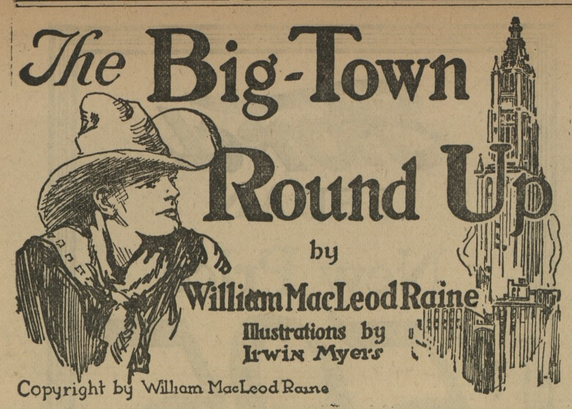

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SYNOPSIS

FOREWORD.—Motoring through Arizona, a party of easterners, father and daughter and a male companion, stop to witness a cattle round up. The girl leaves the car and is attacked by a wild steer. A masterpiece of riding on the part of one of the cowboys saves her life.

CHAPTER I.—Clay Lindsay, range-rider on an Arizona ranch, announces his intention to visit the "big town," New York.

CHAPTER II.—On the train Lindsay becomes interested in a young woman, Kitty Mason, on her way to New York to become a motion-picture actress. She is marked as fair prey by a fellow traveler, Jerry Durand, gang politician and ex-prize fighter. Perceiving his intention, Lindsay provokes a quarrel and throws Durand from the train.

CHAPTER III.—On his first day in New York Lindsay is splashed with water by a janitor. That individual the range-rider punishes summarily and leaves tied to a fire hydrant. A young woman who sees the occurrence invites Clay into her house and hides him from the police.

CHAPTER IV.—Clay's "rescuer" introduces herself as Beatrice Whitford. Lindsay meets her father, Colin Whitford, and is invited to visit them again. He meets Kitty Mason by accident. She has been disappointed in her stage aspirations, and to support herself is selling cigarettes in a cabaret. Clay visits her there.

CHAPTER V.—Kitty is insulted by a customer. Clay punishes the annoyer. After a lively mixup Lindsay escapes. Outside, he is attacked by Jerry Durand and a companion and beaten insensible.

CHAPTER VII.—The two take an apartment together, Johnnie securing employment at the Whitford's as "handy man." An advertisement signed "Kitty M." conveys the information that she is in trouble and implores Lindsay to come to a certain house where she is imprisoned. Clay is dubious as to its authenticity, but finally decides to go. He makes his way into what he supposes is the right house and finds himself in a young woman's bedroom.

CHAPTER VIII.—Naturally indignant, the girl is reassured when Clay tells her the reason for his unmeant intrusion. She shows him how to enter the house he is after, through the roof. In the place he comes on a party of "gunmen," obviously waiting for his appearance. Lindsay "gets the drop" on the thugs, locks them in a room, and escapes.

CHAPTER IX.—With a theater party, which includes the Whitfords, Lindsay meets Kitty Mason, friendless and penniless. He leaves the party to take the girl to his apartment, there seemingly being no other place available and Kitty in dire need of immediate food and warmth.

CHAPTER X.—Beatrice resents Lindsay's interest in Kitty. Though not admitting it even to herself, she is becoming attached to the Arizonan, as he is to her. The two part in anger.

CHAPTER XI.—Hurt and indignant, Beatrice practically proposes marriage to an old admirer, Clarence Bromfield, wealthy man-about-town, and the third member of the party which we met at the beginning of the story. Their engagement is announced. Durand's gang kidnaps Kitty. Clay appeals to the girl he had met the night he escaped the trap Durand had set for him. She tells him where the girl is likely to be found.

CHAPTER XII.—At the place, Clay conceals himself to await the arrival of Durand, probably with Kitty. He gets the thug alone, and in a fist fight worsts the professional bruiser.

