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 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.

CHAPTER XX.—Bromfield threatens to be revenged on the Whitfords through a business deal. Lindsay compels him to stay away from a meeting at which it had been planned to wrest control of a rich property, the Bird Cage mine, from Whitford.

"Your daughter's engaged to Bromfield, ain't she?" demanded the ex-prize fighter, his bulbous eyes full on his host.

"That's our business, sir."

"I got a reason for asking. She is or she ain't. Which is it?"

"We'll not discuss my daughter's affairs."

"All right, since you're so d—d particular. We'll discuss Bromfield's. I warned him to keep his mouth shut or he'd get into trouble."

"He was released from prison this afternoon."

"Did I say anything about prison?" Durand asked. "There's other kinds of grief beside being in stir. I've got this guy right."

"Just what do you mean, Mr. Durand?"

"I mean that he hired me to get Lindsay in bad with you and the girl. He was to be caught at the Omnium club with a woman when the police raided the place, and it was to get into the papers."

"I don't believe it," said Whitford promptly.

"You will. I had a dictagraph in the room when Bromfield came to see me. You can hear it all in his own voice."

"That's not what I call it," defended the clubman.

"It doesn't matter what you call it. The fact stands."

"I told him explicitly—again and again—that there was to be no violence. I intended only to show him up. I had a right to do it."

Whitford got up and walked up and down the room. He felt like laying hands on this well-dressed scamp and throwing him out of the office. He tasted something of his daughter's sense of degradation at ever having been connected with a man of so little character. The experience was a bitterly humiliating one to him. For Bee was, in his opinion, the cleanest, truest little thoroughbred under heaven. The only questionable thing he had ever known her to do was to engage herself to this man.

Colin came to a halt in front of the other.

"We've got to protect you, no matter how little you deserve it. I can't have Bee's name dragged into all the papers of the country. The case against Durand will have to be dropped. He's lost his power anyhow and he'll never get it back."



"Of Course, I'm Not Good Enough. I Know That. No Man's Good Enough for a Good Woman."

"Then it doesn't matter much whether he's tried or not."

That phase of the subject Whitford did not pursue. He began to feel in his vest pocket for something.

"Of course you understand that we're through with you, Bromfield. Neither Beatrice nor I care to have anything more to do with you."

"I don't see why," protested Bromfield. "As a man of the world—"

"If you don't see the reason I'm not able to explain it to you." Whitford's fingers found what they were looking for. He fished a ring from his pocket and put it on the desk. "Beatrice asked me to give you this."

"I don't think that's fair. If she wants to throw me over she ought to tell me her reasons herself."

"She's telling them through me. I don't want to be more explicit unless you force me."

"Of course I'm not good enough. I know that. No man's good enough for a good woman. But I'm as good as other fellows. We don't claim to be angels. New York doesn't sprout wings."

"I'm not going to argue this with you. And I'm not going to tell you what I think of you beyond saying that we're through with you. The less said about it the better. Man, don't you see I don't want to have any more talk about it? The engagement was a mistake in the first place. Bee never loved you. Even if you'd been what we thought you, it wouldn't have done. She's lucky to have found out in time."

"Is this a business rupture, too, Mr. Whitford?"

"Just as you say about that, Bromfield. As an investor in the Bird Cage you're entitled to the same consideration that any other stockholder is. Since you're the second largest owner you've a right to recognition on the board of directors. I'm not mixing my private affairs with business."

Bromfield rose, pulled on the glove he had removed, nodded good-bye without offering to shake hands, and sauntered out of the office. There was a look on his face the mining man did not like. It occurred to Whitford that Clarendon, now stripped of self-respect by the knowledge of the regard in which they held him, was in a position to strike back hard if he cared to do so. The right to vote the proxies of the small stockholders of the Bird Cage company had been made out in his name at the request of the president of the corporation.

