The Big-Town Round Up

by

William MacLeod Raine

Illustrations by Irwin Myers

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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 VI

Beatrice Up Stage.

If you vision Clay as a man of battles and violent death, you don't see him as he saw himself. He was a peaceful citizen from the law-abiding West. It was not until he had been flung into the whirlpool of New York that violent and melodramatic mishaps befell this innocent.

This was the version of himself that he conceived to be true and the one he tried to interpret to Bee Whitford when he emerged from the hospital after two days of seclusion and presented himself before her.

It was characteristic of Beatrice that when she looked at his battered face she asked no questions and made no exclamations. After the first startled glance one might have thought from her expression that he habitually wore one black eye, one swollen lip, one cauliflower ear, and a strip of gauze across his cheek.

The dark-lashed eyes lifted from him to take on a business-like directness. She rang for the man.

"Have the runabout brought round at once, Stevens. I'll drive myself," she gave orders.

With the light ease that looked silken strong she swept the car into the park. Neither she nor Clay talked. Both of them knew that an explanation of his appearance was due her and in the meantime neither cared to fence with small talk. She drew up to look at some pond lilies, and they talked about them for a moment, after which her direct eyes questioned him frankly.

He painted with a light brush the picture of his adventure into Bohemia. The details he filled in whimsically, in the picturesque phraseology of the West. Up stage on his canvas was the figure of the poet in velveteens. That Son of the Stars he did full justice. Jerry Durand and Kitty Mason were accessories sketched casually.

"I gather that Mr. Lindsay of Arizona was among those present," Beatrice said, smiling.

"I was givin' the dance," he agreed, and his gay eyes met hers.

Since she was a woman, one phase of his story needed expansion for Miss Whitford. She made her comment carelessly while she adjusted the mileage on the speedometer.

"Queer you happened to meet someone you knew down there. You said you knew the girl, didn't you?"

"We were on the same train out of Denver. I got acquainted with her."

Miss Whitford asked no more questions. But Clay could not quite let the matter stand so. He wanted her to justify him in her mind for what he had done. Before he knew it he had told her the story of Kitty Mason and Durand.

"I couldn't let him hypnotize that little girl from the country, could I?" he asked.

"I suppose not." Her whole face began to bubble with laughter in the way he liked so well. "But you'll be a busy knight errant if you undertake to right the wrongs of every girl you meet in New York. Don't you think it possible that you rescued her out of a job?"

The young man nodded his head ruefully. "That's exactly what I did. After all her trouble gettin' one I've thrown her out again. I'm a sure-enough fathead."

"You've been down to find out?" she asked with a sidelong tilt of her quick eyes.

"Yes. I went down this mawnin' with Tim Muldoon. He's a policeman I met down there. Miss Kitty hasn't been seen since that night. We went out to the Pirate's Den, the Purple Pup, Grace Godwin's Garret, and all the places where she used to sell cigarettes. None of them have seen anything of her."

"So that really your championship hasn't been so great a help to her after all, has it?"

"No."

"And I suppose it ruined the business of the man that owns the Sea Siren."

"I don't reckon so. I've settled for the furniture. And Muldoon says when it gets goin' again the Sea Siren will do a big business on account of the fracas. It's Kitty I'm worried about."

"I wouldn't worry about her if I were you. She'll land on her feet," the girl said lightly.

Her voice had not lost its sweet cadences, but Clay sensed in it something that was almost a touch of cool contempt. He felt vaguely that he must have blundered in describing Kitty. Evidently Miss Whitford did not see her quite as she was.

The young woman pressed the starter button. "We must be going home. I have an engagement to go riding with Mr. Bromfield."

The man beside the girl kept his smile working and concealed the little stab of jealousy that dirked him. Colin Whitford had confided to Lindsay that his daughter was practically engaged to Clarendon Bromfield and that he did not like the man. The range-rider did not like him either, but he tried loyally to kill his distrust of the clubman. If Beatrice loved him there must be good in the fellow. Clay meant to be a good loser anyhow.