CHAPTER XIII.—Kitty is rescued from her abductors by Johnnie Green, who has long admired the girl. He makes a declaration of his love and the wedding day is promptly set.

CHAPTER XIV.—Beatrice has long since repented her treatment of Clay and sends him a note of apology. Their friendship is resumed. Riding through the park, Beatrice's horse runs away with her. The beast is halted by Clay, and in the excitement the girl reveals the fact that she is the one whom he had saved from the steer in Arizona. Of course, Lindsay had known it all the time, but he had not supposed she remembered him. Clarence Bromfield is annoyed at the friendship between his fiancee and the Arizonan, and plans to discredit him.

CHAPTER XV.—Bromfield pays Durand to "frame up" a meeting between Lindsay and a woman of evil reputation. The thug arranges to have Lindsay killed in a gambling house to which Bromfield is to take him. With the latter, Lindsay is present when the police raid the place. In the melee "Slim Jim" Collins, a follower of Durand, is hit with a chair, and killed. Bromfield escapes, but Lindsay is captured and accused of the killing.

CHAPTER XVI.—Beatrice refuses to believe Clay guilty. She suspects Bromfield and forces him to admit he was in the gambling house with Clay.

CHAPTER XVII.—Beatrice and her father visit Clay. He advises them to get into touch with a policeman he knows, named Muldoon, and seek evidence of the shooting in the gambling house.

CHAPTER XVII

Into the Hands of His Enemy.

Durand waited alone for word to be flashed him that the debt he owed Clay Lindsay had been settled in full. A telephone lay on the desk close at hand and beside it was a watch. The second-hand ticked its way jerkily round and round the circle. Except for that the stillness weighed on him unbearably. He paced up and down the room chewing nervously the end of an unlit cigar. For the good tidings which he was anxious to hear was news of the death of the strong young enemy who had beaten him at every turn.

He Paced Up and Down the Room, Chewing Nervously the End of an Unlit Cigar.

Why didn't Collins get to the telephone? Was it possible that there had been a slip-up, that Lindsay had again broken the trap set for him? Had "Slim's" nerve failed him? Or had Bromfield been unable to bring the victim to the slaughter?

His mind went over the details again. The thing had been well planned even to the unguarded door through which Collins was to escape. In the darkness "Slim" could do the job, make his getaway along with Dave, and be safe from any chance of identification. Bromfield, to save his own hide, would keep still. If he didn't, Durand was prepared to shift the murder upon his shoulders.

The minute-hand of the watch passed down from the quarter to the half and from the half to the three-quarters. Still the telephone bell did not ring. The gang leader began to sweat blood. Had some one bungled after all the care with which he had laid his plans?

A door slammed below. Hurried footsteps sounded on the stair treads. Into the room burst a man.

"Slim's been croaked," he blurted.

"What!" Durand's eyes dilated.

"At Maddock's."

"Who did it?"

"De guy he was to gun."

"Lindsay?"

"Dat's de fellow."

"Did the bulls get Lindsay?"

"Pinched him right on de spot."

"Gun 'Slim,' did he?"

"Nope. Knocked him cold wit' a chair. Cracked his skull."

"Is he dead?"

"He'll never be deader. Dave grabbed this sucker Lindsay and yelled that he done it. The bulls pinched him like I said right there."

"Did it happen in the dark?"

"Sure as you're a foot high. My job was dousin' the glims, and I done it right."

"What about 'Slim?' Was he shooting when he got it?"

The other man shook his head. "This Lindsay man claims he was. I talked wit' a bull afterward. Dey didn't find no gun on 'Slim.' The bull says there was no gun-play."

"What became of 'Slim's' gun?"

"Search me."

Durand slammed a big fist exultantly down on the desk. "Better than the way I planned it. If the gun's gone, I'll frame Lindsay for the chair. It's Salt creek for his."

He lost no time in getting into touch with Gorilla Dave, who was under arrest at the station house. From him he learned the story of the killing of Collins. One whispered detail of it filled him with malicious glee.

