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 XI

A Lady Wears a Ring.

Clarendon Bromfield got the shock of his life that evening. Beatrice proposed to him. It was at the Roberson dinner-dance, in the Palm room, within sight but not within hearing of a dozen other guests.

She camouflaged what she was doing with occasional smiles and ripples of laughter intended to deceive the others present, but her heart was pounding sixty miles an hour.

Bromfield was not easily disconcerted. He prided himself on his aplomb. But for once he was amazed.

"I beg your pardon."

Miss Whitford laced her fingers round her knee and repeated. Her eyes were hard and brilliant as diamonds.

"I was wondering when you are going to ask me again to marry you."

Since she had given a good deal of feminine diplomacy to the task of keeping him at a reasonable distance, Bromfield was naturally surprised.

"That's certainly a leading question," he parried. "What are you up to, Bee? Are you spoofing me?"

"I'm proposing to you," she explained, with a flirt of her hand and an engaging smile toward a man and a girl who had just come into the Palm room. "I don't suppose I do it very well, because I haven't had your experience. But I'm doing the best I can."

His lids narrowed a trifle. "Do you mean that you've changed your mind?"

"Have you?" she asked, quickly, with a sidelong slant of eyes at him.

"I'm still very much at your service, Bee."

"Does that mean you still think you want me?"

"I don't think. I know it."

"Then you're on," she told him with a little nod. "Thank you, kind sir."

Bromfield drew a deep breath. "By Jove, you're a good little sport, Bee.

"I Was Wondering When You Were Going to Ask Me Again to Marry You."

I think I'll get up and give three ringing cheers."

"I'd like to see you do that," she mocked.

"Of course you know I'm the happiest man in the world," he said, with well-ordered composure.

"You're not exactly what I'd call a rapturous lover, Clary. But I'm not, either, for that matter, so I dare say we'll hit it off very well."

"I'm a good deal harder hit than I've ever let on, dear girl. And I'm going to make you very happy. That's a promise."

Nevertheless he watched her warily, behind a manner of graceful eagerness. A suspicious little thought was filtering through the back of his mind. "What the deuce has got into the girl? has she been quarreling with that bounder from Arizona?"

"I'm glad of that. I'll try to make you a good wife, even if—" She let the sentence die out unfinished.

"May I tell everybody how happy I am?"

"If you like," she agreed.

"A short engagement," he ventured.

"Yes," she nodded. "And take me away for a while. I'm tired of New York, I think."

"I'll take you to a place where the paths are primrose-strewn and where nightingales sing," he promised, rashly.

She smiled incredulously, a wise old little smile that had no right on her young face.

The report of the engagement spread at once. Bromfield took care of that. The evening of the day the Runt heard of the engagement he told his friend about it while Kitty was in the kitchen.

"Miss Beatrice she's wearin' a new ring," he said by way of breaking the news gently.

Clay turned his head slowly and looked at Johnnie.

"Bromfield?" he asked.

"Yep. That's the story."

"The ring was on the left hand?"

"Yep."

Clay made no comment. His friend knew enough to say no more to him. Presently the cattleman went out. It was in the small hours of the morning when he returned. He had been tramping the streets to get the fever out of his blood.

But Johnnie discussed with Kitty at length this new development, just as he had discussed with her the fact that Clay no longer went to see the Whitfords. Kitty made a shrewd guess at the cause of division. She had already long since drawn from the cowpuncher the story of how Miss Beatrice had rejected his proposal that she take an interest in her.

"They must 'a' quarreled—likely about me being here. I'm sorry you told her."

"I don't reckon that's it. Miss Beatrice she's got too good judgment for that."

"I ought to go away. I'm only bringing Mr. Lindsay trouble. If he just could hear from his friends in Arizona about that place he's trying to get me, I'd go right off."

He looked at her wistfully. Kitty had begun to bloom again. Her cheeks were taking on their old rounded contour and occasionally dimples of delight flashed into them. Already the marks of her six-weeks' misery among the submerged derelicts of the city was beginning to be wiped from her mind like the memory of a bad dream from which she had awakened. Love was a craving of her happy, sensuous nature. She wanted to live in the sun, among smiles and laughter. She was like a kitten in her desire to be petted, made much of and admired. Almost anybody who liked her could win a place in her affection.

Johnnie's case was not so hopeless as he imagined it.

* * * * * * *

Over their good-night smoke Clay gave a warning. "Keep yore eyes open, Johnnie. I was trailed to the house today by one of the fellows with Durand the night I called on him. It spells trouble. I reckon the 'Paches are going to leave the reservation again."

