

The Big-Town Round Up

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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, ranger-ride 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 married 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.—On his first day in New York Lindsay is splashed with water by a janitor. That individual the ranger-ride punishes summarily and leaves tied to a fire hydrant. A young woman who seen 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 IV Continued.

He offered instant reassurance with a strong grip of his brown hand. "You've got one, little pardner. I'll promise that one big husky will be on the job when you need him. Don't you worry."

She gave him her shy eyes gratefully. There was a mist of tears in them.

"You're good," she said again natively.

CHAPTER V

Arizona Follows Its Lawless Impulse.

The Sea Siren was already beginning to fill up when Clay descended three steps to a cellar and was warily admitted. A near-Hawaiian orchestra was strumming out a dance tune and a few couples were on the floor. Waitresses, got up as Lorelets, were moving about among the guests delivering orders for refreshments.

The westerner sat down in a corner and looked about him. The walls were decorated with crude purple crayons of undervalued sirens. A statue of a nude woman distressed Clay. He did not mind the missing clothes, but she was so dreadfully emaciated that he thought it wise for her to cling to the yellow-and-red draped barber pole that rose from the pedestal. On the base was the legend, "The Weeping Lady." After he had tasted the Sea Siren fare the man from Arizona suspected that both her grief and her anemia arose from the fact that she had been fed on it.

A man in artist's velveteens, minus a haircut, with a large, fat, pasty face, sat at an adjoining table and discoursed to his friends. Presently, during an intermission of the music, he rose and took the rest of those present into his confidence.

"Bourgeois to the core," he announced, speaking of the United States. "What are the idols we worship? Law, the chain which binds an enslaved people, thrift, born of childish fear; love of country, which is another name for crass provincialism. I—I am a Cosmopolite, not an American. Bohemia is my land, and all free souls are my brothers. Why should I get wrinkles because Germany sunk the Lusitania a month or two ago? That's her business, not mine."

Clay leaned forward on a search for information. "Excuse me for buttin' in, and me a stranger. But isn't it yore business when she murders American women and children?"

The pasty-faced man looked at him with thinly disguised contempt. "You wouldn't understand if I explained."

"Mebbe I wouldn't, but you take a whir at it and I'll listen high, wide, and handsome."

The man in velveteens unexpectedly found himself doing as he was told. There was a suggestion of compulsion about the gray-blue eyes fastened on his, something in the clasp of the strong jaw that brought him up for a moment against stark reality.

"The intelligentia of a country know that there can be no freedom until there is no law. Every man's duty is to disregard duty. So, by faring far on the wings of desire, he helps break down the slavery that binds us. Obey the Cosmic Urge of your soul regardless of where it leads you, young man."

It was unfortunate for the poet of Bohemia that at this precise moment Kitty Mason, dressed in sandals and a black-patterned smock, stood before him with a tray of cigarettes asking for his trade. The naive appeal in her soft eyes had its weight with the poet. What is the use of living in Bohemia if one cannot be free to follow impulse? He slipped an arm about the girl and kissed the crimson lips upturned to him.

Kitty started back with a little cry

of distress. The freedom taken by the near-poet was instantly avenged.

A Cosmic Urge beat in the veins of the savage from Arizona. He took the poet's advice and followed his Lawless Impulse where it led. Across the table a long arm reached. Siney fingers closed upon the flowing neckwear of the fat-faced orator and dragged him forward, leaving overturned glasses in the wake of his course.

The man in velveteens met the eyes of the energetic manhandler and quailed. This brown-faced barbarian looked very much like business.

"Don't you touch me! Don't you dare touch me!" the apostle of anarchy shrieked as the table crashed down. "I'll turn you over to the police!" Clay jerked him to his feet. Hard knuckles pressed cruelly into the soft throat of the Villager. "Git down on yore han bones and beg the lady's pardon. Tell her you're a yellow pup, but you don't reckon you'll ever pull a bone like that again."

The companions of the poet rushed forward to protest at the manhandling of their leader. Those in the rear jammed the front ones close to Clay and his captive. The cow puncher gently but strongly pushed them back.

"Don't get on the prod," he advised in his genial drawl. "The poet he's got an important engagement right now."

