

The Big-Town Round Up



by
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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 prize fighter. Perceiving his intention, Lindsay provokes a quarrel and throws Durand from the train.

CHAPTER III, Continued.

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.

The little man took a suit from a rack and held it at arm's length to admire it. His fingers caressed the wool 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 friend, 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 yourself like that. And me a perfect stranger to you too." "Quality, y' understand me. Which a man must get 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. Glances 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 straits 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 sulky 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 thank 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, just 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 slipped 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 up on 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 '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 'ell!" Rose Out of the Waters.

Before his dull brain had functioned to action an iron grip had him by the back of the neck. He was jerked to his feet and propelled forward to the curb. Every inch of the way the heavy stream from the nozzle broke on his face and neck. It paralyzed his resistance, jarred him so that he could not gather himself to fight. Clay bumped him up against a hitching post, garroted him, and swung the hose around the post in such a way

as to encircle the feet of the man. The cowpuncher drew the hose tight, slipped the nozzle through the iron ring, and caught the flapping arms of the man to his body. With the deft skill of a trained roper Clay swung the rubber pipe round the body of the man again and again, drawing it close to the post and knotting it securely behind. The Swede struggled, but his furious rage availed him nothing. When Clay stepped back to inspect his job he knew he was looking at one that had been done thoroughly.

"I keel you, by d-n, ef you don't turn me loose!" roared the big man in a rage. The range-rider grinned gayly at him. He was having the time of his young life. He did not even regret his fifty-five-dollar suit.

"Life's just loaded to the hocks with disappointment, Olie," he explained, and his voice was full of genial sympathy. "I'll bet a dollar Mex you'd sure like to beat me on the head with a two-by-four. But I don't reckon you'll ever get that fond wish gratified. We're not liable to meet up with each other again pronto. Today we're here and tomorrow we're at Yuma, Arizona, say, for life is short and darned fleetin', as the poet fellow says."

He waved a hand jauntily and turned to go. But he changed his mind. His eye had fallen on a young woman standing at a French window of the house opposite. She was beckoning to him imperiously.

The young woman disappeared as he crossed the street, but in a few moments the door opened and she stood there waiting for him. Clay stared. He had never before seen a girl dressed like this. She was in riding boots, breeches and coat. Her eyes dilated while she looked at him.

"Wyoming?" she asked. "Arizona," he answered.

"All one. Knew it the moment I saw you tie him. Come in." She stood aside to let him pass.

That hall, with its tapestried walls, its polished floors, and oriental rugs, was reminiscent of "the movies" to Clay. Nowhere else had he seen a home so stamped with the mark of ample means.

"Come in," she ordered again, a little sharply. He came in and she closed the door. "I'm sopping wet. I'll drip all over the floor."

"What are you going to do? You'll be arrested, you know." She stood straight and slim as a boy, and the frank directness of her gaze had a boy's sexless unconsciousness.

There came to them from outside the tap-tap-tap of a policeman's night stick rattling on the curbstone. "He's calling help."

"I can explain how it happened." "No. He wouldn't understand. They'd find you guilty."

To a manservant standing in the background the young woman spoke. "Jenkins, have Nora clean up the floor and the steps outside. And remember—I don't want the police to know this gentleman is here."

"Yes, miss." "Come!" said the girl to her guest. Clay followed his hostess to the stairs and went up them with her, but he went protesting, though with a chuckle of mirth. "He sure ruined my clothes a heap. I ain't fit to be seen."

The suit he had been so proud of was shrinking so that his arms and legs stuck out like signposts. The color had run and left the goods a peculiar bilious-looking overall blue. She lit a gas-log in a small library den.

"Just a minute, please." She stepped briskly from the room. In her manner was a crisp decision, in her pose a trim gallantry that won him instantly.

"I'll bet she'd do to ride with," he told himself in a current western idiom. When she came back it was to take him to a dressing room. A complete change of clothing was laid out for him on a couch. A man whom Clay recognized as a valet—be whom he had seen his duplicate in the moving-picture theaters at Tucson—was there to supply his needs and attend to the temperature of his bath.