There had been moments when the range-rider's heart had quickened with a wild, insurgent hope. One of these had been on a morning when they were riding in the park, knee to knee, in the dawn of a new clean world. It had come to him with a sudden clamor of the blood that in the eternal rightness of things such mornings ought to be theirs till the youth in them was quenched in sober age. He had looked into the eyes of this slim young Diana, and he had throbbed to the certainty that she too in that moment of tangled glances knew a sweet confusion of the blood. In her cheeks there had been a quick flame of flying color. Their talk had fallen from them, and they had ridden in a shy, exquisite silence from which she had escaped by putting her horse to a canter.

But in the sober sense of sanity Clay knew that this wonderful thing was not going to happen to him. He was not going to be given her happiness to hold in the hollow of his hand. Bee Whitford was a modern young woman, practical-minded, with a proper sense of the values that the world esteems. Clarendon Bromfield was a catch even in New York. He was rich, of a good family, assured social position, good-looking, and manifestly in love with her. Like gravitates to like the land over.

Bromfield, too, had no doubt that Bee meant to marry him. He was in love with her as far as he could be with anybody except himself. He wanted her—the youth, the buoyant life, the gay, glad comradeship of her—and he had always been lucky in getting what he desired. That was the use of having been born with a silver spoon in his mouth.

But though Clarenden Bromfield had no doubt of the issue of his suit, the friendship of Beatrice for this fellow from Arizona stabbed his vanity. It hurt his class pride and his personal self-esteem that she should take pleasure in the man's society. Bee never had been well-broken to harness. He set his thin lips tight and resolved that he would stand no nonsense of this sort after they were married. If she wanted to flirt it would have to be with some one in their own set.

Beatrice could not understand herself. She knew that she was behaving rather indiscreetly, though she did not fathom the cause of the restlessness that drove her to Clay Lindsay. The truth is that she was longing for an escape from the empty life she was leading, had been seeking one for years without knowing it. Surely this round of social frivolities, the chatter of these silly women and smug tailor-made men, could not be all there was to life. She must have been made for something better than that.

And when she was with Clay she knew she had been. He gave her a vision of life through eyes that had known open, wide spaces, clean, wholesome, and sun-kissed. He stood on his own feet and did his own thinking. Simply, with both hands, he took hold of problems and examined them stripped of all trimmings. The man was elemental, but he was keen and broad-gauged. It amazed her one day to learn that he had read William James and understood his philosophy much better than she did.

"But You'll Be a Busy Knight Errant If You Undertake to Right the Wrongs of Every Girl You Meet in New York."

There was in her mind no intention whatever of letting herself do anything so foolish as to marry him. But there were moments when the thought of it had a dreadful fascination for her. She did not invite such thoughts to remain with her.

For she meant to accept Clarendon Bromfield in her own good time and make her social position in New York absolutely secure. She had been in the fringes too long not to appreciate a chance to get into the social Holy of Holies.

* * * * *

A bow-legged little man in a cheap, wrinkled suit with a silk kerchief knotted loosely round his neck stopped in front of a window where a girl was selling stamps.

"I wantta see the postmaster."

"Corrid'y'right. Takel'vatorthir'door-left," she said, just as though it were two words.

At that the freckled-face little fellow opened wider his skim-milk eyes and his weak mouth. "Come again, ma'am, please."

"Corrid'y'right. Takel'vatorthir'door-left," she repeated. "Next."

The inquirer knew as much as he did before, but he lacked the courage to ask for an English translation. He shuffled away from the window and wandered helplessly, swept up by the tide of hurrying people that flowed continuously into the building and ebbed out of it. From this he was tossed into a backwater that brought him to another window.

"I wantta see the postmaster of this burg," he announced again with a plaintive whine.

"What about?" asked the man back of the grating.

"Important business, amigo. Where's he at?"

The man directed him to a door upon which was printed the legend, "Superintendent of Complaints."

"Well, sir! What can I do for you?" the man behind the big desk snapped.

"I wantta see the postmaster."

"What about?"

"I got important business with him."

"Who are you?"

"Me, I'm Johnnie Green of the B-in-a-Box ranch. I just drapped in from Arizona and I wantta see the postmaster."

