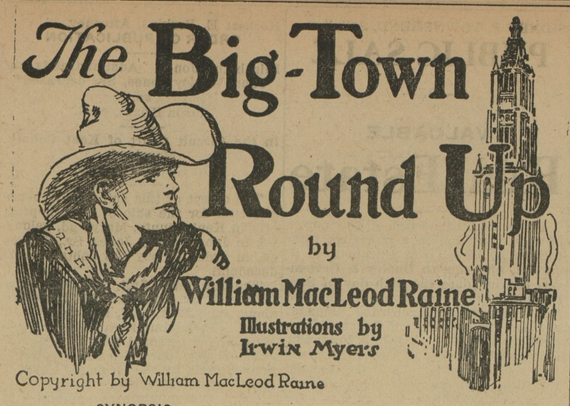

The Big-Town Round Up

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.—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.

"I'd bet my last chip on Annie. So last night I went straight to her. She wouldn't throw down 'Slim' Jim, but she gave me an address. I went there and met Durand."

"With his gang?" asked Tim.

"No; I waited till they had gone. I locked myself in a room alone with him. He took eight shots at me in the dark and then we mixed."

"You bate him! I can see it in your eye!" cried Muldoon, pounding the table so that the dishes jumped.

"You'll have to ask him about that." Clay passed to more important facts. "When I reached home Kitty was there. They had dropped her in the park to make a safe getaway."

"That's good."

"But Tim—when Annie Millikan gave me the address where Jerry Durand was, the driver of my taxi saw her. The man was 'Slim' Jim."

Muldoon sat up, a serious look on his face. "Man, yuh spilt the beans that time. How'd you ever come to do it? They'll take it out on Annie, the dogs." The eyes of the policeman blazed.

"Unless we stand by her. First we've got to get her away from there to some decent place where she'll be safe."

Mrs. Muldoon spoke up. "And that's easy. She'll just take our spare bedroom and welcome. Sure the girl needs a mother and a home. An' I don't doubt that she'll pay her way."

"Then that's settled. Will you see Annie, Tim? Or shall I?"

"We'll both see her. But there's another thing. Will she be safe here?"

"I'm goin' to have a talk with 'Slim' Jim and try to throw a scare into him. I'll report to you what he says."

They took a trolley to the lodging house where Annie lived.

The girl looked pale and tired. Clay guessed she had slept little. The memory of "Slim" Jim's snarling face had stood out in the darkness at the foot of her bed.

"Is this a pinch?" she asked Tim, with a pert little tilt to her chin.

"Yuh can call it that, Annie. Mother wants yuh to come and stay with us. You're not safe here. That gang will make yuh pay somehow for what yuh did."

"And if your mother took me in they'd make her pay. You'd maybe lose your job."

"I'd find another. I'm thinkin' of quittin', anyhow."

"I don't think they'd get Tim," put in Clay. "I'm goin' to see Collins and have a talk with him."

"You can't salve Jim with soft soap."

"Did I mention soft soap?"

"I heard some one most killed Jerry Durand last night," said Annie abruptly, staring at Lindsay's bruised face. "Was it you?"

"Yes," said the Arizonan simply.

"Did you get the girl?"

"They dropped her to save themselves. My friend found her with a man and took her from him."

"I hope you did up Jerry right!" cried Annie, a vindictive flash in her dark eyes.

"I haven't called him up this mo'nin' to see how he's feelin'," said Clay whimsically. "Miss Annie, we're worried some about you. Mrs. Muldoon is right anxious for us to get you to come and stay awhile with her. She's honin' to have a li'l' girl to mother. Don't you reckon you can go?"

"I—I wish yuh'd come, Annie," blurted out Tim, looking down his nose.

"I'm an alley cat you're offerin' to take in and feed, Tim Muldoon," she charged suspiciously.

"Yuh're the girl—my mother loves." He choked on the impulsive avowal he had almost made and finished the sentence awkwardly.

The girl's face softened. Inside, she was a river of tenderness flowing toward the Irishman. "I'll go to your mother, Tim, if she really wants me," she said almost in a murmur.

"You're shoutin' now, Miss Annie," said Clay, smiling. "She sure wants you. I'll hit the trail to have that talk with Jim Collins."

He found "Slim" Jim at his stand. That flashily dressed young crook eyed him with a dogged and wary defiance. He had just come from a call at the bedside of Jerry Durand and he felt a healthy respect for the man who could do what this light-stepping young fellow had done to the champion rough-houser of New York. The story Jerry had told was of an assault from behind with a club, but this Collins did not accept at par. There were too many bruises on his sides and cuts on his face to be accounted for in any way except by a hard toe-to-toe fight.

"Mo'nin', Mr. Collins. I left you in a hurry last night and forgot to pay my bill. What's the damage?" asked Clay in his gently ironic drawl.

"Slim" Jim growled something the meaning of which was drowned in an oath.

"You say it was a free ride? Much obliged. That's sure fair enough," Clay went on easily. "Well, I didn't come to talk to you about that. I've got other business with you this mo'nin'."