A kind of scuffle developed. The proprietor increased it by his hysterical efforts to prevent any trouble. Men joined themselves to the noisy group of which Clay was the smiling center. The excitement increased. Distant corners of the room became the refuge of the women. Some one struck at the cow puncher over the heads of those about him. The mass of closely packed human beings showed a convulsive activity. It became suddenly the most popular indoor sport at the Sea Siren to slay this barbarian from the desert who had interfered with the amusements of Bohemia.

But Clay took a lot of slaying. In the rough-and-tumble life of the outdoor West he had learned how to look out for his own hand. The copper hair of his strong lean head rose above the tangle of the mealee like the broom-like helmet of Navarre. A reckless light of mirth bubbled in his daredevil eyes. The very number of the opponents who interfered with each other trying to get at him was a guarantee of safety. The blows showered at him lacked steam and were badly timed as to distance.

The pack rolled across the room, tipped over a table, and deluged an artist and his affinity with hot chocolate before they could escape from the avalanche. Chairs went over like ineptins. Stands collapsed. Men grunted and shouted advice. Girls screamed. The Sea Siren was being wrecked by a cyclone from the bad lands.

Arms thrashed wildly to and fro. The local point of their destination was the figure at the center of the disturbance. Most of the blows found other marks. Four or five men could have demolished Clay. Fifteen or twenty found it a tough job because they interfered with each other at every turn. They were packed too close for hard hitting. Clay was not fighting but wrestling. He used his arms to push with rather than to strike blows that counted.

The Arizona could not afterward remember at exactly what stage of the proceedings the face of Jerry Durand impinged itself on his consciousness. Once, when the swirl of the crowd flung him close to the door, he caught a glimpse of it, tight-lipped and wolf-eyed, turned to him with relentless malice. The gang leader was talking no part in the fight.

The crowd parted. Out of the pack a pair of strong arms and lean broad shoulders plowed a way for a somewhat damaged face that still carried a 'debonair smile. With potherish liltiness the Arizonan ducked a swinging blow. A moment, and he was outside taking the three steps that led to the street.

Into his laboring lungs he drew deliciously the soft breath of the night. It cooled the fever of his hammered face, was like an icy bath to his hot body. A little dizzy from the blows that had been rained on him, he stood for a moment uncertain which way to go.

Then again he became aware of Durand. The man was not alone. He had with him a hulking ruffian whose heavy, hunched shoulders told of strength. There was a hint of the gorilla in the way the long arms hung straight from the shoulders as he leaned forward. Both of the men were watching the cow puncher as steadily as alley cats do a house flick.

"H—It's going to pop in about three seconds," announced Clay to himself. Silently, without lifting their eyes from their victim for an instant, the two men moved apart to take him on both sides. He clung to the wall, forcing a frontal attack. The laughter had

gone out of his eyes now. They had hardened to pinpoints. This time it was no amateur horseplay. He was fighting for his life. No need to tell Clay Lindsay that the New York gangster meant to leave him as good as dead.

The men rushed him. He fought back with clean, hard blows. Jerry bored in like a wild bull. Clay caught him off his balance, using a short arm jolt which had back of it all that twenty-three years of clean outdoors Arizona could give. The gangster hit the pavement hard.

He got up furious and charged again. The Arizonan, busy with the other man, tried to sidestep. An uppercut



The Men Rushed Him. He Fought Back With Clean, Hard Blows.

jarred him to the heel. In that instant of time before his knees began to sag beneath him his brain flashed the news that Durand had struck him on the chin with brass knuckles. He crumpled up and went down, still alive to what was going on, but unable to move in his own defense. Weakly he tried to protect his face and sides from the kicks of a heavy boot. Then he floated balloon-like in space and vanished into unconsciousness.

Clay drifted back to a world in which the machinery of his body creaked. He turned his head, and a racking pain shot down his neck. He moved a leg, and every muscle in it ached. From head to foot he was sore.

Voices somewhere in space, detached from any personal ownership, floated vaguely to him. Presently these resolved themselves into words and sentences.

"We're not to make a pinch, Tim. That's the word he gave me before he left. This is wan as Jerry's private little wars and he don't want a judge askin' a lot of unnecessary questions, y' understand."

"Mother av Moses, if this he-man from H—I's Hinges hadn't the luck av the Irish, there'd be questions a-plenty asked. He'd be ready for the morgue this blissed minute. Jerry's a murderin' divvie. When I breeze in I find him croakin' this lad proper and he acts like a crazy man when I stand him and Gorilla Dave off till yuh come a-runnin'. At that they may have given the bye more than he can carry. Maybe it'll be roses and a nice black carriage for him yet."

