're with us or with Durand," said Whitford mildly. "Of course we know the answer to that. You're with us. But we want to hear you say it, flat-foot."

"Of course I'm with you. That is, I'd like to be. But I don't want to get into trouble, Mr. Whitford. Can you blame me for that?"

"You wouldn't get into trouble," argued the mine owner impatiently. "I keep telling you that."

Beatrice, watching the younger man closely, saw as in a flash the solution of this mystery—the explanation of the tangle to which various scattered threads had been leading her.

"Are you sure of that, dad?"

"How could he be hurt, Bee?"

The girl let Bromfield have it straight from the shoulder. "Because Clay

"We'll hear what the coroner's jury has to say," the man behind the desk at headquarters had decided. "It'll not hurt him to rest a day or two in the cooler."

After dinner the committee of defense met in the Red room and discussed ways and means. Johnnie and his bride were present because it would have been cruel to exclude them, but for the most part they were silent members. Tim Muldoon arrived with Annie Millikan, both of them somewhat awed by the atmosphere of the big house adjoining the Drive. Each of them brought a piece of information valuable to the cause.

The man in charge of the blotter at the station had told Tim that from a dip called Fog Coney, one of those arrested in the gambling-house raid, an automatic gun with two chambers discharged had been taken and turned in by those who searched him. It had required some maneuvering for Tim to get permission to see Fog alone, but he had used his influence on the force, and managed this.

Fog was a sly dog. He wanted to make sure on which side his bread was buttered before he became communicative. At first he had been willing to tell exactly nothing. He had already been seen by Durand, and he had a very pronounced respect for that personage. It was not until he had become convinced that Jerry's star was on the wane that he had "come through" with what Muldoon wanted. Then he admitted that he had picked the automatic up from the floor where Collins had dropped it when he fell. His story further corroborated that of the defense. He had seen "Slim" fire twice before he was struck by the chair.

Clay summed up in a sentence the result of all the evidence they had collected. "It's not any longer a question of whether Bromfield goes to prison, but of Durand. The fellow has sure overplayed his hand."

Before twelve hours more had passed Durand discovered this himself. He had been too careless, too sure that he was outside of and beyond the law. At first he had laughed contemptuously at the advice of his henchmen to get to cover before it was too late.

"They can't touch me," he bragged. "They aren't."

But it came to him with a sickening realization that the district attorney meant business. He was going after him just as though he were an ordinary crook.

Jerry began to use his "pull." There reached him presently that same sinking at the pit of the stomach he had known when Clay had thrashed him. He learned that when a lawbreaker is going strong, friends at court who are under obligations to him are a bulwark of strength, but when one's power is shaken politicians prefer to take no risks. No news spreads more

"We've got proof of that. Lindsay is one witness. He must have seen it all. I've got in my pocket one of the bullets Collins shot. That's more evidence. Then—"

Beatrice broke in excitedly. "Dad, Mr. Muldoon just told me over the phone that they've got the express wagon. The plank with the bullet holes was in it. And the driver has confessed that he and a carpenter, whose name he had given, changed the partition for Durand."

Whitford gave a subdued whoop. "We win. That lets you out, Clarendon. The question now isn't whether you or Clay will go to the penitentiary, but whether Durand will. We can show he's been trying to stand in the way of justice, that he's been cooking up false evidence."

"Let's hurry! Let's get to the police right away!" the girl cried, her eyes shining with excitement. "We ought not to lose a minute. We can get Clay out in time to go home to dinner with us."

Bromfield smiled wanly. He came to time as gallantly as he could. "All right. I'm elected to take his place, I see."

"Only for a day or two, Clarendon," said the older man. "As soon as we can get together a coroner's jury we'll straighten everything out."

"Yes," agreed the clubman lifelessly. It was running through his mind already that if he should be freed of the murder charge, he would only have escaped Scylla to go to wreck on Charybdis. For it was a twenty-one-one bet that Jerry would go to Whitford with the story of his attempt to hire the gang leader to smirch Lindsay's reputation.

It must be admitted that when Bromfield made up his mind to clear Lindsay he did it thoroughly. His confession to the police was quiet and business-like. He admitted responsibility for the presence of the westerner at the Omnum club. He explained that his guest had neither gambled nor taken any liquors, that he had come only as a spectator out of curiosity. The story of the killing was told by him simply and clearly. After he had struck down the gunman, he had done a bolt down-stairs and got away by a back alley. His instinct had been to escape from the raid and from the consequences of what he had done, but of course he could not let anybody else suffer in his place. So he had come to give himself up.

