The Big-Town Round Up

by

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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.—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

Bee Makes a Morning Call.

Colin Whitford came into the room carrying a morning paper. His step was hurried, his eyes eager. When he spoke there was the lift of excitement in his voice.

"Bee, I've got bad news."

"Is the Bird Cage flooded?" asked Beatrice. "Or have the miners called a strike again?"

"Worse than that. Lindsay's been arrested. For murder."

The bottom fell out of her heart.

The Bottom Fell Out of Her Heart. She Caught at the Corner of a Desk to Steady Herself.

She caught at the corner of a desk to steady herself. "Murder! It can't be! Must be some one of the same name."

"I reckon not, honey. It's Clay sure enough. Listen." He read the headlines of a front-page story.

"It can't be Clay! What would he be doing in a gambling-dive?" She reached for the paper, but when she had it the lines blurred before her eyes. "Read it, please."

Whitford read the story to the last line. Long before he had finished, his daughter knew the one arrested was Clay. She sat down heavily, all the life stricken from her young body.

"It's that man Durand. He's done this and fastened it on Clay. We'll find a way to prove Clay didn't do it."

"Maybe, in self-defense—"

Beatrice pushed back her father's hesitant suggestion, and even while she did it a wave of dread swept over her. The dead man was the same criminal "Slim" Jim Collins whom the cattleman had threatened in order to protect the Millikan girl. The facts that the man had been struck down by a chair and that her friend claimed, according to the paper, that the gunman had fired two shots, buttressed the solution offered by Whitford. But the horror of it was too strong for her. Against reason her soul protested that Clay could not have killed a man. It was too horrible, too ghastly, that through the faults of others he should be put in such a situation.

And why should her friend be in such a place unless he had been trapped by the enemies who were determined to ruin him? She knew he had a contempt for men who wasted their energies in futile dissipations. He was too clean, too much a son of the wind-swept desert, to care anything about the low pleasures of indecent and furtive vice. He was the last man she knew likely to be found enjoying a den of this sort.

"Dad, I'm going to him," she announced with crisp decision.

Her father offered no protest. His impulse, too, was to stand by the friend in need. He had no doubt Clay had killed the man, but he had a sure conviction it had been done in self-defense.

"We'll get the best lawyers in New York for him, honey," he said. "Nobody will slip anything over on Lindsay if we can help it."

"Will they let us see him? Or shall we have to get permission from some one?"

"We'll have to get an order. I know the district attorney. He'll do what he can for me, but maybe it'll take time."

Beatrice rose, strong again and resilient. Her voice was vibrant with confidence. "Then after you've called up the district attorney, we'll drive to Clay's flat in Harlem and find out from Johnnie what he can tell us. Perhaps he knows what Clay was doing in that place they raided."

It was not necessary to go to the Runt. He came to them. As Beatrice and her father stepped into the car Johnnie and Kitty appeared round the corner. Both of them had the news of a catastrophe written on their faces. A very little encouragement and they would be in tears.

"Ain't it tur'ble, Miss Beatrice? They done got Clay at last. After he made 'em all look like plugged nickels they done fixed it so he'll mebbe go to the electric chair and—"

"Stop that nonsense, Johnnie," ordered Miss Whitford sharply, a pain stabbing her heart at his words. "Don't begin whining already. We've got to see him through. Buck up and tell me what you know."

"That's right, Johnnie," added the mining man. "You and Kitty quit looking like the Atlantic ocean in distress. We've got to endure the grief and get busy. We'll get Lindsay out of this hole all right."

"You're dawg-goned whistlin'. Y'betcha, by jollies!" agreed the Runt, immensely cheered by Whitford's confidence. "We been drug into this an' we'll sure hop to it."

"When did you see Clay last? How did he come to be in that gambling-house? Did he say anything to you about going there?" The girl's questions tumbled over each other in her hurry.

"Well, ma'am, it must 'a' been about nine o'clock that Clay left last night. I recollect because—"

"It doesn't matter why. Where was he going?"