* * * * * * *

The case against Durand was pigeonholed by the district attorney without much regret. All through the underworld where his influence had been strong, it was known that Jerry had begged off. He was discredited among his following and was politically a down-and-outer. But he knew too much to permit him to be dragged into court safely. With his back to the wall he might tell of many shady transactions implicating prominent people. There were strong influences which did not want him pressed too hard. The charge remained on the docket, but it was set back from term to term and never brought to trial.

Colin Whitford found his attention pretty fully absorbed by his own affairs. Bromfield had opened a fight against him for control of the Bird Cage company. The mine had been developed by the Coloradoan from an unlikely prospect into a well-paying concern. It was the big business venture of his life and he took a strong personal interest in running it. Now, because of Bromfield's intention to use for his own advantage the proxies made out in his name, he was likely to lose control. With Bromfield in charge the property might be wrecked before he could be ousted.

"Dad's worrying," Beatrice told Lindsay. "He's afraid he'll lose control of the mine. There's a fight on against him."

"What for? I thought yore father was a mighty competent operator. Don't the stockholders know when they're well off?"

She looked at him enigmatically. "Some one he trusted has turned out a traitor. That happens occasionally in business, you know."

It was from Colin himself that Clay learned the name of the traitor.

"It's that fellow Bromfield," he explained. "He's the secretary and second largest stockholder in the company. The annual election is to be tomorrow afternoon. He's got me where the wool's short. I was fool enough to ask the smaller stockholders to make out their proxies in his name. At that time he was hand in glove with us. Now I'm up against it. He's going to name the board of directors and have himself made president."

Clay ventured on thin ice. The name of Bromfield had not been mentioned to him before in the last twenty-four hours by either Beatrice or her father. "Surely Bromfield wouldn't want to offend you."

"That's exactly what he would want to do."

"But—"

"He's got his reasons."

"When is the election?"

"At three o'clock."

"Where?"

"At the company offices."

"Perhaps if I talked with Bromfield—"

Whitford laughed shortly. "I'd talk an arm off him if it would do any good. But it won't. He's out for revenge."

Clay's eyes alighted swiftly on the older man. They asked gravely a question and found an answer that set his heart singing. Beatrice had broken her engagement with Bromfield.

It was a little after eleven o'clock next morning when the cattleman walked into an apartment house for bachelors, took the elevator, and rang the bell at Bromfield's door.

Clarendon, fresh from the hands of his valet, said he was glad to see Lindsay, but did not look it. He offered his guest a choice of liquors and selected for himself a dry martini. Cigars and cigarettes were within reach on a tabouret.

Clay discovered that one difficulty he had expected to meet did not complicate the problem. The valet had left to select the goods for some custom-made shirts, Bromfield explained apologetically, apropos of the lack of service. He would not return till late in the afternoon.

"I've come to see about that Bird Cage business, Mr. Bromfield," his visitor explained. "I've been millin' it over in my mind, and I thought I'd put the proposition up to you the way it looks to me."

Bromfield's eyebrows lifted. His face asked with supercilious politeness what the devil business it was of Lindsay's.

"Mr. Whitford has put in twenty years of his life building up the Bird Cage into a good property. It's a one-man mine. He made it out of a hole in the ground, developed it, expanded it, gave it a market value. He's always protected the stockholders and played the game square with them. Don't it look like he ought to stay in control of it?"

"Did he send you here to tell me that?"

"No, he didn't. But he's gettin' along in years, Bromfield. It don't look hardly right to me for you to step in and throw him out. What do you think about it, yourself?"

The clubman flushed with anger. "I think that it's d—d impertinent of you to come here meddling in my business. I might have expected it. You've always been an impertinent meddler."



"I Think It's D—d Impertinent of You to Come Here Meddling in My Business."

"Mebbeso," agreed Clay serenely, showing no surprise at this explosion. "But I'm here. And I put a question. Shall I ask it again?"

"No need. I'm going to take what the law allows me—what I and my friends have bought and paid for in the open market. The more it hurts Whitford the better I'll be pleased," answered Bromfield, his manner of cynical indifference swept away by gathering rage. The interference of this "bounder" filled him with a passion of impotent hate.