"The boob! He'll go to the death chair sure if I can frame him. We're lucky Bromfield ran back into the little room. Up in front a dozen guys might have seen the whole play even in the dark."

Durand spent the night strengthening the web he had spun to destroy his enemy. He passed to and fro among those who had been arrested in the raid and he arranged the testimony of some of them to suit his case. More than one of the men caught in the dragnet of the police was willing to see the affray from the proper angle in exchange for protection from prosecution.

After breakfast Durand went to the Tombs, where Clay had been transferred at daybreak.

"You needn't bring the fellow here," he told the warden. "I'll go right to his cage and see him. I wantta have a talk with him."

Between two guards Clay climbed the iron steps to an upper tier of cages at the Tombs. He was put into a cell which held two beds, one above the other, as in the cabin of an ocean liner. By the side of the bunks was a narrow space just long enough for a man to take two steps in the same direction.

An unshaven head was lifted in the lower bunk to see why the sleep of its owner was being disturbed.

"I've brought you a cell mate, Shiny," explained one of the guards. "You want to be civil to him. He's just croaked a friend of yours."

"For de love o' Gawd. Who did he croak?"

"'Slim' Jim Collins. Cracked him one on the bean and that was a-plenty. Hope you'll enjoy each other's society, gents." The guard closed the door and departed.

"Is that right? Did youse do up 'Slim,' or was he kiddin' me?"

"I don't reckon we'll discuss that subject," said Clay blandly, but with a note of finality in his voice.

"No offense, boss. It's an honor to have so distinguished a gent for a cell pal. For that matter I ain't no cheap rat myself. Dey pinched me for shovin' de queer. I'd ought to get fifteen years," he said proudly.

This drew a grin from Lindsay, though not exactly a merry one. "If you're anxious for a long term you can have some of mine," he told the counterfeiter.

"Maybe you'll go up Salt creek," said Shiny hopefully.

Afraid the allusion might not be understood, he thoughtfully explained that this was the underworld term for the electric chair.

Clay made no further comment. He found the theme a gruesome one.

"Anyhow, I'm glad dey didn't put no holster nor damper-getter wit' me. I'm partickler who I meet. De whole profesh is gettin' run down at de heel. I'm dead sick of rats who can't do nothin' but lift pokes," concluded the occupant of the lower berth with disgust.

Though Clay's nerves were of the best he did very little sleeping that night. He was in a grave situation. Even if he had a fair field his plight would be serious enough. But he guessed that during the long hours of darkness Durand was busy weaving a net of false evidence from which he could scarcely disentangle himself. Unless Bromfield came forward at once as a witness for him, his case would be hopeless—and Clay suspected that the clubman would prove only a broken reed as a support. The fellow was selfish to the core. He had not, in the telling western phrase, the guts to go through. He would take the line of least resistance.

Beatrice was in his thoughts a great deal. What would she think of him when the news came that he was a murderer, caught by the police in a den of vice where he had no business to be? Some deep instinct of his soul told him that she would brush through the evidence to the essential truth. She had failed him once. She would never do it again. He felt sure of that.

The gray morning broke, and brought with it the steaming smell of prison cooking, the sounds of the caged underworld, the sense of life all around him dwarfed and warped to twisted moral purposes. A warden came with breakfast—a lukewarm, muddy liquid he called coffee and a stew in which potatoes and bits of fat beef bobbed like life buoys—and Clay ate heartily while his cellmate favored him, between gulps, with a monologue on ethics, politics, and the state of society, as these related especially to Shiny the Shover. Lindsay was given to understand that the whole world was "on de spud," but the big crooks had fixed the laws so that they could wear diamonds instead of stripes.

Presently a guard climbed the iron stairway with a visitor and led the way along the deck outside the tier of cells where Clay had been put.

"He's in seventy-four, Mr. Durand," the man said as he approached. "I'll have to beat it. Come back to the office when you're ready."

The ex-pugilist had come to gloat over him. Clay knew it at once. His pupils narrowed.

He was lying on the bed, his supple body stretched at graceful ease. Not by the lift of an eyelid did he recognize the presence of his enemy.

