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.—Lindsay's acquaintance with Beatrice Whitford ripens. Through her he is introduced into "society." His "side partner" on the Arizona ranch, Johnnie Green, comes to the "big town."

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

Johnnie Makes a Joke.

As Kitty stepped from the cab she was trembling violently.

"Don't you be frighteend, li'l pardner. You've come home. There won't anybody hurt you here."

The Arizonan ran her up to his floor in the automatic elevator.

"I've got a friend from home stayin' with me. He's the best-hearted fellow you ever saw. You'll sure like him," he told her without stress as he fitted his key to the lock. In another moment Lindsay was introducing her casually to the embarrassed and astonished joint proprietor of the apartment.

The Runt was coatless and in his stockinged-feet. He had been playing

The Runt Was Coatless and in His Stockinged-Feet.

a doleful ditty on a mouth-organ. Caught so unexpectedly, he blushed a beautiful brick red to his neck.

"Heat some water, Johnnie, and make a good stiff toddy. Miss Kitty has been out in the rain."

He lit the gas-log and from his bedroom brought towels, a bathrobe, pajamas, a sweater and woolen slippers. On a lounge before the fire he dumped the clothes he had gathered. He drew up the easiest armchair in the room.

"I'm goin' to the kitchen to jack up Johnnie so he won't lay down on his job," he told her cheerily. "You take yore time and get into these dry clothes. We'll not disturb you till you knock."

When her timid knock came her host brought in a steaming cup. "You drink this. It'll warm you good."

"What is it?" she asked shyly.

"Medicine," he smiled. "Doctor's orders."

While she sipped the toddy Johnnie brought from the kitchen a tray upon which were tea, fried potatoes, ham, eggs, and buttered toast.

The girl ate ravenously. It was an easy guess that she had not before tasted food that day.

Clay kept up a flow of talk, mostly about Johnnie's culinary triumphs. Meanwhile he made up a bed on the couch.

Once she looked up at him, her throat swollen with emotion. "You're good."

"Sho! We been needin' a li'l' sister to brace up our manners for us. It's lucky for us I found you. Now I expect you're tired and sleepy. We fixed up yore bed in here because it's warmer. You'll be able to make out with it all right. The springs are good." Clay left her with a cheerful smile. "Turn out the light before you go to bed, Miss Colorado. Sleep tight. And don't you worry. You're back with old home folks again now, you know."

Tired out from tramping the streets without food and drowsy from the toddy she had taken, Kitty fell into deep sleep undisturbed by troubled dreams.

The cattleman knew he had found her in the nick of time. She had told him that she had no money, no room in which to sleep, no prospect of work. Everything she had except the clothes on her back had been pawned to buy food and lodgings. But she was young and resilient. When she got back home to the country where she belonged, time would obliterate from her mind the experiences of which she had been the victim.

It was past midday when Kitty woke. She found her clothes dry. After she dressed she opened the door that led to the kitchen. Johnnie began to bustle about in preparation for her breakfast.

"Please don't trouble. I'll eat what you've got cooked," she begged.

"It's no trouble, ma'am. If the's a thing on earth I enjoy doin' it's sure cookin'. Do you like yore aigs sunny side up or turned?"

"Either way. Whichever you like, Mr. Green."

While she ate he waited on her solicitously. Inside, he was a river of tears for her, but with it went a good deal of awe. Even now, wan-eyed and hollow-cheeked, she was attractive. In Johnnie's lonesome life he had never before felt so close to a girl as he did to this one.

"I—I don't like to be so much bother to you," she said. "Maybe I can go away this afternoon."

"No, ma'am, we won't have that a-tall," broke in the range-rider in alarm. "We're plumb tickled to have you here. Clay, he feels thataway too."

"I could keep house for you while I stay," she suggested timidly. "I know how to cook—and the place does need cleaning."