"Say, Clay, ain't you gettin' homesick for the whinin' of a rawhide? Wha's the matter with us hittin' the dust for good old Tucson? I'd sure like to chase cowtails again."

"You can go, Johnnie. I'm not ready yet—quite. And when I go it won't be because of any rattlesnake in the grass."

"Whadyou mean I can go? If this Jerry Durand's trying to get you I'll be there followin' yore dust, old scout."

"There's more than one way to skin a cat. Mebbe the fellow means to strike at me through you or Kitty. I've a mind to put you both on a train for the B-in-a-Box ranch."

"You can put the li'l' girl on a train. You can't put me on none less'n you go too," answered his shadow, stoutly.

"Then see you don't get drawn into any quarrels while you and Kitty are away from the house. Stick to the lighted streets. I think I'll speak to her about not lettin' any strange man talk to her. I think she had better not go out unless one of us is with her."

"Suits me. And don't you take any chances, old-timer. That goes double. I'm the cautious guy in this outfit, not you."

Within twenty-four hours Clay heard some one pounding wildly on the outer door of the apartment and the voice of the cautious guy imploring haste.

"Lemme in, Clay. Hurry! Hurry!" he shouted.

Lindsay was at the door in four strides, but he did not need to see the stricken woe of his friend's face to guess what had occurred. For Johnnie and Kitty had started together to see a picture play two hours earlier.

"They done took Kitty—in an auto," he gasped. "Right before my eyes. Claimed a lady had fainted."

"Who took her?"

"I dunno. Some men. Turned the trick slick, me never liftin' a hand. Ain't I a heluva man?"

"Hold yore hawsses, son. Don't get excited. Begin at the beginnin' and tell me all about it," Clay told him, quietly.

"We was comin' home an' I took Kitty into that Red Star drug store for to get her some ice cream. Well, right after that I heerd a man say how the lady had fainted—"

"What lady?"

"The lady in the machine."

"Were you in the drug store?"

"No. We'd jes' come out when this here automobile drew up an' a man jumped out hollerin' the lady had fainted and would I bring a glass o' water from the drug store. 'Course I got a jump on me and Kitty she moved up closeter to the car to he'p if she could. When I got back to the walk with the water the man was hoppin' back into the car. It was already movin'. He slammed the door shut and it went up the street like greased lightnin'."

"Get the number?"

"No, I—I plumb forgot to look."

Clay slipped a revolver under his belt. He slid into a street coat. Then he got police headquarters on the wire and notified the office of what had taken place.

It had come on to rain and beneath the street lights the asphalt shone like a river. The storm had driven most people indoors, but as the westerner drew near the drug store Clay saw with relief a taxicab draw up outside. Its driver, crouched in his seat behind the waterproof apron as far back as possible from the rain, promptly accepted Lindsay as a fare.

"Back in a minute," Clay told him, and passed into the drug store.

The abduction was still being discussed. He pushed home questions as to identification. One of the men in

"What's the Big Idea in Calling Me From Me Job in the Rush Hours?"

the drug store had caught a flash of the car number. He was sure the first four figures were 3967. The fifth he did not remember. The car was dark blue and it looked like a taxi. This information Clay got the owner of the store to forward to the police.

He did not wait to give it personally, but joined Johnnie in the cab. The address he gave to the driver with the waterproof hat pulled down over his head was that of a certain place of amusement known as Heath's Palace of Wonders. A woman he wanted to consult was wont to sit behind a window there at the receipt of customs.

Miss Annie Millikan's pert smile beamed through the window at Clay when he stepped up.

"Hello, Mr. Flat-Worker," she sang out. "How many?"

Clay explained that his business was serious. "I've got to see you alone—now," he added.

"If you gotta you gotta." The girl called an usher, who found a second usher to take her place.

Annie walked down the street a few steps beside Clay.

"What's the big idea in callin' me from me job in the rush hours?" she asked.

Clay told his story.

"Some of Jerry's strong-arm work," she commented.

"Must be. Can you help me?"

Annie looked straight at him, a humorous little quirk to her mouth. "Say, what're you askin' me to do—t'row down my steady?"

Annie was pretty, and inevitably she had lovers. One of these was "Slim" Jim Collins, confidential follower of Jerry Durand. He was a crook, and she knew it. But some quality in him—his good looks, perhaps, or his gameness—fascinated her in spite of herself. She avoided him, even while she found herself pleased to go to Coney with an escort so well dressed and so glibly confident. Another of her admirers was a policeman, Tim Muldoon by name, the same one that had rescued Clay from the savagery of Durand outside the Sea Siren. Tim she liked. But for all his Irish ardor he was wary. He had never asked her to marry him. She thought she knew the reason. He did not want for a wife a woman who had been "Slim" Jim's girl.