Durand stood in front of the cell, hands in pockets, the inevitable unlit black cigar in his mouth. On his face was a sneer of malevolent derision.

Shiny the Shover bustled forward, all complaisance. "Pleased to meet youse, Mr. Durand."

The gang politician's insolent eyes went up and down him. "I didn't come to see you."

"'S allright. Glad to see youse, anyhow," the counterfeit passer went on obsequiously. "Some day, when you've got time I'd like to talk wit' youse about gettin' some fall money."

"Nothin' doin', Shiny. I'm not backin' you," said Jerry coldly. "You've got to go up the river."

"Youse promised—"

"Aw, what the h—l's eatin' you?"

Shiny's low voice carried a plaintive whine. "If you'd speak to de judge—"

"Forget it." Durand brushed the plea away with a motion of the hand.

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

"It's your cell pal I've come to take a look at—the one who's goin' to the chair."

With one lithe movement Clay swung down to the floor. He sauntered forward to the grating, his level gaze on the ward boss.

"Shiny, this fellow's rotten," he said evenly and impersonally. "He's not only a crook, but he's a crooked crook. He'd throw down his own brother if it paid him."

Durand's cruel lips laughed. "Your pal's a little worried this mornin', Shiny. He ain't slept much. You see the bulls got him right. It's the death chair for him and no lifeboat in sight."

Clay leaned against the bars negligently. He spoke with a touch of lazy scorn. "See those scars on his face, Shiny—the one on the cheek bone and the other above the eye. Ask him where he got 'em and how?"

Jerry cursed. He broke into a storm of threats, anger sweeping over him in furious gusts. He had come to make sport of his victim and Lindsay somehow took the upper hand at once. He had this fellow where he wanted him at last. Yet the man's soft voice still carried the note of easy contempt. If the Arizonan was afraid, he gave no least sign of it.

"You'll sing another tune before I'm through with you," the prize-fighter prophesied savagely.

The westerner turned away and swung back to his upper berth. He knew, what he had before suspected, that Durand was going to "frame" him if he could. That information gained, the man no longer interested him.

Sullenly 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.

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 fiance 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 get 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 mo'nin'." 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 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!"

"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 selected a cigar. He grinned with evil mirth.

"You will, eh? Like h—l you will. You're hidin' from the cops this blessed minute. I've just found out myself where you live."

"You took my money and threw me down. You hired a gunman to kill me."

"Now, what would I do that for? I hadn't a thing in the world against you, an' I haven't now."

"That d—d ruffian shot at me. He was still shooting when I struck him with the chair," cried Bromfield, his voice shaking.

"He didn't know it was you—mistook you for Lindsay in the darkness."

"My G—d, I didn't mean to kill him. I had to do something."

"You did it all right."

"I told you there wasn't to be any violence. It was explicitly stated. You promised. And all the time you were planning murder. I'll tell all I know. By G—d, I will."

"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 slit 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 outa the country till the thing's over with."

"But Lindsay will talk."

"The boob's padlocked his mouth. For some fool reason he's protectin' you. Get out, an' you're safe."

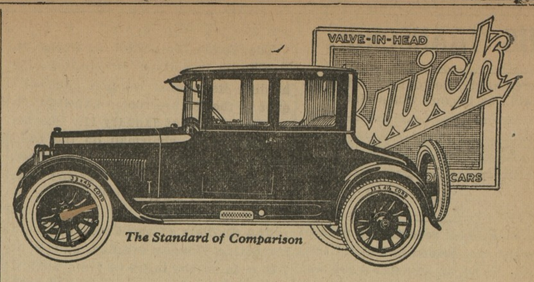
Bromfield sweated blood as he walked up and down the room looking for a way out of his dilemma. He had come to the parting of the road again. If he did this thing he would be a yellow cur. It was one thing to destroy Lindsay's influence with Beatrice by giving her a false impression. From his point of view their friendship was pernicious 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."

To Be Continued



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