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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

Clay Appoints Himself Chaperon.

As he traveled east Clay began to slough the outward marks of his calling. He gave his spurs to Johnnie before he left the ranch. At Tucson he shed his chaps and left them in care of a friend at the Longhorn corral. The six-gun with which he had shot rattlesnakes he packed into his suitcase at El Paso. His wide-rimmed felt hat flew off while the head beneath it was stuck out of a window of the coach somewhere south of Denver. Before he passed under the Welcome arch in that city the silk kerchief had been removed from his brown neck and retired to the hip pocket which formerly held his forty-five.

The young cattleman began to flatter himself that nobody could now tell he was a wild man from the hills who had never been curried. He might have spared himself the illusion. The lightness of his stride, the breadth of the well-packed shoulders, the frankness of the steady eyes, all advertised him as a son of Arizona.

It was just before noon at one of the small plains towns east of Denver that a girl got on the train and was taken by the porter to a section back of Clay Lindsay. The man from Arizona noticed that she was refreshingly pretty in an unsophisticated way.

A little later he had a chance to confirm this judgment, for the dining-car manager seated her opposite him at a table for two. When Clay handed her the menu card she murmured "Thank you!" with a rush of color to her cheeks and looked helplessly at the list in her hand. Quite plainly she was taking her first long journey.

The cow puncher helped her fill the order card. She put herself entirely in his hands and was willing to eat whatever he suggested unbiased by preferences of her own.

She was a round, soft, little person with constant intimations of a childhood not long outgrown. During the course of lunch she confided that her name was Kitty Mason, that she was an orphan, and that she was on her way to New York to study at a school for moving-picture actresses.

"I sent my photograph and the manager wrote back that my face was one hundred per cent perfect for the movies," the girl explained. It was clear that she was expecting to be manufactured into a film star in a week or two.

After they had finished eating, the range-rider turned in at the smoking compartment and enjoyed a cigar. He fell into casual talk with an army officer who had served in the Southwest, and it was three hours later when he returned to his own seat in the car.

A hard-faced man in a suit of checks more than a shade too loud was sitting in the section beside the girl from Brush. He was making talk in an assured, familiar way, and the girl was listening to him shyly and yet eagerly. The man was a variation of a type known to Lindsay. That type was the Arizona bad-man. If this expensively dressed fellow was not the eastern equivalent of the western gunman, Clay's experience was badly at fault.

Clay had already made friends with the Pullman conductor. He drifted to him now on the search for information.

"The hard-faced guy with the little girl?" he asked casually after the proffer of a cigar. "The one with the muscles bulging out all over him—who is he?"

"He comes by that tough mug honestly. That's Jerry Durand."

"The prize-fighter?"

"Yep. Used to be. He's a gang leader in New York now. Runs a gambling house of his own, I've heard. You can't prove it by me."

When Lindsay returned to his place he settled himself with a magazine in a seat where he could see Kitty and her new friend. The very vitality of the girl's young life was no doubt a temptation to this man. The soft, rounded throat line, the oval cheek's rich coloring so easily moved to ebb and flow, the carmine of the full red lips; every detail helped to confirm the impression of a sensuous young creature, innocent as a wild thing of the forests and as yet almost as unspiritual.

Durand took the girl in to dinner with him and they sat not far from Lindsay. Kitty was lost to any memory of those about her. She was flirting joyously with a sense of newly awakened powers. The man from Graham county, Arizona, felt uneasy in his mind. The girl was flushed with life. In a way she was celebrating her escape from the narrow horizon in which she had lived. In her unsophistication danger lay. For she was plainly easily influenced, and in the beat of her healthy young blood probably there was latent passion.

They left the diner before Clay. He passed them later in the vestibule of the sleeper. They were looking out together on the moonlit plain through which the train was rushing. The arm of the man was stretched behind her to the railing and with the motion of the car the girl swayed back slightly against him.

Again Clay sought the smoking compartment and was led into talk by the officer. It was well past eleven when he rose, yawned, and announced, "I'm goin' to hit the hay."

Kitty Was Lost to Any Memory of Those About Her.

Most of the berths were made up and it was with a little shock of surprise that his eyes fell on Kitty Mason and her new friend, the sleek black head of the man close to her fair curls, his steady eyes holding her like a charmed bird while his caressing voice wove the fairy tale of New York to which she yielded herself in strange delight.

"Don't you-all want yo' berth made up, lady?"

It was the impatient porter who interrupted them. The girl sprang up tremulously to accept.