"Sure it does. Say, wha's the matter with you bein' Clay's sister, jes' got in last night on the train? Tha's the story we'll put up to the landlord if you'll gimme the word."

Johnnie told the story of the search for her, with special emphasis on the night Clay broke into three houses in answer to her advertisement.

"I never wrote it. I never thought of that. It must have been—"

"It was that scalawag Durand, y'betcha. I ain't still wearin' my pinfeathers none. He was sore because Clay had fixed his clock proper."

"I've got no place to go, except back home—and I've got no folks there but a second cousin. She doesn't want me. I don't know what to do. If I had a woman friend—some one to tell me what was best—"

Johnnie slapped his hand on his knee, struck by a sudden inspiration. "Say! Y'betcha, by jollies, I've got 'er—the very one! You're d—n—you're sure whistlin'. We got a lady friend, Clay and me, the finest little pilgrim in New York. She's sure there when the gong strikes. You'd love her. I'll fix it for you—right away. I got to go to her house this afternoon an' do some chores. I'll bet she comes right over to see you."

Kitty was doubtful. "Maybe we better wait and speak to Mr. Lindsay about it," she said.

"No, ma'am, you don't know Miss Beatrice. She's the best friend. Why, I shouldn't wonder but that she and Clay might get married one o' these days. He thinks a lot of her."

"Oh!" Kitty knew just a little more about human nature than the puncher. "Then I wouldn't tell her about me if I was you. She wouldn't like my bein' here."

"Sho! You don't know Miss Beatrice. She grades 'way up. I'll bet she likes you fine."

When Johnnie left to go to work that afternoon he took with him a resolution to lay the whole case before Beatrice Whitford. She would fix things all right. If there was one person on earth Johnnie could bank on without fail it was his little boss.

* * * * * * *

It was not until Johnnie had laid the case before Miss Whitford and restated it under the impression that she could not have understood that his confidence ebbed. He had expected an eager interest, a quick enthusiasm. Instead, he found in his young mistress a spirit beyond his understanding. Her manner had a touch of cool disdain, almost of contempt, while she listened to his tale.

She asked no questions and made no comments. What he had to tell met with chill silence. Johnnie's guileless narrative had made clear to her that Clay had brought Kitty home about midnight, had mixed a drink for her, and had given her his own clothes to replace her wet ones. Somehow the cattleman's robe, pajamas and bedroom slippers obtruded unduly from his friend's story. Even the Runt felt this. He began to perceive himself a helpless medium of wrong impressions.

"I suppose you know that when the manager of your apartment house finds out she's there he'll send her packing." So Beatrice summed up when she spoke at last.

"No, ma'am, I reckon not. You see we done told him she is Clay's sister jes' got in from the West," the puncher explained.

"Oh, I see." The girl's lip curled and her clean-cut chin lifted a trifle. "You don't seem to have overlooked anything. No, I don't think I care to have anything to do with your arrangements."

Beatrice turned and walked swiftly into the house. A pulse of anger was beating in her soft throat. She felt a sense of outrage. To Clay Lindsay she had given herself generously in spirit. She had risked something in introducing him to her friends. They might have laughed at him for his slight social lapses. They might have rejected him for his lack of background. They had done neither. He was so genuinely a man that he had won his way instantly.

Pacing up and down her room, little fists clenched, her soul in passionate

Pacing Up and Down Her Room, Little Fists Clenched, Her Soul in Passionate Turmoil.

turmoil. Beatrice went over it all again as she had done through a sleepless night. She had given him so much, and he had seemed to give her even more. Hours filled with a keen-edged delight jumped to her memory, hours that had carried her away from the falseness of social fribble to clean, wind-swept, open spaces of the mind. And after this—after he had tacitly recognized her claim on him—he had insulted her before her friends by deserting his guests to go off with this hussy he had been spending weeks to search for.