"To meet Mr. Bromfield at his club," said Kitty.

"Mr. Bromfield!" cried Beatrice, surprised. "Are you sure?"

"That's what Clay said," corroborated the husband. "Mr. Bromfield invited him. We both noticed it because it seemed kinda funny, him and Clay not bein'—"

"Johnnie," his wife reproved, mindful of the relationship between this young woman and the clubman.

"Did he say which club?"

"Seems to me he didn't, not as I remember. How about that, Kitty?"

"No, I'm sure he didn't. He said he wouldn't be back early. So he went to bed. We s'posed after we got up this mo'nin' he was sleepin' in his room, till the paper come and I looked at it." Johnnie gave way to lament. "I told him awhile ago he had orto go back to Arizona or they'd git him. And now they've gone and done it sure enough."

Keen as a hawk on the hunt, Beatrice turned to her father quickly. "I'm going to get Clarendon on the 'phone. He'll know all about it."

"Why will he know all about it?"

"Because he was with Clay. He's the man the paper says the police are looking for—the man with Clay when it happened."

Her father's eyes lit. "That's good guessing, Bee."

It was her fiance's man who answered the girl's call. She learned that Clarendon was still in his room.

"He's quite sick this morning, miss," the valet added.

"Tell him I want to talk with him. It's important."

"I don't think, miss, that he's able—"

"Will you please tell him what I say?"

Presently the voice of Bromfield, thin and worried, came to her over the wire. "I'm ill, Bee. Absolutely done up. I—I can't talk."

"Tell me about Clay Lindsay. Were you with him when—when it happened?"

There was a perceptible pause before the answer came.

"With him?" She could feel his terror throbbing over the wire. Though she could not see him, she knew her question had stricken him white. "With him where?"

"At this gambling-house—Maddock's?"

"No, I—I—Bee, I tell you I'm ill."

"He went out last night to join you at your club. I know that. When did you see him last?"

"I—we didn't—he didn't come."

"Then you didn't see him at all?"

There was another pause, significant and telling, followed by a quavering "No-o."

"Clary, I want to see you—right away."

"I'm ill, I tell you—can't leave my bed." He gave a groan too genuine to doubt.

Beatrice hung up the receiver. Her eyes sparkled. For all her slimness, she looked both competent and dangerous.

"What does he say?" her father asked.

"Says he didn't meet Clay at all—that he didn't show up. Dad, there's something wrong about it. Clary's in a panic about something. I'm going to see him, no matter whether he can leave his room or not."

Whitford looked dubious. "I don't see—"

"Well, I do," his daughter cut him off decisively. "We're going to his rooms—now. Why not? He says he's ill. All right. I'm engaged to be married to him and I've a right to see how ill he is."

"What's in your noodle, honey? You've got some kind of a suspicion. What is it?"

"I think Clary knows something. My notion is that he was at Maddock's and that he's in a blue funk for fear he'll be found and named as an accessory. I'm going to find out all he can tell me."

"But—"

She looked at her father directly, a deep meaning in the lovely eyes. A little tremor ran through her body. "Dad, I'm going to save Clay. That's the only thing that counts."

Her words were an appeal, a challenge. They told him that her heart belonged to the friend in prison, and they carried him back somehow to the hour when the nurse first laid her, a tiny baby, in his arms.

His heart was very tender to her. "Whatever you say, sweetheart."

Their chauffeur broke the speed laws getting them to the apartment house for bachelors where Bromfield lived.

His valet for once was caught off guard when he opened the door to them. Beatrice was inside before he could quite make up his mind how best to meet this frontal attack.

"We came to see Mr. Bromfield," she said.

"Sorry, miss. He is really quite ill. The doctor says—"

"I'm Miss Whitford. We're engaged to be married. It's very important that I see him."

"Yes, miss, I know."