The chauffeur looked at him sullenly and silently.

"Suppose we get inside the cab, where we can talk comfortably," Clay proposed.

"Slim" Jim stepped into the cab and sat down. Clay followed him, closing the door.

"Have you seen Jerry Durand this sunny mo'nin'?" asked Lindsay, with surface amiability.

"Wot's it to you?" demanded Collins.

"Not a thing. Nothin' a-tall," agreed Clay. "But it may be somethin' to you. I'm kinda wonderin' whether I'll have to do to you what I did to him."

"Slim" Jim reached for the door hastily.

A strong, sinewy hand fell on his arm and tightened, slightly twisting the flesh as the fingers sank deeper.

Collins let out a yell. "Gawd! Don't do that. You're killin' me."

"Beg yore pardon. An accident. If I get annoyed I'm liable to hurt without meanin' to," apologized Clay, suavely. "I'll come right down to brass tacks, Mr. Collins. You're through with Annie Millikan. Understand?"

"Say, wot t'ell's this stuff you're pipin'? Who d' you t'ink youse are?"

"Never you mind who I am. You'll keep away from Annie from now on—absolutely. If you bother her—if anything happens to her—well, you go and take a good long look at Durand before you make any mistakes."

"You touch me an' I'll croak you. See!" hissed Collins.

"A gun-play?" asked Clay pleasantly. "Say, there's a shootin'-gallery round the corner. Come along. I wantta show you somethin'."

"Aw, go to h—l!"

The sinewy hand moved again toward the aching muscles of the gunman. Collins changed his mind hurriedly.

"All right. I'll come," he growled.

Clay tossed a dollar down on the counter, took a .22 and aimed at the row of ducks sailing across the gallery pool. Each duck went down as it appeared. He picked up a second rifle and knocked over seven or eight mice as they scampered across the target screen. With a third gun he snuffed the flaming eye from the right to the left side of the face that grinned at him, then with another shot sent it back again. He smashed a few clay pipes by way of variety. To finish off with, he scored six center shots in a target and rang a bell each time. Not one single bullet had failed to reach its mark.

The New York gunman had never seen such speed and accuracy. He was impressed in spite of the insolent sneer that still curled his lip.

"Got a six-shooter—a fohty-five?" asked Clay of the owner of the gallery.

"No."

"Sorry. I'm not much with a rifle, but I'm a good average shot with a six-gun. I kinda take to it natural." They turned and walked back to the cab. Collins fell into the Bowery strut.

"Tryin' to throw a scare into me," he argued feebly.

"Me? Oh, no. You mentioned soft music and the preacher. Mebbeso. But it's liable to be for you if you monkey with the buzz-saw. I'm no gun sharp, but no man who can't empty a revolver in a shade better than two seconds and put every bullet inside the rim of a cup at fifteen yards wants to throw lead at me. You see, I hang up my hat in Arizona. I grew up with a six-gun by my side."

"I should worry. This is little old New York, not Arizona," the gangman answered.

"That's what yore boss Durand thought. What has it brought him but trouble? Lemme give you something to chew on. New York's the biggest city of the biggest, freest country on God's green footstool. You little sewer rats pull wires and think you run it. Get wise, you poor locoed gink. You run it about as much as that fly on the wheel of yore taxi drives the engine. Durand's the whole works by his way of it, but when some one calls his bluff see where he gets off."

"He ain't through with you yet," growled "Slim" Jim, sulkily.

"Mebbe not, but you—you're through with Annie." Clay caught him by the shoulder and swung him round. His eyes bored chilly into the other man. "Don't you forget to remember not to forget that. Let her alone. Don't go near her or play any tricks to hurt her. Lay off for good. If you don't—well, you'll pay heavy. I'll be on the job personal to collect."

Clay swung away and strode down the street, light-heeled and lithe, the sap of vital youth in every rippling muscle.

"Slim" Jim watched him, snarling hatred. If ever he got a good chance at him it would be curtains for the guy from Arizona, he swore savagely.

CHAPTER XIV

Johnnie Says He Is Much Obliged.

Beatrice, just back from riding with Bromfield, stood on the steps in front of the grilled door and stripped the gloves from her hands.

"I'm on fire with impatience, Bee," he told her. "I can hardly wait for that three weeks to pass. The days drag when I'm not with you."

He was standing a step or two below her, a graceful, well-groomed figure of ease, an altogether desirable catch in the matrimonial market. His dark hair, parted in the middle, was beginning to thin, and tiny crow's-feet radiated from the eyes, but he retained the light, slim figure of youth. It ought not to be hard to love Clarendon Bromfield, his fiancee reflected. Yet he disappointingly failed to stir her pulses.

She smiled with friendly derision. "Poor Clary! You don't look like a Vesuvius ready to erupt. You have such remarkable self-control."

His smile met hers. "I can't go up and down the street ringing a bell like a town crier and shouting it out to everybody I meet."

Round the corner of the house a voice was lifted in tuneless song.