"Is that quite correct? Did you buy control in the market? In point of fact, aren't you holdin' a bunch of proxies because Whitford wrote and asked the stockholders to sign them for you to vote? What you intend doing is a moral fraud, no matter what its legal aspect is. You'd be swindling the very stockholders you claim to represent, as well as abusing the confidence of Whitford."

"What you think isn't of the least importance to me, Mr. Lindsay. If you're here merely to offer me your advice, I suppose I shall now have regretfully to say good-day." The New Yorker rose, a thin lip smile scarcely veiling his anger at this intruder who had brought his hopes to nothing.

"I reckon I'll not hurry off, Mr. Bromfield," Clay replied easily. "You might think I was mad at you. I'll stick around awhile and talk this over."

"Unfortunately I have an engagement," retorted the other icily.

"When?"

"I really think, Mr. Lindsay, that is my business."

"I'm makin' it mine," said Clay curtly.

Bromfield stared. "I beg your pardon?"

"I said it was mine too. You see I bought a coupla shares of Bird Cage stock yesterday. I'd hate to see Whitford ousted from control. I've got confidence in him."

"It's your privilege to vote that stock this afternoon. At least it would be if it had been transferred to you on the books. I'll vote my stock according to my own views."

"I wonder," murmured Clay aloud.

"What's that?" snapped Bromfield.

"I was just figurin' on what would happen if you got sick and couldn't attend that annual meeting this afternoon," drawled the westerner. "I reckon mebbe some of the stockholders you've got lined up would break away and join Whitford."

The New Yorker felt a vague alarm. What idea did this fellow have in the back of his head. Did he intend to do bodily violence to him? Without any delay Bromfield reached for the telephone.

The large brown hand of the westerner closed over his.

"I'm talkin' to you, Mr. Bromfield. It's not polite for you to start 'phoning, not even to the police, whilst we're still engaged in conversation."

"Don't you try to interfere with me," said the man who paid the telephone bill. "I'll not submit to such an indignity."

"I'm not the only one that interferes. You fixed up quite an entertainment for me the other night, didn't you? Wouldn't you kinda call that interferin' some? I sure ought to comb yore hair for it."

Bromfield made a hasty decision to get out. He started for the door. Clay traveled in that direction too. They arrived simultaneously. Clarendon backed away. The Arizonan locked the door and pocketed the key.

His host grew weakly violent. From Whitford he had heard a story about two men in a locked room that did not reassure him now. One of the men had been this cattleman. The other—well, he had suffered. "Let me out! I'll not stand this! You can't bully me!" he cried shrilly.

"Don't pull yore picket-pin, Bromfield," advised Lindsay. "I've elected myself boss of the rodeo. What I say goes. You'll save yoresel'f a heap of worry if you make up yore mind to that right away."

"What do you want? What are you trying to do? I'm not a barroom brawler like Durand. I don't intend to fight with you."

"You've ce'tainly relieved my mind," murmured Clay lazily. "What's yore own notion of what I ought to do to you, Bromfield? You invited me out as a friend and led me into a trap after you had fixed it up. Wouldn't a first-class thrashin' with a hawsswhip be about right?"

Bromfield turned pale. "I've got a weak heart," he faltered.

"I'll say you have," agreed Clay. "It's pumpin' water in place of blood right now, I'll bet. Did you ever have a real honest-to-G—d lickin' when you was a boy?"

The New Yorker knew he was helpless before this clear-eyed, supple athlete who walked like a god from Olympus. One can't lap up half a dozen highballs a day for an indeterminate number of years without getting flabby, nor can he spend himself in feeble dissipations and have reserves of strength to call upon when needed. The tongue went dry in his mouth. He began to swallow his Adam's apple.

"Let's look at this thing from all sides," went on Clay cheerfully. "If we decide by a majority of the voting stock—and I'm carryin' enough proxies so that I've got control—that you'd ought to have a whalin', why, o' course, there's nothin' to it but get to business and make a thorough job."

