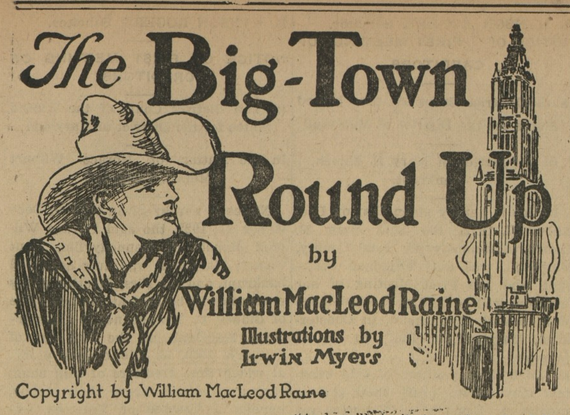

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SYNOPSIS

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 XVIII.—Durand gets Bromfield to admit he killed Collins. With Muldoon, Beatrice visits the gambling house and finds evidence of shooting, which makes the killing of Collins a matter of self-defense.

CHAPTER XIX.—The Whitfords force Bromfield to admit the killing of Collins, and the clubman makes a confession to the police. Lindsay is released. Alarmed at the turn of affairs, Durand tells Whitford of the plot to discredit Lindsay. Beatrice authorizes her father to break her engagement to Bromfield, whose claim of self-defense is admitted and the case dismissed.

"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 fist 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."

* * * * * * *

Annie Millikan nodded her wise little head. "Jerry's gonna frame him if he can. He's laid the wires for it. That's a lead pipe."

"Sure," agreed Muldoon. "I'll bet he's been busy all night fixin' up his story. Some poor divvles he'll bullyrag into swearin' lies an' others he'll buy. Trust Jerry for the crooked stuff."

"We've got to tell the truth," said Beatrice crisply, pulling on her gloves.

"And we'll do it, too. A pack of lies can't stand against four of us all looking for the truth."

Muldoon, who was on night duty this month and therefore had his days free, guided Whitford and his daughter to Maddock's. As they reached the house an express wagon was being driven away. Automatically the license number registered itself in Tim's memory.

The policeman took a key from his pocket and unlocked the door. The three went up the stairs to the deserted gambling hall and through it to the rear room.

"From what Lindsay says, the bullet holes ought to be about as high as his armpits," said Whitford.

"'Slim' must 'a' been standin' about here," guessed Muldoon, illustrating his theory by taking the position he meant. "The bullets would hit the partition close to the center, wouldn't they?"

Beatrice had gone straight to the plank wall. "They're not here," she told them.

"Must be. According to Lindsay's story the fellow was aiming straight at it."

"Well, they're not here. See for yourself."

She was right. There was no evidence whatever that any bullets had passed through the partition. They covered every inch of the cross wall in their search.

"Lindsay must have been mistaken," decided Whitford, hiding his keen disappointment. "This man Collins couldn't have been firing in this direction. Of course everything was confusion. No doubt they shifted round in the dark and—"

He stopped, struck by an odd expression on the face of his daughter. She had stooped and picked up a small fragment of shaving from the floor. Her eyes went from it to a plank in the partition and then back to the thin crisp of wood.

"What is it, honey?" asked Whitford.

The girl turned to Muldoon, alert in every quivering muscle. "That express wagon—the one leaving the house as we drove up—did you notice it?"

"Number 714," answered Tim, promptly.

"Can you have it stopped and the man arrested? Don't you see? They've rebuilt this partition. They were taking away in that wagon the planks with the bullet holes."

Muldoon was out of the room and going down the stairs before she had finished speaking. It was a quarter of an hour later when he returned. Beatrice and her father were not to be seen.

From back of the partition came an eager, vibrant voice. "Is that you, Mr. Muldoon? Come here quick. We've found one of the bullets in the wall."

The policeman passed out of the door through which Bromfield had made his escape and found another small door opening from the passage. It took him into the cubby-hole of a room in which were the wires and instruments used to receive news of the races.

"What about the express wagon?" asked Whitford.

"We'll get it. Word is out for those on duty to keep an eye open for it. Where's the bullet?"

Beatrice pointed it out to him. There it was, safely embedded in the plaster, about five feet from the ground.

"Durand wasn't thorough enough. He quit too soon," said the officer with a grin. "Crooks most always do slip up somewhere and leave evidence behind them. Yuh'd think Jerry would have remembered the bullet as well as the bullet hole."

"Beat It," Ordered Gorilla Dave, His Head Thrust Forward in a Threat. "You'se Got No Business Here!"

They found the mark of the second bullet, too. It had struck a telephone receiver and taken a chip out of it.

They measured with a tape-line the distance from the floor and the side walls to the place where each bullet struck. Tim dug out the bullet they had found.

They were back in the front room again when a huge figure appeared in the doorway and stood there blocking it.

"Whatta youse doin' here?" demanded a husky voice.

Muldoon nodded a greeting. "'Lo, Dave. Just lookin' around to see the scene of the scrap. How about yuh?"

"Beat it," ordered Gorilla Dave, his head thrust forward in a threat. "Youse got no business here."

"Friends av mine." The officer indicated the young women and her father. "They wanted to see where 'Slim' was knocked out. So I showed 'em. No harm done."

Dave moved to one side. "Beat it," he ordered again.

In the pocket of Muldoon was a request of the district attorney for admission to the house for the party, with an O. K. by the captain of police in the precinct, but Tim did not show it. He preferred to let Dave think that he had been breaking the rules of the force for the sake of a little private graft. There was no reason whatever for warning Durand that they were aware of the clever trick he had pulled off in regard to the partition.

CHAPTER XIX.

Two and Two Make Four.

From Maddock's the Whitfords drove straight to the apartment house of Clarendon Bromfield. For the third time that morning the clubman's valet found himself overborne by the insistence of visitors.

"We're coming in, you know," the owner of the Bird Cage told him in answer to his explanation of why his master could not be seen. "This is important business and we've got to see Bromfield."

"Yes, sir, but he said—"

"He'll change his mind when he knows why we're here." Whitford pushed in and Beatrice followed him. From the adjoining room came the sound of voices.

"I thought you told us Mr. Bromfield had gone to sleep and the doctor said he wasn't to be awakened," said Beatrice with a broad, boyish smile at the man's discomfiture.

"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 Omnium 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 fiancee'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 shockproof. 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 Arizonan, 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 derisive 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?"

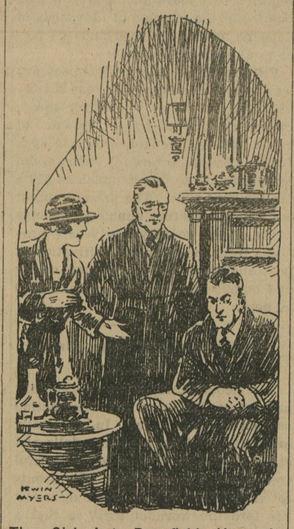
"You wouldn't get into trouble," argued the mine owner impatiently. "I keep telling you that."

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



The Girl Let Bromfield Have It Straight From the Shoulder.

"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. "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-to-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 businesslike. He admitted responsibility for the presence of the westerner at the Omnium 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 downstairs 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.

"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.

Fox 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 daren'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 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.

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