"Suppose you tell your troubles to me."

Johnnie changed his weight to the other foot. "No, suh, I allow to see the postmaster himself personal."

"He's busy," explained the official. "He can't possibly see anybody without knowing his business."

"That's all right. I've lost my pal. I wantta see—"

The superintendent of complaints cut into his parrot-like repetition. "Yes, you mentioned that. But the postmaster doesn't know where he is, does he?"

"He might tell me where his mail goes, as the old sayin' is."

"When did you lose your friend?"

"I ain't heard from him since he come to New York. So bein' as I got a chanct to go from Tucson with a jackpot trainload of cows to Denver, I kinda made up my mind to come on here the rest of the way and look him up. I'm afraid some one's done him dirt."

"Do you know where he's staying?"

"No, suh, I don't."

The superintendent of complaints tapped with his fingers on the desk. Then he smiled. The postmaster was fond of a joke. Why not let this odd little freak from the West have an interview with him?

Twenty minutes later Johnnie was telling his story to the postmaster of the city of New York. He had written three times to Clay Lindsay and had received no answer. So he had come to look for him.

"Is your friend like you?" asked the postmaster, interested in spite of himself.

"No suh." Johnnie, alias the Runt, began to beam. "He's a sure-enough go-getter, Clay is, every jump of the road. I'd follow his dust any day of the week. He's the livest proposition that ever come out of Graham county. You can ce'tainly gamble on that."

The postmaster touched a button. A clerk appeared, received orders, and disappeared.

The clerk presently returned with three letters addressed to Clay Lindsay, General Delivery, New York. The postmaster handed them to the little cow puncher.

"Evidently he never called for them," he said.

Johnnie's chin fell. He looked a picture of helpless woe. "They're the letters I set down an' wrote him my own se'l. Something has sure happened to that boy, looks like," he bemoaned.

"We'll try police headquarters. Maybe we can get a line on your friend," the postmaster said, reaching for the telephone. "But you must remember New York is a big place. It's not like your Arizona ranch. The city has nearly eight million inhabitants. You'll understand that when one man gets lost it isn't always possible to find him."

"Go to Police Headquarters, Center Street, and Take This Note to Capt. Luke Byrne.'"

"Why not? We got some steers down in my country—about as many as you got men in this here town of yourn. Tha's what we ride the range for, so's not to lose 'em. We've traced a B-in-a-Box steer clear from Tucson to Denver, done it more'n onct or twice too. I notice you got a big bunch of man-punchers in uniform here. Ain't it their business to rustle up strays?"

"The police," said the postmaster, amused. "That is part of their business. We'll pass the buck to them, anyhow."

After some delay and repeated explanations of who he was, the postmaster got at the other end of the wire his friend the commissioner. Their conversation was brief. When the postmaster hung up he rang for a stenographer and dictated a letter of introduction. This he handed to Johnnie, with explicit instructions.

"Go to police headquarters, Center street, and take this note to Capt. Luke Byrne. He'll see that the matter is investigated for you. Do you know the way to police headquarters?"

"I reckon I can find it. Is it far?" The man from Arizona looked down at the high-heeled boots in which his tortured feet had clumped over the pavements of the metropolis all morning.

"I'll send you in a taxi." The postmaster was thinking that this babe in the woods of civilization never would be able to find his way alone.

As the driver swept the car in and out among the traffic of the narrow streets Johnnie clung to the top of the door fearfully. Every moment he expected a smash. His heart was in his throat. The hurricane deck of a bronco had no terrors for him, but this wild charge through the humming trenches shook his nerve.

"I come mighty nigh askin' you would you just as lief drive slower," he said with a grin to the chauffeur as he descended to the safety of the sidewalk. "I ain't awful hardy, an' I sure was plumb scared."

A sergeant took Johnnie in tow and delivered him at length to the office waiting-room of Captain Anderson, head of the bureau of missing persons. The Runt, surveying the numbers in the waiting-room and those passing in and out, was ready to revise his opinion about the possible difficulty of the job. He judged that half the population of New York must be missing.

After a time the captain's secretary notified Johnny that it was his turn. As soon as he was admitted the puncher began his little piece without waiting for any preliminaries.