The late afternoon papers carried the story that Clarendon Bromfield, well-known man about town, had confessed to having killed "Slim" Collins and had completely exonerated Lindsay. It was expected that the latter would be released immediately.

He was. That evening he dined at the home of the Whitfords. The mine owner had wanted to go on the bond of Bromfield, but his offer had been rejected.

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rapidly than that of the impending fall of a chieftain. The word was passing among the wise that Jerry Durand was to be thrown overboard.

Durand tried to make an appointment with Whitford. That gentleman declined to see him. Jerry persisted. He offered to meet him at one of his clubs. He telephoned to the house, but could not get any result more satisfactory than the cold voice of a servant saying, "Mr. Whitford does not wish to talk with you, sir." At last he telegraphed.

The message read: "I'll come to your house at eight this evening. Better see me for Missie's sake."

It was signed by Durand.

When Jerry called he was admitted. Whitford met him with chill hostility. He held the telegram in his

hand. "What does this message mean?" he asked bluntly.

"Your daughter's engaged to Bromfield, ain't she?" demanded the ex-prize fighter, his bulbous eyes full on his host.

"That's our business, sir."

"I got a reason for asking. She is or she ain't. Which is it?"

"We'll not discuss my daughter's affairs."

"All right, since you're so d-d particular. We'll discuss Bromfield's. I warned him to keep his mouth shut or he'd get into trouble."

"He was released from prison this afternoon."

"Did I say anything about prison?" Durand asked. "There's other kinds of grief beside being in stir. I've got this guy right."

"Just what do you mean, Mr. Durand?"

"I mean that he hired me to get Lindsay in bad with you and the girl. He was to be caught at the Omnum club with a woman when the police raided the place, and it was to get in to the papers."

"I don't believe it," said Whitford promptly.

"You will. I had a dictagraph in the room when Bromfield came to see me. You can hear it all in his own voice."

"But there wasn't any woman with Lindsay at Maddock's when the raid was pulled off."

"Sure there wasn't. I threw Bromfield down."

"You arranged to have Lindsay killed instead."

"Forget that stuff. The point is that if you don't call off the district attorney, I'll tell all I know about son-in-law Bromfield. He'll be ruined for life."

"To hear you tell it."

"All right. Ask him."

"I shall."

"Conspiracy is what the law calls it. Maybe he can keep outa stir. But when his swell friends hear it they'll turn their backs on Bromfield. You know it."

"I'll not know it unless Mr. Bromfield tells me so himself. I don't care anything for your dictagraph. I'm no eavesdropper."

"You tell him what he's up against and he'll come through all right. I'll see that every newspaper in New York carries the story if you don't notify me today that this attack on me is off. I'll learn you silk stockings you can't make Jerry Durand the goat."

Whitford announced his decision sharply. "If you'll leave me your telephone number, I'll let you know later in the day what we'll do."

He had told Durand that he did not believe his story. He had tried to reject it because he did not want to accept it, but after the man had gone and he thought it over, his judgment was that it held some germ of truth. If so, he was bound to protect Bromfield as far as he could. No matter what Clarendon had done, he could not throw overboard to the sharks the man who was still engaged to his daughter. He might not like him. In point of fact he did not. But he had to stand by him till he was out of his trouble.

Collin Whitford went straight to his daughter.

"Honey, this man Durand has just brought me a story about Clarendon. He says he paid him to get Clay into trouble at the Omnum club in order to discredit him with us."

"Oh, dad!"

"I'm going to see Clarendon. If it's true I don't want you to see him again. Authorize me to break the engagement for you."

They talked it over a few minutes. Beatrice slipped the engagement ring

from her finger and gave it to her father with a sigh.

"You can't do wrong without paying for it, dad."

"That's right. Bromfield—"

"I'm not thinking of Clarendon. I'm thinking about me. I feel as if I had been dragged in the dust," she said wearily.

CHAPTER XX

On the Carpet.

The question at issue was not whether Beatrice would break with her fiancé, but in what way it should be done. If her father found him guilty of what Durand had said, he was to dismiss him brusquely; if not, Beatrice wanted to disengage herself gently and with contrition.

Whitford summoned Bromfield to his office where the personal equation would be less pronounced. He put to him plainly the charge made by Jerry and demanded an answer.

No lie could save him. The only thing he could do was to sugarcoat the truth. He set about making out a case for himself as skillfully as he could.