Not for a moment did she admit, perhaps she did not know, that an insane jealousy was flooding her being, that her indignation was based on personal as well as moral grounds. Something primitive stirred her—a flare of feminine ferocity. She felt hot to the touch, an active volcano ready for eruption. If only she could get a chance to strike back in a way that would hurt, to wound him as deeply as he had her!

Pat to her desire came the opportunity. Clay's card was brought in to her by Jenkins.

"Tell Mr. Lindsay I'll see him in a few minutes," she told the man.

The few minutes stretched to a long quarter of an hour before she descended. As soon as his eyes fell on her, Clay knew that this pale, slim girl in the close-fitting gown was a stranger to him. Her eyes, star-bright and burning like live coals, warned him that the friend whose youth had run out so eagerly to meet his was hidden deep in her today.

"I reckon I owe you and Mr. Whitford an apology," he said. "No need to tell you how I happened to leave last night. I expect you know."

"Why take the trouble? I think I understand." She spoke in an even, schooled voice that set him at a distance. "Your friend, Mr. Green, has carefully brought me the details I didn't know."

Clay flushed. Her clear voice carried an edge of scorn. "You mustn't judge by appearances. I know you won't be unfair. I had to take her home and look after her."

"I don't quite see why—unless, of course, you wanted to," the girl answered, tapping the arm of her chair with impatient finger-tips, eyes on the clock. "But, of course, it isn't necessary I should see."

Her cavalier treatment of him did not affect the gentle imperturbability of the westerner.

"Because I'm a white man, because she's a little girl who came from my country and can't hold her own here, because she was sick and chilled and starving. Do you see now?"

"No, but it doesn't matter. I'm not the keeper of your conscience, Mr. Lindsay," she countered with hard lightness.

"You're judging me just the same. If you'd let me bring her here to see you—"

"No, thanks."

"You're unjust."

"You think so?"

"And unkind. That's not like the little friend I've come to—like so much."

"You're kind enough for two, Mr. Lindsay. She really doesn't need another friend so long as she has you," she retorted with a flash of contemptuous eyes. "In New York we're not used to being so kind to people of her sort."

Clay lifted a hand. "Stop right there, Miss Beatrice. You don't want to say anything you'll be sorry for."

"I'll say this," she cut back. "The men I know wouldn't invite a woman to their rooms at midnight and pass her off as their sister—and then expect people to know her. They would be kinder to themselves—and to their own reputations."

"Will you tell me what else there was to do? Where could I have taken her at that time of night? Are reputable hotels open at midnight to lone women, wet and ragged, who come without baggage either alone or escorted by a man?"

"I'm not telling you what you ought to have done, Mr. Lindsay," she answered, with a touch of hauteur. "But since you ask me—why couldn't you have given her money and let her find a place for herself?"

"Because that wouldn't have saved her."

"Oh, wouldn't it?" she retorted, dryly.

He walked over to the fireplace and put an elbow on the corner of the mantel.

"Lemme tell you a story, Miss Beatrice," he said presently. "Mebbe it'll show you what I mean. I was runnin' cattle in the Galluros five years ago and I got caught in a storm 'way up in the hills. When it rains in my part of Arizona, which ain't often, it sure does come down in sheets. The clay below the rubble on the slopes got slick as ice. My hawss, a young one, slipped and fell on me, clawed back to its feet, and bolted. Well, there I was with my laig busted, forty miles from even a whistlin' post in the desert, gettin' wetter and colder every blessed minute.

"There wasn't a chance in a million that anybody would hear, but I kept firin' off my fohty-five on the off hope. And just before night a girl on a pinto came down the side of that uncurried hill round a bend and got me. She took me to a cabin hidden in the bottom of a canon and looked after me four days. Her father, a prospector, had gone to Tucson for supplies and we were alone there. She fed me, nursed me, and waited on me. We divided a one-room twelve-by-sixteen cabin. Understand, we were four days alone together before her dad came back, and all the time the sky was lettin' down a terrible lot of water. When her father showed up he grinned and said, 'Lucky for you Myrtle heard that six-gun of yore's pop!' He never thought one evil thing about either of us. He just accepted the situation as necessary. Now the question is, what ought she to have done? Left me to die on that hillside?"