"Oh, please. Is it late?" Her glance swept down the car and took in the fact that her section alone was not made up. "I didn't know—why, what time is it?"

"Most twelve, ma'am," replied the aggrieved porter severely.

She flashed a look of reproach at her companion and blushed again as she fled with her bag to the ladies' dressing room.

The train was rolling through the cornfields of the Middle West when the Arizonan awoke. He was up early, but not long before Kitty Mason, who was joined at once by Durand.

"Shucks! Nothin' to it a-tall," the range-rider assured himself. "That li'l' girl must have the number of this guy. She's flirtin' with him to beat three of a kind, but I'll bet a dogie she knows right where she's at."

Clay did not in the least believe his own argument. If he had come from a city he would have dismissed the matter as none of his business. But he came from the clean Southwest where every straight girl is under the protection of every decent man. If she was in danger because of her innocence it was up to him to look after her. There was no more competent man in Graham county than Clay Lindsay, but he recognized that this was a delicate affair in which he must move warily.

On his way to the diner at noon the range-rider passed her again. She was alone for the moment and as she leaned back her soft round throat showed a beating pulse. Her cheeks were burning and her starry eyes were looking into the future with a happy smile.

"You pore little maverick," the man commented silently.

The two had the table opposite him. As the wheels raced over a culvert to the comparative quiet of the ballasted track beyond, the words of the man reached Clay.

". . . and we'll have all day to see the city, Kid."

Kitty shook her head. There was hesitation in her manner, and the man was quick to make the most of it. "And it won't cost you a cent, girlie," he added.

But the long lashes of the girl lifted and her baby-blue eyes met his with shy reproach. "I don't think I ought," she breathed, color sweeping her face in a vivid flame.

"You should worry," he scoffed.

Lindsay knew the girl was weakening. She was no match for this big, dominant, two-fisted man.

The jaw of the cow puncher set. This child was not fair game for a man like Durand. When Clay rose to leave the diner he knew that he meant to sit in and take a hand.

The train was creeping through the thickly settled quarter where the poorer people are herded when Clay touched Durand on the shoulder.

"Like to see you a moment in the vestibule," he said in his gentle voice.

The eyes of the two men met and the gambler knew at once that this man and he were destined to be enemies.

No man had ever said that Jerry Durand was not game. He rose promptly and followed the westerner from the car, swinging along with the light, catlike tread acquired by many pugilists.

The floor of the vestibule had been raised and the outer door of the car opened. Durand found time to wonder why.

The cowpuncher turned on him with an abrupt question. "Can you swim?"

The eyes of the ward boss narrowed. "What's that to you?" he demanded truculently.

"Nothin' to me, but a good deal to you. I'm almin' to drop you in the river when we cross."

"Is that so?" snarled Durand. "You're quite a joker, ain't you? Well, suit me. But let's get this clear so we'll know where we're at. What's ailin' you, rube?"

"I don't like the color of yore hair or the cut of yore clothes," drawled Lindsay. "You've got a sure-enough bad eye, and I'm tired of travelin' in yore company. Let's get off, me or you one."

In the slitted eyes of the Bowery graduate there was no heat at all. They were bleak as a heavy winter morn. "Suits me fine. You'll not travel with me much farther. Here's where you beat the place."

The professional lashed out suddenly with his left. But Clay was not at the receiving end of the blow. Always quick as lightning, he had ducked and clinched. His steel-muscled arms tightened about the waist of the other. A short-arm jolt to the cheek he disregarded.

Before Durand had set himself to meet the plunge he found himself flying through space. The gambler caught at the rail, missed it, landed on the cinders beside the roadbed, was flung instantly from his feet, and rolled over and over down an incline to a muddy gully.

Clay, hanging to the brass railing, leaned out and looked back. Durand had staggered to his feet, plastered with mud from head to knees, and was shaking furiously a fist at him. The face of the man was venomous with rage.

The cowpuncher waved a debonair hand and mounted the steps again. The porter was standing in the vestibule looking at him with amazement.

"You throwed a man off'n this train, mistah," he charged.

"So I did," admitted Clay, and to save his life he could not keep from smiling.

The porter sputtered. This beat anything in his previous experience. "But—but—it ain't allowed to open up the cah. Was you-all havin' trouble?"

"No trouble a-tall. He bet me a cigar I couldn't put him off."

Clay palmed a dollar and handed it to the porter as he passed into the car. The eyes of that outraged official rolled after him. The book of rules did not say anything about wrestling matches in the vestibule. Besides, it happened that Durand had called him down sharply not an hour before. He decided to brush off his passengers and forget what he had seen.