"Stevens will look after you," she said; "when you are ready come back to dad's den."

His eyes followed to the door her resilient step. Once, when he was a boy, he had seen Ada Rehan play in "As You Like It." Her acting had entranced him. This girl carried him back to that hour. She was boyish as Rosalind, woman in every motion of her slim and lissom body.

At the head of the stairway she paused. Jenkins was moving hurriedly up to meet her.

"It's a policeman, miss. 'E's come about the—the person that came in, and 'e's talkin' to Nora on the steps. She's a-jollyin' 'im, as you might say, miss."

His young mistress nodded. She swept the hall with the eye of a general. Swiftly she changed the position of a Turkish rug so as to hide a spot on the polished floor that had been recently scrubbed and was still moist. Then she opened the door and sauntered out.

"Does the officer want something, Nora?" she asked innocently, switching the end of a crop against her riding-boots.

"Yes, miss. There's been a ruffian bath' up Swedes an' 'y'n' 'em to posts. This officer thinks he came here," explained Nora.

"Does he want to look in the house?" "Yes, miss."

"Then let him come in." The young mistress took the responsibility on her own shoulders. She led the policeman into the hall. "I don't really see how he could have got in here without some of us seeing him, officer."

"No, ma'am. I don't see how he could." The patrolman scratched the red head. "The janitor's a Swede, anyhow. He jest guesses it. I came to make sure av it. I'll be sorry for troubling yuh, miss."

The smile she gave him was warm and friendly. "Oh, that's all right. If you'd care to look around . . . But there really is no use."

"No." The forehead under the red thatch wrinkled in thought. "He said he seen him come in here or next door, an' he came up the steps. But nobody could have got in without some of youse seein' him. That's a lead pipe." The officer pushed any doubt that remained from his mind. "Only a middle-headed Swede."

CHAPTER IV

Clay Takes a Transfer.

While Beatrice Whitford waited in the little library for the Arizona to join her, she sat in a deep chair, chin in hand, eyes fixed on the jetting flames of the gas-log. A little flush had crept into the oval face. In her blood there tingled the stimulus of excitement. For into her life an adventure had come from faraway Catteland.

A crisp, strong footstep sounded in the hall. Her fingers flew to pat into place the soft golden hair curled low at the nape of the neck. At times she had a boylike unconcern of sex; again, a spirit wholly feminine.

The clothes of her father fitted Lindsay loosely, for Colin Whitford had begun to take on the flesh of middle age and Clay was lean and clean of build as an elk. But the westerner was one of those to whom clothes are unimportant. The splendid youth of him would have shone through the rags of a beggar.

"My name is Clay Lindsay," he told her by way of introduction. "Mine is Beatrice Whitford," she answered.

They shook hands. "I'm to wait here till my clothes dry, yore man says."

"Then you'd better sit down," she suggested. Within five minutes she knew that he had been in New York less than three hours. His impressions of the city amused and entertained her. He was quite simple. She could look into his mind as though it were a deep, clear well. There was something inextinguishably boyish and buoyant about him. But in his bronzed face and steady, humorous eyes were strength and shrewdness. He was the last man in the world a bunco-steerer could play for a sucker. She felt that. Yet he made no pretenses of a worldly wisdom he did not have.

A voice reached them from the top of the stairs. "Do you know where Miss Whitford is, Jenkins?"

"Hm, in the Red room, sir." The answer was in the even, colorless voice of a servant. The girl rose at once. "If you'll excuse me," she said, and stepped out of the room.

"Hello, Bee. What do you think? I never saw such idiots as the police of this town are. They're watching this house for a desperado who assaulted some one outside. I met a sergeant on our steps. Says he doesn't think the man's here, but there's just a chance he slipped into the basement. It's absurd."

"Of course it is." There was a ripple of mirth in the girl's voice. "He didn't come in by the basement at all, but walked in at the front door."

"The front door?" exploded her father. "What do you mean? Who let him in?"

"I did. He came as my guest, at my invitation."

"What?" "Don't shout, dad," she advised. "I thought I had brought you up better."

"But—but—what do you mean?" he sputtered. "Is this ruffian in the house now?"

