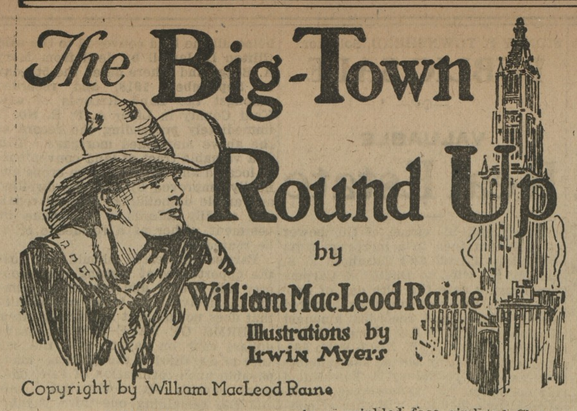
The Big-Town Round Up

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.—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.

Two Men in a Locked Room.

Some sixth sense of safety—one that comes to many men who live in the outdoors on the untamed frontier—warned Clay that all was not well. The machine had swung to the right and was facing from the wind instead of into it. Clay was not very well acquainted with New York, but he did know this was not the direction in which he wanted to go.

Lindsay opened the door and swung out on the running board. "We're goin' wrong. Stop the car!" he ordered.

The man at the wheel did not turn. He speeded up.

His fare wasted no time in remonstrances. A moment, and the chauffeur threw on the brake sharply. His reason was a good one. The blue nose of a revolver was jammed hard against his ribs. He had looked round once to find out what it was prodding him. That was enough to convince him he had better stop.

Under the brake the back wheels skidded and brought up against the curb. Clay, hanging on by one hand, was flung hard to the sidewalk. The cab teetered, regained its equilibrium, gathered impetus with a snort, and leaped forward again.

As the cattleman clambered to his feet he caught one full view of the chauffeur's triumphant, vindictive face. He had seen it before, at a reception especially arranged for him by Jerry Durand one memorable night. It belonged to the more talkative of the two gunmen he had surprised at the pretended poker game. He knew, too, without being told that this man and "Slim" Jim Collins were one and the same. The memory of Annie's stricken face carried this conviction home to him.

The rain pelted down as he moved toward the brighter lighted street that intersected the one where he had been dropped. The lights of a saloon caught his eye at the corner. He went in, got police headquarters on the wire, and learned that a car answering the description of the one used by his abductor had been headed into Central park by officers and that the downtown exits were being watched.

Presently he picked up another taxi. He hesitated whether to go to the address Annie had given him or to join the chase uptown. Reluctantly, he decided to visit the house.

Clay paid his driver and looked at the house numbers as he moved up the street he wanted. Many of the residences were used to keep lodgers in. Others were employed for less reputable purposes.

His overcoat buttoned to his neck, Clay walked without hesitation up the steps of the one numbered 243. He rang the bell and waited, his right hand in the pocket of his overcoat.

The door opened cautiously a few inches and a pair of close-set eyes in a wrinkled face gimleted Clay.

"Whadya want?"

"The old man sent me with a message," answered the Arizonan promptly. "Got everything ready for the girl?"

"Say, who the h—l are youse?"

"One of Slim's friends. Listen, we got the kid—picked her up at a drug store."

"I don' know watcher fairy tale's about."

Clay put his foot against the door to prevent it from being closed and drew his hand from the overcoat pocket. In the hand nestled a blue-nosed persuader.

Unless the eyes peering into the night were bad barometers of their owner's inner state, he was in a panic of fear.

"Love o' Gawd, d-don't shoot!" he



"Love o' Gawd, D-don't Shoot!" He Chattered. "I Ain't Nobody but the Caretaker."

chattered. "I ain't nobody but the caretaker."

He backed slowly away, followed by Lindsay. The barrel of the thirty-eight held his eyes fascinated. By the light of his flash Clay discovered the man to be a chalk-faced little inconsequent.

"Say, don't point that at me," the old fellow implored.

"Are you alone?"

"You know it."

"Is Jerry comin' himself with the others?"

"They don't none of them tell me nothin'. I'm nobody. I'm only Joey."

"Unload what you know. Quick. I'm in a hurry."

The man began a rambling, whining tale.

The Arizonan learned that a room had been prepared on the second floor for a woman. Slim had made the arrangements. Joe had heard Durand's name mentioned, but knew nothing of the plans.