Oh, I'm goin' home
Bull-whackin' for to spurn;
I ain't got a nickel,
And I don't give a dern.
'Tis when I meet a pretty girl,
You bet I will or try,
I'll make her my little wife,
Root hog or die.

"You see Johnnie isn't ashamed to shout out his good intentions," she said.

"Johnnie isn't engaged to the loveliest creature under heaven. He doesn't have to lie awake nights for fear the skies will fall and blot him out before his day of bliss."

Beatrice dropped a little curtsy. She held out her hand in dismissal. "Till tomorrow, Clary."

As Bromfield turned away, Johnnie came round a corner of the house, dragging a garden hose. He was attacking another stanza of the song:

There's hard times on old Bitter Creek
That never can be beat.
It was root hog or die
Under every wagon sheet.
We cleared up all the Indians,
Drank . . .

The puncher stopped abruptly at sight of his mistress.

"What did you drink that has made you so happy this morning, Johnnie?" she asked lightly.

It Ought Not to Be Hard to Love Clarendon Bromfield, His Fiancee Reflected. Yet He Disappointingly Failed to Stir Her Pulses.

The cowpuncher's secret burst from him. "I done got married, Miss Beatrice."

"You—what?"

"I up and got married day before yesterday," he beamed.

"And who's the happy girl?"

"Kitty Mason. We jes' walked to the church round the corner. Clay, he stood up with us and give the bride away. It's me 'n' her for Arizona poco pronto."

Beatrice felt a queer joyous lift inside her as of some weight that had gone. In a single breath Johnnie had blown away the mists of misunderstanding that for weeks had clouded her vision. Her heart went out to Clay with a rush of warm emotion. The friend she had distrusted was all she had ever believed him. He was more—a man too stanch to desert under pressure any one who had even a slight claim on him.

"I want to meet her. Will you bring her to see me this afternoon, Johnnie?" she asked.

His face was one glad grin. "I sure will. Y'betcha, by jollies."

He did.

To Beatrice, busy writing a letter, came Jenkins some hours later.

"A young—person—to see you, Miss Whitford." He said it with a manner so apologetic that it stressed his opinion of the social status of the visitor.

"What kind of a person?"

"A young woman, Miss. From the country, I tyke it."

"She didn't give you a card?"

"No, Miss. She came with the person Mr. Whitford took on to 'elp with the work houtside."

"Oh! Show them both up. And have tea sent in, Jenkins."

Kitty's shy eyes lifted apprehensively to those of this slim young patrician so beautifully and simply gowned. Instantly her fears fled. Beatrice moved swiftly to her with both hands outstretched.

"I'm so glad to meet you."

She kissed the young wife with unaccustomed tenderness. For the Colorado girl had about her a certain modesty that was disarming, an appeal of helplessness Beatrice could not resist.

Kitty, in the arms of her hostess, wept a few tears. She had been under a strain in anticipating the ordeal of meeting Johnnie's mistress, and she had discovered her to be a very sweet, warm-hearted girl.

As for Johnnie, he had a miserably happy half-hour. He had brought his hat in with him and he did not know how to dispose of it. What he did do was to keep it revolving in his hands. This had to be abandoned when Miss Whitford handed him a quite unnecessary cup of tea and a superfluous plate of toasted English muffins. He wished his hands had not been so big and red and freckled. Also he had an uncomfortable suspicion that his tow hair was tousled and uncombed in spite of his attempts at home to plaster it down.

He declined sugar and cream because for some reason it seemed easier to say "No'm" than "Yes," though he always took both with tea. And he disgraced himself by scalding his tongue and failing to suppress the pain. Finally the plate, with his muffin, carefully balanced on his knee, from some devilish caprice plunged over the precipice to the carpet and the bit of china broke.

Whereupon Kitty gently reproved him, as was her wifely duty.

"I ain't no society fellow," the distressed puncher explained to his hostess, tiny beads of perspiration on his forehead.

Beatrice had already guessed as much, but she did not admit it to Johnnie. She and Kitty smiled at each other in that common superiority which their sex gives them to any mere man upon such an occasion. For Mrs. John Green, though afternoon tea was to her an alien custom, took to it as a duck to water.

Miss Whitford handed Johnnie an envelope. "Would it be too much trouble for you to take a letter to Mr. Lindsay?" she asked very casually as they rose to go.

The bridegroom said he was much obliged and he would be plumb tickled to take a message to Clay.

When Clay read the note his blood glowed. It was a characteristic two-line apology:

I've been a horrid little prig, Clay (so the letter ran). Won't you come over tomorrow and go riding with me?

BEATRICE.

* * * * * * * *

Colin Whitford had been telling Clay the story of how a young cowpuncher had snatched Beatrice from under the hoofs of a charging steer. His daughter and the Arizonan listened without comment.

"I've always thought I'd like to explain to that young man I didn't mean to insult him by offering money for saving Bee. But you see he didn't give me any chance. I never did learn his name," concluded the mining man.

To Be Continued

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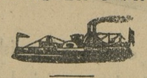

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