"Of course not. That's different," protested Beatrice, indignantly. "You're trying to put me in the wrong. Well, I won't have it. That's all. You may take your choice, Mr. Lindsay. Either send that girl away—give her up—have nothing to do with her, or—"

"Or—?"

"Or please don't come here to see me any more."

He waited, his eyes steadily on her. "Do you sure enough mean that, Miss Beatrice?"

Her heart sank. She knew that she had gone too far, but she was too imperious to draw back now.

"Yes, that's just what I mean."

"I'm sorry. You're leavin' me no option. I'm not a yellow dog. Sometimes I'm 'most a man. I'm goin' to do what I think is right."

"Of course," she responded, lightly. "If our ideas of what that is differ—"

"They do."

"It's because we've been brought up differently, I suppose." She achieved a stifled little yawn behind her hand.

"You've said it." He gave it to her straight from the shoulder. "All yore life you've been pampered. When you wanted a thing all you had to do was to reach out a hand for it. Folks were born to wait on you, by yore way of it. You're a spoiled kid. Ask me to turn my back on a friend, and I've got to say, 'Nothin' doin'.' And if you was just a few years younger I'd advise yore pa to put you in yore room and feed you bread and water for askin' it."

The angry color poured into her cheeks. She clenched her hands till the nails bit her palms. "I think you're the most hateful man I ever met," she cried, passionately.

His easy smile taunted her. "Oh, no, you don't. You just think you think it. Now, I'm goin' to light a shuck. I'll be sayin' good-by, Miss Beatrice, until you send for me."

"And that will be never," she flung at him.

He rose, bowed and walked out of the room.

The street door closed behind him. Beatrice bit her lip to keep from breaking down before she reached her room.

To Be Continued

Schedule of Meetings For Girls' Clubs

Still Pond—Tuesday, Sept. 19, Oct. 3, Dec. 5, 9.30 a. m.

Worton—Wednesday, Sept. 20, Oct. 4, Dec. 6, 9.30 a. m.

Millington—Thursday, Sept. 21, Oct. 5, Dec. 7, 9.30 a. m.

Kennedyville—Friday, Sept. 22, Oct. 6, Dec. 8, 9.30 a. m.

Locust Grove—Monday, Sept. 25, Oct. 9, Dec. 11, 9.30 a. m.

Betterton—Tuesday, Sept. 26, Oct. 10, Dec. 12, 9.30 a. m.

Fairlee—Wednesday, Sept. 27, Oct. 11, Dec. 13, 9.30 a. m.

Massey—Thursday, Sept. 28, Oct. 12, Dec. 14, 9.30 a. m.

Rock Hall—Friday, Sept. 29, Oct. 13, Dec. 15, 9.30 a. m.

Quaker Neck—Sept. 27, Oct. 11, Dec. 13, 2.30 p. m.

A Very Odd Fish

In the Pacific Ocean, among the islands of Santa Barbara and in the seas of California, a queer fish spends a lazy life, floating on the surface most of the time and basking in the sunshine, with part of its body out of the water. It is called the Molamola by the natives, and the mole or moonfish by the whites. Unlike other fish, it has no tail in the proper sense of the word, only a kind of fringe acting as a rudder. It is sometimes 10 feet across the fins, and round as a bladder. Strange to say, it serves as a floating island for a large number of seagulls and cormants, to rest upon and preen their feathers. When chased, the indolent moonfish dives like a duck, to reappear at a distance. Nevertheless, it would be easily caught were the fish good to eat, but its toughness renders it fit only to dry in the sun as a substitute for India rubber balls.

—Eddie Gibson, a well-known local colored resident, died of blood poison last week.

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