The man was perfectly well aware that his master wanted of all things to avoid a meeting with her. For some reason or other, Bromfield was in a state of collapse this morning the valet could not understand. The man's business was to protect him until he had recovered. But he could not flatly turn his master's fiancee out of the apartment. His eyes turned to Whitford and found no help there. He fell back on the usual device of servants.

"I don't really think he can see you, miss. The doctor has specially told me to guard against any excitement. But I'll ask Mr. Bromfield if—if he feels up to it."

The valet passed into what was evidently a bedroom and closed the door behind him. There was a faint murmur of voices.

"I'm going in now," Beatrice announced abruptly to her father.

She moved forward quickly, before Whitford could stop her, whipped open the door and stepped into the room. Her father followed her reluctantly.

Clarendon, in a frogged dressing-gown, lay propped up by pillows. Beside the bed was a tray, upon which was a decanter of whisky and a siphon of soda. His figure seemed to have fallen together and his seamed face was that of an old man. But it was the eyes that held her. They were full of stark terror. The look in them took the girl's breath. They told her that he had undergone some great shock.

He shivered at sight of her.

"What is it, Clary?" she cried, moving toward him. "Tell me—tell me all about it."

"I—I'm ill." He quaked it from a burning throat.

"You were all right yesterday. Why are you ill now?"

He groaned unhappily.

"You're going to tell me everything—everything."

His fascinated, frightened eyes clung to this straight, slim girl whose look stabbed into him and shook his soul. Why had she come to trouble him this morning while he was cowering in fear of the men who would break in to drag him away to prison?

"Nothing to tell," he got out with a gulp.

"Oh, yes, you have. Are you ill because of what happened at Maddock's?"

He tried to pull himself together, to stop the chattering of his teeth.

"N-nonsense, my dear. I'm done up completely. Delighted to see you and

He Shivered at Sight of Her.

all that, but— won't you go home?" His appealing eyes passed to Whitford. "Can't you take her away?"

"No, I won't go home—and he can't take me away." Her resolution was hard as steel. It seemed to crowd inexorably upon the shivering wretch in the frogged gown. "What is it you're so afraid to tell me, Clarendon?"

He quailed at her thrust. "What—what do you mean?"

She knew now, beyond any question or doubt, that he had been present when "Slim" Jim Collins had been killed. He had seen a man's life snuffed out, was still trembling for fear he might be called in as a party to the crime.

"You'd better tell me before it's too late. How did you and Clay Lindsay come to go to that den?"

"We went out to—to see the town."

"But why to that place? Are you in the habit of going there?"

He shuddered. "Never was there before. I had a card. Some one gave it to me. So we went in for a few minutes—to see what it was like. The police raided the place." He dropped his sentences reluctantly, as though they were being forced from him in pain.

"Well?"

"Everybody tried to escape. The lights went out. I found a back door and got away. Then I came home."

"What about Clay?"

Bromfield told the truth. "I didn't see him after the lights went out, except for a moment. He was running at the man with the gun."

"You saw the gun?"

He nodded, moistened his dry lips with the tip of his tongue.

"And the—the shooting? Did you see that?"

Twice the words he tried to say faded on his lips. At last he managed a "No."

"Why not?"

"I—found a door and escaped."

"You must have heard shooting."

"I heard shots as I ran down the stairs. This morning I read that—that a man was—" He swallowed down a lump and left the sentence unfinished.

"Then you know that Clay is accused of killing this man, and that the police are looking for you because you were with him."

"Yes." His answer was a dry whisper.

"Did you see this man Collins in the room?"

"No. I shouldn't know him if I saw him."

"But you heard shots. You're sure of that!" cried Beatrice.

"Y-yes."

The girl turned triumphantly to her father. "He saw the gun and he heard shots. That proves self-defense at the worst. They were shooting at Clay when he struck with the chair—if he did. Clarendon's testimony will show that."

"My testimony!" screamed Bromfield. "My G—d, do you think I'm going to—to—go into court? They would claim I—I was—"

She waited, but he did not finish. "Clay's life may depend upon it, and of course you'll tell the truth," she said quietly.