Clay opened his eyes, flexed his arm muscles, and groaned. He caressed tenderly his aching ribs.

"Some wreck," he gasped weakly. "They didn't do a thing to me—outside of beatin' me up—and stompin' on me—and runnin' a steam roller—over the dear departed."

"Whose fault will that be? Don't yuh know better than to start a fight with a rightment?" demanded the sergeant of police severely. "That wasn't a fight. It was a waltz. The faint, unconquered smile of brown Arizona broke through the blood and bruises of the face. "The fight began when Jerry Durand and his friend rushed me—and it ended when Jerry landed on me with brass knuckles. After that I was a football." "The words came in gasps. Every breath was drawn in pain.

"We'd ought to pinch yuh," the sergeant said by way of reprimand. "Think yuh can come to New York and pull your small-town stuff on us? We'll show yuh. If yuh wasn't all-salfa goven I'd give yuh a ride." The officer dropped his grumbling complaint to a whisper. "Whisht, bye. Take a straight tip from a man that knows. Beat it out of town. Get where the long arm of—a of a friend of ours—can't reach yuh. Me's a revengeful enemy if ever there was wan."

"You mean that Durand—"

"I'm not namin' names," the officer interrupted doggedly. "I'm tellin' yuh somethin' for your good. Take it or leave it."

"Thanks, I'll leave it. This is a free country, and no man livin' can drive me away," answered Clay promptly. "Ouch, I'm sore. Give me a lift, sergeant."

They helped the cow puncher to his feet. He took a lumping step or two. Every move was torture to his out-faged flesh.

"Can you get me a taxi? That is, if you're sure you don't want me in yore calaboose," the range-ride said, leaning against the wall.

"We'll let yuh go this time."

"Much obliged—to Mr. Jerry Durand. Tell him for me that maybe I'll meet up with him again some time—and hand him my thanks personal for this first-class wallopin'." From the

bruised, bleeding face there beamed again the smile indomitable, the grin still gay and winning. Physically he had been badly beaten, but in spirit he was still the man on horseback.

Presently he eased himself into a taxi as comfortably as he could. "Home, James," he said jauntily.

"Where?" asked the driver. "The nearest hospital," explained Clay. "I'm goin' to let the doctors worry over me for a while. Much obliged to both of you gentlemen. I always did like the Irish. Friend Jerry is an exception."

The officers watched the cab disappear. The sergeant spoke the comment that was in the mind of them both.

"He's the best single-barreled sport that iver I met in this man's town. Not a whimper out of the guy and him mauled to a pulp. Game as they come. Did yuh see that spark of the divvie in his eye, and him not fit to crawl into the cab? S'long, Tim. No report on this rough-house, mind yuh."

"Sure, Mike."

CHAPTER VI

Beatrice Up Stage.

If you vision Clay as a man of battles and violent death, you don't see him as he saw himself. He was a peaceful citizen from the law-abiding West. It was not until he had been flung into the whirlpool of New York that violent and melodramatic mishaps befell this innocent.

This was the version of himself that he conceived to be true and the one he tried to interpret to Bee Whitford when he emerged from the hospital after two days of seduction and presented himself before her.

It was characteristic of Beatrice that when she looked at his battered face she asked no questions and made no exclamations. After the first startled glance one might have thought from her expression that he habitually wore one black eye, one swollen lip, one cauliflower ear, and a strip of gauze across his cheek.

The dark-lashed eyes lifted from him to take on a business-like directness. She rang for the man.

"Have the runabout brought round at once, Stevens. I'll drive myself," she gave orders.

With the light ease that looked slick on strong she swept the car into the park. Neither she nor Clay talked. Both of them knew that an explanation of his appearance was due her and in the meantime neither cared to fence with small talk. She drew up to look at some pond lilies, and they talked about them for a moment, after which her direct eyes questioned him frankly.

He painted with a light brush the picture of his adventure into Bohemia. The details he filled in whimsically, in the picturesque phraseology of the West. Up stage on his canvas was the figure of the poet in velveteens. That Son of the Stars he did full justice. Jerry Durand and Kitty Mason were accessories sketched casually.

"I gather that Mr. Lindsay of Arizona was among those present," Beatrice said, smiling.