Clay had come to Annie Millikan now because of what she had told him about "Slim" Jim. This man was one of Durand's stand-bys. If there was any underground work to be done it was odds-on chance that he would be in charge of it.

"I'm askin' you to stand by a poor girl that's in trouble," he said in answer to her question. "You wouldn't let Durand spoil her life if you could stop it."

"Well, what's my cue? Where do I come in on this rescue-the-beautiful heroine act?"

"When did you see 'Slim' Jim last?"

"I might 'a' seen him this afternoon an' I might not," she said cautiously, looking at him from under a broad hat-brim. "Say, what's the lay-out? Are you framin' Jim for up the river?"

"I'm tryin' to save Kitty."

"Because she's your goil. Where do I come in at? What's there in it for me to go rappin' me friend?" demanded Annie sharply.

"She's not my girl," explained Clay. Then, with that sure instinct that sometimes guided him, he added, "The young lady I—I'm in love with has just become engaged to another man."

Miss Millikan looked at him, frankly incredulous. "For the love o' Mike, where's her eyes? Don't she know a real man when she sees one? I'll say she don't."

A flush beat into Annie's cheeks. She went off swiftly at a tangent. "Wouldn't it give a fellow a jar? This guy Jim Collins slips it to me confidential that he's off the crooked stuff. Nothin' doin' a-tall in gorilla work. He kids me that he's quit goin' out on the spud and porchclimbin' don't look good to him no more. A four-room flat, a little wife, an' the straight road for 'Slim' Jim. I fall for it, though I'd orta be hep to men. An' he dates me up tonight for the chauffeurs' ball."

"But you didn't go?"

"No; he sidesteps it this aft with a fairy tale about drivin' a rich old dame out to Yonkers. All the time he was figurin' on pinchin' this goil for Jerry. He's a rotten crook."

"What color is 'Slim' Jim's car?"

"A dirty blue. Why?"

"That was the car."

Annie lifted her hands in a little gesture of despair. "I'm dead sick of this game. What's there in it? I live straight and eat in a beanery. No lobster palaces in mine. Look at me cheap duds. And Tim gives me the over like I was a street cat. What sort of a chance did I ever have, with toughs and gunmen for me friends?"

"You've got yore chance now, Annie. Tim will hop off that fence he's on and light a runnin' straight for you if he thinks you've ditched 'Slim' Jim. You don't owe Jerry Durand anything, anyhow. Where would he have Kitty taken? You can give a guess."

She had made her decision before she spoke. "Gimme paper and a pencil."

On Clay's notebook she scrawled hurriedly an address.

"Jim'd croak me if he knew I'd given this," she said, looking straight at the cattleman.

"He'll never know—and I'll never forget it, Annie."

Clay left her and turned to the driver. From the slip of paper in his hand he read aloud an address.

As Clay slammed the door shut and the car moved forward he had an impression of something gone wrong, of a cog in his plans slipped somewhere. For Annie, standing in the rain under a sputtering misty street light, showed a face stricken with fear.

Her dilated eyes were fixed on the driver of the taxicab.

CHAPTER XII.

Two Men in a Locked Room.

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NOTICE TO CREDITORS

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SIDNEY P. TOWNSHEND, Solicitor.

In the Matter of the Joint Trust Estate of Milton P. Crew and Hettie H. Crew.

In the Circuit Court for Kent County. In Equity No. 2190.

Ordered, this twenty-first day of August in the year nineteen hundred and twenty-two, by the Circuit Court for Kent County, in Equity, and by the authority of said Court, that joint creditors of Milton P. Crew and Hettie H. Crew, and all others claiming any interest in the Joint Estate and property or the proceeds of the sale thereof, granted and assigned by the Joint Deed of Trust of the said Milton P. Crew and Hettie H. Crew to W. Bradford Copper, Trustee, for the purposes in said Joint Deed stated and declared, be and they are hereby directed and required to file their said claims, with the proper vouchers atached thereto, with the Clerk of the Circuit Court for Kent County, in Equity, on or before the twenty-sixth day of December, in the year nineteen hundred and twenty-two; provided a copy of this order be published in some newspaper published in Kent County, Maryland, once in each of four successive weeks before the twenty-sixth day of October in the year nineteen hundred and twenty-two.

PHILEMON B. HOPPER.

True Copy, Test:—
a26-5t. ROBERT R. AYRES, Clerk.

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