"Oh, yes. He's in the Red room here—and unless he's very deaf he hears everything we are saying," the girl answered calmly, much amused at the amazement of her father. "Won't you come in and see him? He doesn't seem very desperate."

Clay arose, pinpoints of laughter dancing in his eyes. He liked the gay audacity of this young woman. A moment later he was offering a brown hand to Colin Whitford. "Glad to meet you, Mr. Whitford. Yore daughter has just saved my life from the police," the westerner said, and his friendly smile was very much in evidence.

"You make yourself at home," answered the owner of a large per cent of the stock of the famous Bird Cage mine.

"My guests do, dad. It's proof that I'm a perfect hostess," retorted Beatrice, her dainty, provocative face flashing to mirth.

"Hmp!" granted her father dryly. "I'd like to know, young man, why the police are shadowing this house?"

"I expect they're lookin' for me." "I expect they are, and I'm not sure I won't help them find you. You'll have to show cause if I don't."

"His bark is much worse than his bite," the girl explained to Clay, just as though her father were not present. "Hmp!" exploded the mining magnate a second time. "Get busy, young fellow."

Clay told the story of the fifty-dollar suit that I. Bernstein had wished on him with near-tears of regret at parting from it. The cowpuncher dramatized the situation with some native talent for mimicry. His arms' gesture like the lifted wings of a startled cockerel. "A man gets a chance at a garment like that only once in a while occasionally. Which

you can take it from me that when I. Bernstein sells a suit of clothes it is just like he is dealing with his own brother. Quality, my friends, quality! Why, I got anyhow a suit which I might be married in without shame, un'erstan' me."

Colin Whitford was of the West himself. He had lived its rough-and-tumble life for years before he made his lucky strike in the Bird Cage. He had moved from Colorado to New York only ten years before. The sound of Clay's drawing voice was like a message from home. He began to grin in spite of himself. This man was too good to be true. It wasn't possible that anybody could come to the big town and import into it so naively such a genuine touch of the outdoor West. It was not possible, but it had happened just the same. Long before the cow puncher had finished his story of hog-tying the Swede to a hitching post with his own hose, the mining man was sealed of the large tribe of Clay Lindsay's admirers. He was ready to hide him from all the police in New York.

Whitford told Stevens to bring in the fifty-five-dollar suit so that he could gloat over it. He let out a whoop of delight at sight of its still sodden appearance. He examined its sickly hue with chuckles of mirth.

"Guaranteed not to fade or shrink," murmured Clay sadly.

He managed to get the coat on with

difficulty. The sleeves reached just below the elbows.

"You look like a lifer from Sing Sing," pronounced Whitford joyously. "Get a hair-cut, and you won't have a chance on earth to fool the police."

"The color did run and fade some," admitted Clay.

"Worth every cent of nine ninety-eight at a bargain sale before the Swede got busy with it—and he let you have it at a sacrifice for fifty-five dollars!" The millionaire wept happy tears as a climax of his rapture. He swallowed his cigar smoke and had to be pounded on the back by his daughter.

Jenkins came to the door and announced "Mr. Bromfield."

Almost on his heels a young man in immaculate riding clothes sauntered into the room. He had the assured ease of one who has the run of the house. Miss Whitford introduced the two young men and Bromfield looked the westerner over with a suave insolence in his dark, handsome eyes.

Clay recognized him immediately. He had shaken hands once before with this well-satisfied young man, and on that occasion a fifty-dollar bill had passed from one to the other. The New Yorker evidently did not know him.

It became apparent at once that Bromfield had called to go riding in the park with Miss Whitford. That young woman came up to say good-by to her new acquaintance.

"Will you be here when I get back?" "Not if our friends outside give me a chance for a getaway," he told her. Her bright, unflinching eyes looked into his. "You'll come again and let us know how you escaped," she invited.

"I'll certainly do that, Miss Whitford."

"Then we'll look for you Thursday afternoon, say."

"I'll be here."

"If the police don't get you."

"They won't," he promised serenely. "When you're ready, Bee," suggested Bromfield in a bored voice.