"Say, captain, I want you to find my friend Clay Lindsay. He— "

"Just a moment," interrupted the captain. "Who are you? Don't think I got your name."

Johnnie remembered the note of introduction and his name at the same time. He gave both to the big man who spent his busy days and often part of the nights looking for the lost, strayed, and stolen among New York's millions.

The captain's eyes swept over the note. "Sit down, Mr. Green, and let's get at your trouble. This note says that you're looking for a man named Clay Lindsay who came to New York several months ago. Have you or has anybody else heard from him in that time?"

"We got a letter right after he got here. He ain't writ since."

"Perhaps he's dead. We'd better look up the morgue records."

"Morgue!" The Runt grew excited instantly. "That place where you keep folks that get drowned or bumped off? Say, captain, I'm here to tell you Clay was the livest man in Arizona, which is the same as sayin' anywheres. Cowpunchers don't take naturally to morgues. No, sir, Clay ain't in no morgue. Like as not he's helped fill this yere morgue if any crooks tried their rough stuff on him. Don't get me wrong, Cap. Clay is the squarest he-man ever God made. All I'm sayin' is—"

The captain interrupted. He asked sharp, incisive questions and got busy. Presently he reached for a 'phone, got in touch with a sergeant at the police desk in the upper corridor, and sent an attendant with Johnnie to the police department.

The Irish sympathies of the sergeant were aroused by the naive honesty of the little man. He sent for another sergeant, had card records brought, consulted a couple of patrolmen, and then turned to Johnnie.

"We've met your friend all right," he said with a grin. "He's wan heluva lad. Fits the description to a T. There can't be but one like him here." And he went on to tell the story of the adventure of the janiter and the hose.

The washed-out eyes of the puncher lit up. "That's him. That's sure him. Tell me where he's at?"

"We don't know. We can show you the place where he tied the janitor, but that's the best we can do." The captain hesitated. "If you find him, give him a straight tip from me. Tell him to buy a ticket for Arizona and take the train for home. This town is no healthy place for him. Your friend has made an enemy—a powerful one. He'll understand if you tell him."

"Who is this here enemy?"

"Never mind. He hit up too fast a pace."

"You can't tell me a thing against Clay—not a thing," protested Johnnie hotly. "He'll sure do to take along, Clay will. There can't any guy knock him to me, if he does wear a uniform."

"I'm not saying a thing against him," replied the officer impatiently. "I'm giving him a friendly tip to beat it, if you see him. Now I'm going to send you uptown with a plain-clothes man. He'll show you where your friend made his New York debut. That's all we can do for you."

An hour later the little cowpuncher was gazing wistfully at the hitching-post. His face was twisted pathetically to a question mark. It was as though he thought he could conjure from the post the secret of Clay's disappearance. Where had he gone from here? And where was he now?

In the course of the next two days the Runt came back to that post many times as the starting-point for weary, high-heeled tramps through streets within a circuit of a mile. He could not have explained why he did so. Perhaps it was because this was the only spot in the city that held for him any tangible relationship to Clay. Some one claimed to have seen him vanish into one of these houses. Perhaps he might come back again. It was a very tenuous hope [illegible] was the only one Johnnie [illegible] clumped over the

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CHARLES E. FAULKNER,

late of said county, deceased. All persons having claims against said deceased's estate are hereby warned to exhibit the same, with the proper vouchers thereof, to the undersigned on or before the 22nd day of January, 1923, otherwise they may by law be excluded from all benefit of said deceased's personal estate.

All persons indebted to this estate must settle at once.

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NOTICE TO CREDITORS

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JAMES W. POORE,

late of said county, deceased. All persons having claims against said deceased's estate are hereby warned to exhibit the same, with the proper vouchers thereof, to the undersigned on or before the first day of January, 1923, otherwise they may by law be excluded from all benefit of said deceased's personal estate.

All persons indebted to this estate must settle at once.

Given under my hand this 27th day of June, 1922.

WM. T. JONES,
july 1-4t. Administrator.

—The Transcript, $1.50 per year, in advance.

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