"I'll look the house over. Move along in front of me and don't make any mistakes. This six-gun is liable to permeate yore anatomy with lead."

The cattleman examined the first floor with an especial view to the exits. He might have to leave in a hurry. If so, he wanted to know where he was going. The plan of the second story was another point he featured as he passed swiftly from room to room. From the laundry in the basement he had brought up a coil of clothes-line. With this he tied Joe hand and foot. After gagging him, he left the man locked in a small rear room and took the key with him.

Clay knew that he was in a precarious situation. If Durand returned with Kitty and captured him here he was lost. The man would make no more mistakes. Certainly he would leave no evidence against him except that of his own tools. The intruder would probably not be killed openly. He would either simply disappear or he would be murdered with witnesses framed to show self-defense. The cattleman was as much outside the law as the criminals were. He had no legal business in this house. But one thing was fixed in his mind. He would be no inactive victim. If they got him at all it would be only after a fighting finish.

To Clay, standing at the head of the stairs, came a sound that stiffened him to a tense wariness. A key was being turned in the lock of the street door below. He moved back into the deeper shadows as the door swung open.

Two men entered. One of them cursed softly as he stumbled against a chair in the dark hall.

"Where's that rat Joe?" he demanded in a subdued voice.

Then came a click of the lock. The sound of the street rain ceased. Clay knew that the door had been closed and that he was shut in with two desperate criminals.

What have they done with Kitty? Why was she not with them? He asked himself that question even as he slipped back into a room that opened to the left.

He groped his way through the darkness, for he dared not flash his light to guide him. His fingers found the edge of a desk. Round that he circled toward a closet he remembered having noted. His arm brushed the closet door. Next moment he was inside and had closed it softly behind him.

And none too soon. For into the room came the gunmen almost on his heels.

"Jerry'll raise h—l," a heavy voice was saying as they entered the room. "And that ain't all. We'll land in stir if we don't look out. We just ducked a bad fall. The bulls pretty near had us that time we poked our nose out from the park at Seventy-second street."

Some one pressed a button and the room leaped to light. Through the open crack of the closed door Clay recognized Gorilla Dave. The second of the gunmen was out of range of his vision.

From the sound of creaking furniture Clay judged that the unseen man had sat down heavily. "It was that blowout queered us. And say—how came the bulls so hot on our trail? Who rapped to 'em?"

"Must 'a' been that boob wit' the goil. He got busy quick. Well, Jerry, won't have to salve the cops this time. We made our getaway all right," said Dave.

"Say, where's Joey?"

"Pulled a sneak likely. Wha's it matter? Listen! What's that?"

Some one was coming up the stairs.

The men in the room moved cautiously to the door. The hall light was switched on.

"Lo, Jerry," Gorilla Dave called softly.

He closed the room door and the sound of the voices was shut off instantly.

The uninvited guest dared not step out of the closet to listen, for at any instant the men might re-enter. He crouched in his hiding place, the thirty-eight in his hand.

The minutes dragged interminably. More than once Clay almost made up his mind to steal out to learn what the men were doing. But his judgment told him he must avoid a brush with so many if possible.

The door opened again.

"Now beat it and do as I say if you know what's good for you," a bullying voice was ordering.

The owner of the voice came in and slammed the door behind him. He sat down at the desk, his back to the closet. Through the chink Clay saw that the man was Jerry Durand.

From his vest pocket he took a fat black cigar, struck a match and lit it. He slumped down in the swivel chair. It took no seer to divine that his mind was busy working out a problem.

Clay stepped softly from his place of refuge, but not so noiselessly that the gangman did not detect his presence. Jerry swung round in the chair and leaped up with catlike activity. He stood without moving, poised on the balls of his feet, his deep-set eyes narrowed to shining slits. It was in his thought to hurl himself headlong on the man holding steadily the menacing revolver.

"Don't you! I've got the dead wood on you," said the Arizonan, a trenchant saltness in his speech. "I'll shoot you down sure as h—l's hot."

Durand's face wore an ugly look of impotent malice, but his throat was dry as a lime kiln. He could not estimate the danger that confronted him nor what lay back of the man's presence.

"What you doin' here?" he demanded.

"Makin' my party call," retorted Clay easily.

Jerry cursed him with a low, savage stream of profanity. The gangman enraged was not a sight pleasing to see.