"Maybe I didn't do right about Maddock's."

"No mebbe about that. You acted like a yellow hound."

"I'm sorry. I apologize."

"I don't reckon I can use apologies. I might make a bargain with you."

"I'll be glad to make any reasonable bargain."

"How'd this do? I'll vote my stock and proxies in the Bromfield Punishment company, Limited, against the whalin', and you vote yore stock and proxies in the Bird Cage company to return the present board and directorate."

"That's coercion."

"Well, so it is."

"The law—"

"Did you go hire a lawyer for an opinion before you paid Durand to do me up?"

"You've got no right to hold me a prisoner here to help Whitford."

"All right, I won't. I'll finish my business with you and when I'm through, you can go to the annual meetin'—if you feel up to travelin' that far."

"I'll give you a thousand dollars to let me alone."

"That'd be a thousand and fifty you had given me, wouldn't it?" returned Lindsay gayly.

Tears of vexation stood in Bromfield's eyes. "All right. Let me go. I'll be fair to Whitford and arrange a deal with him."

"Get the stockholders who're with you on the 'phone and tell 'em to vote their stock as Whitford thinks best. Get Whitford and tell him the fight's off."

"If I do, will you let me go?"

"If you don't we'll return to the previous question—the annual meeting of the Bromfield Punishment company, Limited."

Bromfield got busy with the telephone.

When he had finished, Clay strolled over to a bookcase, cast his eyes over the shelves, and took out a book. It was "David Harum." He found an easy-chair, threw a leg over one arm, and presently began to chuckle.

"Are you going to keep me here all day?" asked his host sulkily.

"Only till about four o'clock. We're paired, you and me, so we'll both stay away from the election. Why don't you pick a good book and enjoy yoreself? There's a lot of A 1 readin' in that case over there. It'll sure improve yore mind."

To Be Continued

CHAPTER XX

On the Carpet.

The question at issue was not whether Beatrice would break with her fiance, but in what way it should be done. If her father found him guilty of what Durand had said, he was to dismiss him brusquely; if not, Beatrice wanted to disengage herself gently and with contrition.

Whitford summoned Bromfield to his office where the personal equation would be less pronounced. He put to him plainly the charge made by Jerry and demanded an answer.

No lie could save him. The only thing he could do was to sugarcoat the truth. He set about making out a case for himself as skillfully as he could.

"I'm a man of the world, Mr. Whitford," he explained. "When I meet an ugly fact I look it in the face. This man Lindsay was making a great impression on you and Bee. Neither of you seemed able quite to realize his—his deficiencies, let us say. I felt myself at a disadvantage with him because he's such a remarkably virile young man and he constantly reminded you both of the West you love. It seemed fair to all of us to try him out—to find out whether at bottom he was a decent fellow or not. So I laid a little trap to find out."

"Not the way Durand tells it," answered the miner bluntly. "He says you paid him a thousand dollars to arrange a trap to catch Lindsay."

"Either he misunderstood me or he's distorting the facts," claimed the clubman with an assumption of boldness.

"That ought to be easy to prove. We'll make an appointment with him for this afternoon and check up by the dictagraph."

Bromfield laughed uneasily. "Is that necessary, Mr. Whitford? Surely my word is good. I have the honor to tell you that I did nothing discreditable."

Whitford leaned back in his swivel chair and looked steadily at the man to whom his daughter was engaged. "Im going to the bottom of this, Bromfield. That fellow Durand ought to go to the penitentiary. We're gathering the evidence to send him there. Now he tells me he'll drag you down to ruin with him if he goes. Come clean. Can he do it?"

"Well, I wouldn't say—"

"Don't evade, Bromfield. Yes or no."

"I suppose he can." The words came sulkily after a long pause.

"You did hire him to destroy Lindsay's reputation."

"Lindsay had no business here in New York. He was disturbing Bee's peace of mind. I wanted to get rid of him and send him home."

"So you paid a crook scoundrel who hated him to murder his reputation."

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