"I was givin' the dance," he agreed, and his gray eyes met hers.

Since she was a woman, one phase of his story needed expansion for Miss Whitford. She made her comment carelessly while she adjusted the mileage on the speedometer.

"Queer you happened to meet someone you knew down there. You said you knew the girl, didn't you?"

"We were on the same train out of Denver. I got acquainted with her."

Miss Whitford asked no more questions. But Clay could not quite let the matter stand so. He wanted her to justify him in her mind for what he had done. Before he knew it he had told her the story of Kitty Mason and Durand.

"I couldn't let him hypnotize that little girl from the country, could I?" he asked.

"I suppose not." Her whole face began to bubble with laughter in the



"But You'll Be a Busy Knight Errant If You Undertake to Right the Wrongs of Every Girl You Meet in New York."

way he liked so well. "But you'll be a busy knight errant if you undertake to right the wrongs of every girl you meet in New York. Don't you think it possible that you rescued her out of a job?"

The young man nodded his head ruefully. "That's exactly what I did. After all her trouble gettin' one I've thrown her out again. I'm a sure enough fathead."

"You've been down to find out?" she asked with a sidelong tilt of her quick eyes.

"Yes, I went down this mornin' with Tim Muldoon. He's a policeman I met down there. Miss Kitty hasn't been seen since that night. We went out to the Pirate's Den, the Purple Pup, Grace Godwin's Garret, and all the places where she used to sell cigarettes. None of them have seen anything of her."

"So that really your championship hasn't been so great a help to her after all, has it?"

"No."

"And I suppose it ruined the business of the man that owns the Sea Siren."

"I don't reckon so. I've settled for the furniture. And Muldoon says when it gets goin' again the Sea Siren will do a big business on account of the fracas. It's Kitty I'm worried about."

"I wouldn't worry about her if I were you. She'll land on her feet," the girl said lightly.

Her voice had not lost its sweet cadences, but Clay sensed in it something that was almost a touch of cool contempt. He felt vaguely that he must have blundered in describing Kitty. Evidently Miss Whitford did not see her quite as she was.

The young woman pressed the starter button. "We must be going home. I have an engagement to go riding with Mr. Bromfield."

The man beside the girl kept his smile working and concealed the little stab of jealousy that dirked him. Colin Whitford had confided to Lindsay that his daughter was practically engaged to Clarendon Bromfield and that he did not like the man. The range-ride did not like him either, but he tried loyally to kill his distrust of the clubman. If Beatrice loved him there must be good in the fellow. Clay meant to be a good loser anyhow.

There had been moments when the range-ride's heart had quickened with a wild, insurgent hope. One of these had been on a morning when they were riding in the park, knee to knee, in the dawn of a new clean world. It had come to him with a sudden clamor of the blood that in the eternal rightness of things such mornings ought to be theirs till the youth in them was quenched in sober age. He had looked into the eyes of this slim young Diana, and he had throbbled to the certainty that she too in that moment of tangled glances knew a sweet confusion of the blood. In her cheeks there had been a quick flame of flying color. Their talk had fallen from them, and they had ridden in a shy, exquisite silence from which she had escaped by putting her horse to a canter.

But in the sober sense of sanity Clay knew that this wonderful thing was not going to happen to him. He was not going to be given her happiness to hold in the hollow of his hand. Bee Whitford was a modern young woman, practical-minded, with a proper sense of the values that the world esteems. Clarendon Bromfield was a catch even in New York. He was rich, of a good family, assured social position, good-looking, and manifestly in love with her. Like gravitates to like the land over.

Bromfield, too, had no doubt that Bee meant to marry him. He was in love with her as far as he could be with anybody except himself. He wanted her—the youth, the buoyant life, the gay, glad comradeship of her—and he had always been lucky in getting what he desired. That was the use of having been born with a silver spoon in his mouth.

But though Clarendon Bromfield had no doubt of the issue of his suit, the friendship of Beatrice for this fellow from Arizona stabbed his vanity. It hurt his class pride and his personal self-esteem that she should take pleasure in the man's society. Bee never had been well-broken to harness. He set his thin lips tight and resolved that he would stand no nonsense of this sort after they were married. If she wanted to flirt it would have to be with some one in their own set.