Clay stopped in front of Kitty and said he hoped she would have no trouble making her transfer in the city. The girl was no fool. She had sensed the antagonism that had flared up between them in that moment when they had faced each other five minutes before.

"Where's Mr. Durand?" she asked.

"He got off."

"But the train hasn't stopped."

"It's just crawlin' along, and he was in a hurry."

Her gaze rested upon an angry bruise on his cheek. It had not been there when last she saw him.

"I don't understand it," she murmured, half to herself. "Why would he get off before we reached the depot?"

She was full of suspicions, and the bruise on the westerner's cheek did not tend to allay them. They were still unsatisfied when the porter took her to the end of the car to brush her clothes.

The discretion of that young man had its limits. While he brushed the girl he told her rapidly what he had seen in the vestibule.

"Was he hurt?" she asked breathlessly.

"No'm. I looked out and seen him standin' beside the track jes' a-cussin' a blue streak. He's a sho-'nough bad actor, that Jerry Durand."

Kitty marched straight to her section. The eyes of the girl flashed anger.

"Please leave my seat, sir," she told Clay.

The Arizonan rose at once. He knew that she knew. "I was intendin' to help you off with yore grips," he said.

She flamed into passionate resentment of his interference. "I'll attend to them. I can look out for myself, sir."

With that she turned her back on him.

The Big Town.

When Clay stepped from the station at the Thirty-fourth Street entrance New York burst upon him with what seemed almost a threat. He could hear the roar of it like a river rushing down a canyon. Clay had faced a cattle stampede. He had ridden out a blizzard launched up with the drifting herd. He had lived rough all his young and joyous life. But for a moment he felt a chill drench at his heart that was almost dread. He did not know a soul in this vast populace. He was alone among seven or eight million crazy human beings.

He had checked his suitcase to be free to look about. He had no destination and was in no hurry. All the day was before him, all of many days. He drifted down the street and across to Sixth avenue.

Chance swept him up Sixth to Herald square. He was caught in the river of humanity that races up Broadway. He wondered where all this rush of people was going. What crazy impulses sent them surging to and fro? And the girls—Clay surrendered to them at discretion. He had not supposed there were so many pretty, well-dressed girls in the world.

"First off I'm goin' to get me a real city suit of clothes," he promised himself. "This here wrinkled outfit is some too woolly for the big town. It's a good suit yet—most as good as when I bought it at the Boston store in Tucson three years ago. But I reckon I'll save it to go home in."

He stopped in front of a store above which was the legend "I. Bernstein, Men's Garments." A small man with sharp little eyes and well defined nose was standing in the doorway.

"Might you would want a good suit of quality clothes, my friendt," he suggested.

"You've pegged me right," agreed the westerner with his ready smile. "Lead me to it."

Mr. Bernstein personally conducted his customer to the suit department. "I wait on you myself on account you was a stranger to the city," he explained.

"Might You Would Want a Good Suit of Quality Clothes, My Friendt?" He Suggested.

The little man took a suit from a rack and held it at arm's length to admire it. His fingers caressed the woof of it lovingly. He evidently could bring himself to part with it only after a struggle.

"Worsted. Fine goods." He leaned toward the range-rider and whispered a secret. "Imported."

Clay shook his head. "Not what I want." His eyes ranged the racks. "This is more my notion of the sort of thing I like." He pointed to a blue serge with a little stripe in the pattern.

The dealer detached the coat lovingly from the hanger and helped his customer into it. Then he fell back, eyes lit with enthusiastic amazement. Only fate could have brought together this man and this suit, so manifestly destined for each other since the hour when Eve began to patch up fig leaves for Adam.

"Like a coat of paint," he murmured aloud.

The cowpuncher grinned. He understood the business that went with selling a suit in some stores. But it happened that he liked this suit himself. "How much?" he asked.

The owner of the store dwelt on the merits of the suit, its style, its durability, the perfect fit. He covered his subject with artistic thoroughness. Then, reluctantly, he confided in a whisper the price at which he was going to sacrifice this suit among suits.

"To you, my friendt, I make this garment for only sixty-five dollars." He added another secret detail. "Below wholesale cost."

A little devil of mirth lit in Lindsay's eye. "I'd hate to have you rob yoreself like that. And me a perfect stranger to you too."

"Qvality, y' understan' me. Which a man must got to live garments like I done to appreciate such a suit. All wool. Every thread of it. Unshrinkable." Mr. Bernstein caressed it again. "One swell piece of goods," he told himself softly, almost with tears in his eyes.