"Maybe I didn't hear shots," he hedged. "Maybe it was furniture falling. There was a lot of noise of people stamping and fighting."

"You—heard—shots."

The eyes of the girl were deadly weapons. They glittered like unscabbarded steel. In them was a contained fire that awed him.

He threw out his hand in a weak, impotent gesture of despair. "My G—d, how did I ever come to get into such a mix-up? It will ruin me."

"How did you come to go?" she asked.

"He wanted to see New York. I suppose I had some notion of taking him slumming."

Beatrice went up to him and looked straight into his eyes. "Then testify to that in court. It won't hurt you any. Go down to the police and say you have read in the paper that they want you. Tell the whole truth. And Clary—don't weaken. Stick to your story about the shots." Her voice shook a little. "Clay's life is at stake. Remember that."

"Do you think it would be safe to go to the police?" he asked doubtfully.

Whitford spoke up. "That's the only square and safe thing to do, Bromfield. They'll find out who you are, of course. If you go straight to them you draw the sting from their charge that you were an accomplice of Clay. Don't lose your nerve. You'll go through with flying colors. When a man has done nothing wrong he needn't be afraid."

"I dare say you're right," agreed Bromfield miserably.

The trouble was that Whitford was arguing from false premises. He was assuming that Clarendon was an innocent man, whereas the clubman knew just how guilty he was. Back of the killing lay a conspiracy which might come to light during the investigation. He dared not face the police. His conscience was not clean enough.

"Of course Dad's right. It's the only way to save your reputation," Beatrice cried. "I'm not going to leave you till you promise to go straight down there to headquarters. If you don't you'll be smirched for life—and you'd be doing something absolutely dishonorable."

He came to time with a heart of heavy dread. "All right, Bee, I'll go," he promised. "It's an awful mess, but I've got to go through with it, I suppose."

"Of course you have," she said with complete conviction. "You're not a quitter, and you can't hide here like a criminal."

"We'll have to be moving, Bee," her father reminded her. "You know we have an appointment to meet the district attorney."

Beatrice nodded. With a queer feeling of repulsion she patted her fiance's cheek with her soft hand and whispered a word of comfort to him.

"Buck up, old boy. It won't be half as bad as you think. Nobody is going to blame you."

They were shown out by the valet.

"You don't want to be hard on Bromfield, honey," Whitford told his daughter after they had re-entered their car. "He's a parlor man. That's the way he's been brought up. Never did a hard day's work in his life. Everything made easy for him. If he'd ever ridden out a blizzard like Clay or stuck it out in a mine for a week without food after a cave-in, he wouldn't balk on the job before him. But he's soft. And he's afraid of his reputation. That's natural, I suppose."

Beatrice knew he was talking to save her feelings. "You don't need to make excuses for him, Dad," she answered gently, with a wry smile. "I've got to give up. I don't think I can go through with it."

"You mean—marry him?"

"Yes." She added, with a flare of passionate scorn of herself: "I deserve what I've got. I knew all the time I didn't love him. It was sheer selfishness in me to accept him. I wanted what he had to give me."

Her father drew a deep breath of relief. "I'm glad you see that, Bee. I don't think he's good enough for you. But I don't know anybody that is, come to that."

"That's just your partiality. I'm a mean little bounder or I never should have led him on," the girl answered in frank disgust.

Both of them felt smirched. The behavior of Bromfield had been a reflection on them. They had picked him for a thoroughbred, and he had failed them at the first test.

"Well, I haven't been proud of you in that affair," conceded Colin. "It didn't seem like my girl to—" He broke off in characteristic fashion to berate her environment. "It's this crazy town. The spirit of it gets into a person and he accepts its standards. Let's get away from here for a while, sweetheart."

"After Clay is out of trouble, Dad, I'll go with you back to Denver or to Europe or anywhere you say."

"That's a deal," he told her promptly. "We'll stay till after the annual election of the company and then go off on a honeymoon together, Bee."

To Be Continued

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