Beatrice could not understand herself. She knew that she was behaving rather indiscreetly, though she did not fathom the cause of the restlessness that drove her to Clay Lindsay. The truth is that she was longing for an escape from the empty life she was leading, had been seeking one for years without knowing it. Surely this round of social frivolities, the chatter of these silly women and smug tailor-made men, could not be all there was to life. She must have been made for something better than that.

And when she was with Clay she knew she had been. He gave her a vision of life through eyes that had known open, wide spaces, clean, wholesome, and sun-kissed. He stood on his own feet and did his own thinking. Simply, with both hands, he took hold of problems and examined them stripped of all trimmings. The man was elemental, but he was keen and broad-gauged. It amazed her one day to learn that he had read William James and understood his philosophy much better than she did.

There was in her mind no intention whatever of letting herself do anything so foolish as to marry him. But there were moments when the thought of it had a dreadful fascination for her. She did not invite such thoughts to remain, with her.

For she meant to accept Clarendon Bromfield in her own good time and make her social position in New York absolutely secure. She had been in the fringes too long not to appreciate a chance to get into the social Holy of Holies.

A bow-legged little man in a cheap, wrinkled suit with a silk kerchief knotted loosely round his neck stopped

in front of a window where a girl was selling stamps.

"I wanta see the postmaster."

"Corridy'right. Take'vatorthr'door-left," she said, just as though it were two words.

At that the freckled-face little fellow opened wider his skim-milk eyes and his weak mouth. "Come again, ma'am, please."

"Corridy'right. Take'vatorthr'door-left," she repeated. "Next."

The inquirer knew as much as he did before, but he lacked the courage to ask for an English translation. He shuffled away from the window and wandered helplessly, swept up by the tide of hurrying people that flowed continuously into the building and ebbed out of it. From this he was tossed into a backwater that brought him to another window.

"I wanta see the postmaster of this burg," he announced again with a plaintive whine.

"What about?" asked the man back of the grating.

"Important business, amigo. Where's he at?"

The man directed him to a door upon which was printed the legend, "Superintendent of Complaints."

"Well, sir! What can I do for you?" the man behind the big desk snapped.

"I wanta see the postmaster."

"What about?"

"I got important business with him. Who are you?"

"Me, I'm Johnnie Green of the B-in-a-Box ranch. I just drapped in from Arizona and I wanta see the postmaster."

"Suppose you tell your troubles to me."

Johnnie changed his weight to the other foot. "No, suh, I allow to see the postmaster himself personal."

"He's busy," explained the official. "He can't possibly see anybody without knowing his business."

"That's all right. I've lost my pal. I wanta see—"

The superintendent of complaints cut into his parrot-like repetition. "Yes, you mentioned that. But the postmaster doesn't know where he is, does he?"

"He might tell me where his mall goes, as the old sayin' is."

"When did you lose your friend?"

"I ain't heard from him since he come to New York. So bein' as I got a chance to go from Tucson with a jackpot trainload of cows to Denver, I kinda made up my mind to come on here the rest of the way and look him up. I'm afraid some one's done him dirt."

"Do you know where he's staying?"

"No, suh, I don't."

The superintendent of complaints tapped with his fingers on the desk. Then he smiled. The postmaster was fond of a joke. Why not let this odd little freak from the West have an interview with him?

Twenty minutes later Johnnie was telling his story to the postmaster of the city of New York. He had written three times to Clay Lindsay and had received no answer. So he had come to look for him.

"Is your friend like you?" asked the postmaster, interested in spite of himself.

"No suh." Johnnie, alias the Runt, began to beam. "He's a sure-enough go-getter, Clay is, every jump of the road. I'd follow his dust any day of the week. He's the liveliest proposition that ever come out of Graham county. You can certainly gamble on that."

The postmaster touched a button. A clerk appeared, received orders, and disappeared.

The clerk presently returned with three letters addressed to Clay Lindsay, General Delivery, New York. The postmaster handed them to the little cow puncher.

"Evidently he never called for them," he said.

Johnnie's chin fell. He looked a picture of helpless woe. "They're the letters I set down an' wrote him my own se! Something has sure happened to that boy, looks like," he bemoaned.

"We'll try police headquarters. Maybe we can get a line on your friend," the postmaster said, reaching for the

telephone. "But you must remember New York is a big place. It's not like your Arizona ranch. The city has nearly eight million inhabitants. You'll understand that when one man gets lost it isn't always possible to find him."

TO BE CONTINUED