"I'm a man of the world, Mr. Whitford," he explained. "When I meet an ugly fact I look it in the face. This man Lindsay was making a great impression on you and Bee. Neither of you seemed able quite to realize his—his deficiencies, let us say. I felt myself at a disadvantage with him because he's such a remarkably little young man and he constantly reminded you both of the West you love. It seemed fair to all of us to try him out—to find out whether at bottom he was a decent fellow or not. So I laid a little trap to find out."

"Not the way Durand tells it," answered the mineer bluntly. "He says you paid him a thousand dollars to arrange a trap to catch Lindsay."

"Either he misunderstood me or he's distorting the facts," claimed the clubman with an assumption of boldness.

"That ought to be easy to prove. We'll make an appointment with him for this afternoon and check up by his dictagraph."

Bromfield laughed unasily. "Is that necessary, Mr. Whitford? Surely my word is good. I have the honor to tell you that I did nothing discreditable."

Whitford leaned back in his swivel chair and looked steadily at the man to whom his daughter was engaged. "I'm going to the bottom of this, Bromfield. That fellow Durand ought to go to the penitentiary. We're gathering the evidence to send him there. Now he tells me he'll drag you down to ruin with him if he goes. Come clean. Can he do it?"

"Well, I wouldn't say—"

"Don't evade, Bromfield. Yes or no."

"I suppose he can." The words came sulkily after a long pause.

"You did hire him to destroy Lindsay's reputation."

TO BE CONTINUED

William E. Shuman, Attorney
NOTICE OF HEARING

In the County Court of Lincoln County, Nebraska.

In the Matter of the Estate of Frederick Werneke, Deceased.

To the Heirs and All Persons Interested in said Estate.

You are hereby notified that on August 23, 1922, Frieda Scherz as executrix of said estate, filed in said Court her final account and application for the assignment of the title to the real estate belonging to said estate, consisting of the Southwest Quarter (SW 1/4) of Section Ten (10) in Township Thirteen (13) North of Range Thirty-one (31) West (W) 6 p. m. Lincoln County, Nebraska, and for the distribution of the personal property belonging to said estate, and that said final account and application will be heard before this Court in the County Courtroom in the Courthouse in the city of North Platte, County of Lincoln, State of Nebraska on the 18th day of September, 1922 at 10 o'clock a. m. and you are hereby notified to appear at said time and place and show cause, if any there be why said final account should not be allowed, the title to said real estate assigned and the personal property of said estate distributed as provided by law and by the terms of the Last Will and Testament of the said Frederick Werneke, deceased.

T. S. BLANKENBURG,
(SEAL) Acting County Judge

Geo. N. Gibbs, Attorney.
NOTICE OF PETITION

Estate of Bridget Jones, deceased, in the County Court of Lincoln County, Nebraska.

The State of Nebraska: to all persons interested in said estate take notice that Owen Jones did on the 19th day of August, 1922 file a petition in said action setting forth that Nicholas McCabe, executor of said estate did on the 8th day of August, 1922 die, and said petition prays for the appointment of Owen Jones, and that letters of administration with will annexed be granted to him, which has been set for hearing herein on the 22nd day of September, 1922 at 10 o'clock a. m.

Dated this 25th day of August, 1922.
T. S. BLANKENBURG
Acting County Judge.



"What Does This Message Mean?" He Asked Bluntly.



The Girl Let Bromfield Have It Straight From the Shoulder.

didn't kill that man Collins. Clarendon did it."

"My G—, you know!" he cried, ashen-faced. "He told you."

"No, he didn't tell us. For some reason he's protecting you. But I know it just the same. You did it."

"It was in self-defense," he pleaded.

"Then why didn't you say so? Why did you let Clay be accused instead of coming forward at once?"

"I was waiting to see if he couldn't show he was innocent without—"

"Without getting you into it. You wanted to be shielded at any cost. The scorn that intolerant youth has for moral turpitude rang in her clear voice."

"I thought maybe we could both get out of it that way," he explained weakly.

"Oh, you thought! As soon as you saw this morning's paper you ought to have hurried to the police station and given yourself up."

"I was ill, I keep telling you."

"Your man could telephone, couldn't he? He wasn't ill, too, was he?"

Whitford interfered. "Hold on, honey. Don't rub it in. Clarendon was a bit rattled. That's natural. The question is, what's he going to do now?"

Their host groaned. "Durand'll see I go to the chair—and I only struck the man to save my own life. I wasn't trying to kill the fellow. He was shooting at me, and I had to do it."

"Of course," agreed Whitford.

"Does he?" The crook turned de-

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