"I reckon heaven, h—l, and high water couldn't keep you from cussin' now. Relieve yore mind proper, Mr. Durand. Then we'll talk business," murmured Clay in the low, easy drawl that never suggested weakness.

The ex-prize-fighter's flow of language dried up. He fell silent and stood swallowing his furious rage. It had come home to him that this narrow-flanked young fellow with the close-gripped jaw and the cool, steady eyes was entirely unmoved by his threats.

"Quite through effervescing?" asked Clay contemptuously.

The gang leader made no answer. He chose to nurse his venom silently.

"Where's Kitty Mason?"

Still no answer.

"I asked you what you've done with Kitty Mason?"

"That's my business."

"By G—d, you'll tell, or I'll tear it out of you!"

Clay backed to the door, found the key, transferred it to the inner side of the lock, turned it, and put it in his pocket.

The cornered gangman took a chance. He ducked for the shelter of the desk, tore open a drawer and snatched out an automatic.

Simultaneously the cowpuncher pressed the button beside the door and plunged the room in darkness. He side-stepped swiftly and without noise.

A flash of lightning split the blackness.

Clay dropped to his knees and crawled away. Another bolt, with its accompanying roar, flamed out.

Still the westerner did not fire in answer, though he knew just where the target for his bullet was. A plan had come to him. In the blackness of that room one might empty his revolver and not score a hit. To wait was to take a chance of being potted, but he did not want the death of even such a ruffian as Durand on his soul.

The crash of the automatic and the rattle of glass filled the room. Jerry, blazing away at some fancied sound, had shattered the window.

Followed a long silence. Durand was resolved to wait until his enemy grew restless and betrayed himself.

The delay became a test of moral stamina. The contest was not one of grit, but of that unflawed nerve which is so much the result of perfect physical fitness. Clay's years of clean life on the desert counted heavily now. He was master of himself, though his mouth was dry as a whisper and there were goose quills on his flesh.

But Durand, used to the fetid atmosphere of barrooms and to the soft living of the great city, found his nerve beginning to crack under the strain. What kind of a man was his enemy to lie there in the black silence and not once give sign of where he was, in spite of crashing bullets? Was it possible that he could have killed the fellow at the first shot? The comfort of this thought whispered hope in the ear of the ex-prize-fighter.

A chair crashed wildly. Durand fired again and yet again, his nerves giving way to a panic that carried him to swift action. He could not have stood another moment without screaming.

There came the faint sound of a hand groping on the wall, and immediately after a flood of light filled the room.

Clay stood by the door. His revolver covered the crouching gang leader. His eyes were hard and pitiless.

"Try another shot," he advised ironically.

Jerry did. A harmless click was all the result he got. He knew now that the cowman had tempted him to waste his last shots at a bit of furniture flung across the room.

"You'll tell me what you did with Kitty Mason," said Clay in his low, persuasive voice, just as though there had been no intermission of flying bullets since he had mentioned the girl before.

"You can't kill me, when I haven't a loaded gun," Durand answered between dry lips.

The other man nodded an admission of that point. "That's an advantage you've got of me. You could kill me if I didn't have a gun, because you're a yellow wolf. But I can't kill you. That's right. But I can beat h—ll out of you, and I'm sure goin' to do it."

"Talk's cheap, when you've got a loaded six-gun in your fist," jeered Jerry.

With a flirt of his hand Clay tossed the revolver to the top of a book-case, out of easy reach of a man standing on the floor. He ripped open the buttons of his overcoat and slipped out of it, then moved forward with elastic step.

"It's you or me now, Jerry Durand."

The prize-fighter gave a snort of derisive triumph. "You d—n fool! I'll eat you alive."

"Mebbeso. I reckon my system can assimilate any whalin' you're liable to hand me. Go to it."

Durand had the heavy shoulders and swelling muscles that come from years of training for the ring. Like most pugilists out of active service he had taken on flesh. But the extra weight was not fat, for Jerry kept always in good condition. He held his leadership partly at least because of his physical prowess. No tough in New York would willingly have met him in a rough-and-tumble fight.

The younger man was more slightly built. He was a Hermes rather than a Hercules. His muscles flowed. They did not bulge. But when he moved it was with the litheness of a panther. The long lines of shoulder and loin had the flow of tigerish grace.

To Be Continued

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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.

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