"All wool, you say?" asked Clay, feeling the texture. He had made up his mind to buy it, though he thought the price a bit stiff.

Mr. Bernstein protested on his honor that there was not a thread of cotton in it. "Which you could take it from me that when I sell a suit of clothes it is like I am dealing with my own brother," he added. "Every garment out of this store takes my personal guarantee."

Clay tried on the trousers and looked at himself in the glass. So far as he could tell he looked just like any other New Yorker.

The dealer leaned forward and spoke in a whisper. Apparently he was ashamed of his softness of heart. "Fifty-five dollars—to you."

"I'll take it," the westerner said.

The clothier called his tailor from the rear of the store to make an adjustment in the trousers. Meanwhile he deftly removed the tags which told him in cipher that the suit had cost him just eleven dollars and seventy-five cents.

Half an hour later Clay sat on top of a Fifth avenue bus which was jerking its way uptown. His shoes were shined to mirror brightness. He was garbed in a blue serge suit with a little stripe running through the pattern. That suit just now was the apple of his eye. It proved him a New Yorker and not a wild man from the Arizona desert.

The motor-bus ran up Fifth avenue, cut across to Broadway, passed Columbus circle, and swept into the Drive. It was a day divinely young and fair. The fragrance of a lingering spring was wafted to the nostrils. Glimpses of the park tempted Clay. Its winding paths! The children playing on the grass while their maids in neat caps and aprons gossiped together on the benches near! This was the most human spot the man from Arizona had seen in the metropolis.

Somewhere in the early three-figure streets he descended from the top of the bus and let his footsteps follow his inclinations into the park. He struck across the Drive into a side street. An apartment house occupied the corner, but from the other side a row of handsome private dwellings faced him.

The janitor of the apartment house was watering the parking beyond the sidewalk. The edge of the stream from the nozzle of the hose sprayed the path in front of Clay. He hesitated for a moment to give the man time to turn aside the hose.

But the janitor on this particular morning had been fed up with trouble. One of the tenants had complained of him to the agent of the place. Another had moved away without tipping him for an hour's help in packing he had given her. He was sullily of the opinion that the whole world was in a conspiracy to annoy him. Just now the approaching rube typified the world.

A little flirt of the hose deluged Clay's newly shined boots and the lower six inches of his trousers.

"Look out what you're doing!" protested the man from Arizona.

"I tank you better look where you're going," retorted the one from Sweden. He was a heavy-set, muscular man with a sullen, obstinate face.

"My shoes and trousers are sopping wet. I believe you did it on purpose."

"Tank so? Val, yust one teng I lak to tell you. I got no time for d—n fule talk."

The westerner started on his way. There was no use having a row with a sulky janitor.

But the Swede misunderstood his purpose. At Clay's first step forward he jerked round the nozzle and let the range-rider have it with full force.

Clay was swept back to the wall by the heavy pressure of water that played over him. The stream moved swiftly up and down him from head to foot till it had drenched every inch of the perfect fifty-five-dollar suit. He drowned fathoms deep in a water spout. He was swept over Niagara Falls. He came to life again to find himself the choking center of a world flood.

He gave a strangled whoop and charged straight at the man behind the hose. The two clinched. While they struggled, the writhing hose slapped back and forth between them like an agitated snake. Clay had one advantage. He was wet through anyhow. It did not matter how much of the deluge struck him. The janitor fought to keep dry and he had not a chance on earth to succeed.

For one hundred and seventy-five pounds of Arizona bone and muscle, toughened by years of hard work in sun and wind, had clamped itself upon him. The nozzle twisted toward the janitor. He ducked, went down, and was instantly submerged. When he tried to rise, the stream beat him back. He struggled halfway up, slipped, got again to his feet, and came down sitting with a hard bump when his legs skated from under him.

A smothered "Vat t'ell!" rose out of the waters. The janitor could not understand what was happening to him. He did not know that he was being treated to a new form of the water cure.

A Smothered "Vat T'ell!" Rose Out of the Waters.

To Be Continued

NOTICE OF DISSOLUTION

The partnership hertofore existing between the undersigned under the firm name of Warren & Townshend Fire Insurance Agency is by mutual agreement dissolved, and the business of Fire Insurance will hereafter be conducted by Wm. Belt Townshend, under the firm name of Warren & Townshend. All bills due and owing to said firm shall be paid to William Belt Townshend.

Chestertown, Md., May 15, 1922.

R. GOLDEY WARREN,
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