She nodded casually and walked out of the room like a young Diana, straight as a dart in her trim slenderness.

Clay slipped out of the house by the back way.

From the top of a bus Clay Lindsay looked down a canyon which angled across the great city like a river of light. He had come from one land of gorges to another. In the walls of this one, thousands and tens of thousands of cliff-dwellers hid themselves during the day like animals of some queer breed and poured out into the canyon at sunset.

Now the river in its bed was alive with a throbbing tide. Cross-currents of humanity flowed into it from side streets and ebbed out of it into others. Streams of people were swept down, caught here and there in swirling eddies. Taxis, private motors, and trolley cars struggled in the raceway.

All this Clay saw in a flash while his bus crossed Broadway on its way to the Avenue. His eyes had become

accustomed to this brilliance in the weeks that had passed since his descent upon New York, but familiarity had not yet dulled the wonder of it.

He had become a fast friend of Miss Whitford. Together they had tramped through Central park and motored up the Hudson in one of her father's cars. They had explored each other's minds along with the country and each had known the surprise and delight of discoveries, of finding in the other a quality of freshness and candor.

The bus jerked down Fifth avenue like a boat in heavy seas, pausing here and there at the curb to take on a passenger. While it was getting under way after one such stop, another downtown bus rolled past.

Clay came to a sudden alert attention. His eyes focused on a girl sitting on a back seat. In the pretty childish face he read a wistful helplessness, a pathetic hint of misery that called for sympathy.

Arizona takes short cuts to its ends. Clay rose instantly, put his foot on the railing, and leaped across to the top of the bus rolling parallel with the one he was on. In another second he had dropped into the seat beside the girl. "Glad to meet you again, Miss Kitty," he said cheerfully. "How the big town been using you?"

The girl looked at him with a little gasp of surprise. "Mr. Lindsay!" Sudden tears filmed her eyes. She forgot that she had left him with the promise never again to speak to him. She was in a far country, and he was a friend from home.

The conductor bustled down the aisle. "Say, where do you get this movie-stuff? You can't jump from the top of one bus to another. That ain't the system of transfers we use in this town. You might 'a' got killed."

"Oh, well, let's not worry about that now."

"I'd ought to have you pulled. Three years I've been on this run and—"

"Nice run. Wages good?"

"Don't get gay, young fellow. I can tell you one thing. You've got to pay another fare."

Clay paid it.

The conductor retired to his post.

"What about that movie job? Is it panning' out pay gold?" Lindsay asked Kitty.

Bit by bit her story came out. It was a common enough one. She had been film-fanned out of her money by the alleged school of moving-picture actors, and the sharpers had decamped with it.

As she looked at her recovered friend, Kitty gradually realized an outward transformation in his appearance. He was dressed quietly in clothes of perfect fit made for him by

Colin Whitford's tailor. From shoes to hat he was a New Yorker got up regardless of expense. But the warm smile, the strong, tanned face, the grip of the big brown hand that buried her small one—all these were from her own West. So too had been the nonchalance with which he had stepped from the rail of one moving bus to that of the other, just as though this were his usual method of transfer.

"I've got a job at last," she explained to him. "I'm working downtown in Greenwich Village, selling cigarettes. I'm Sylvia the Cigarette Girl. At least that's what they call me. I carry a tray of them evenings into the cafe."

"Greenwich Village?" asked Clay.

Kitty was not able to explain that the Village is a state of mind which is the habitat of long-haired men and

short-haired women, the brains of whom functioned in a way totally alien to all her methods of thought. "Can't you come down tonight to The Purple Pup or The Sea Siren and see for yourself?" she proposed, and gave him directions for finding the classic resorts.

"I'm dressed silly—in bare feet and sandals and what they call a smock. You won't mind that, will you?"

"You'll look good to me, no matter what you wear, little Miss Colorado," he told her with his warm, big brother's smile.

"You're good," the girl said simply. "I knew that on the train even when I—when I was mean to you." There came into her voice a small tremor of apprehension. "I'm afraid of this town. It's so—so kinda cruel. I've got no friends here."

TO BE CONTINUED

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