

The Big-Town Round Up



by William MacLeod Raine

Illustrations by Irwin Myers

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CHAPTER XIII Continued.

He made a vain circuit of the roof, then passed to the next house.

Again he was out of luck. The tenants had made safe the entrance against prowlers of the night. He knew that at any moment now the police might appear in pursuit of him. There was no time to lose.

He crossed to the last house in the block—and found himself barred out. As he rose from his knees he heard the voices of men clambering through the scuttle to the roof. At the same time he saw that which brought him to instant action. It was a rope clothes-line which ran from post to post, dangling from one corner of the building to another and back to the opposite one.

No man in Manhattan's millions knew the value of a rope or could handle one more expertly than this cattleman. His knife was open before he had reached the nearest post. One strong slash of the blade severed it. In six long strides he was at the second post unwinding the line. He used his knife a second time at the third post.

With deft motions Clay worked swiftly. He was fastening the rope to the chimney of the house. Every instant he expected to hear a voice raised in excited discovery of him crouched in the shadows. But his fingers were as sure and as steady as though he had minutes before him instead of seconds.

"There's the guy—over by the chimney."

Clay threw the slack of the line from the roof. He had no time to test the strength of the rope nor its length. As the police rushed him he slid over the edge and began to lower himself hand under hand.

The wide eaves protected him. A man would have to hang out from the wall above the ledge to see him. Clay's eyes were on the gutter above while he jerked his way down a foot at a time. A face and part of a body swung out into sight.

"We've got yuh. Come back, or I'll shoot," a voice called down.

A revolver showed against the black sky.

The man from Arizona did not answer and did not stop. He knew that shooting from above is an art that few men have acquired.

A bullet sang past his ear just as he swung in and crouched on the windowsill. Another one hit the bricks close to his head.

The firing stopped. A pair of uniformed legs appeared dangling from the eaves. A body and a head followed these. They began to descend jerkily.

Clay took a turn at the gun-play. He fired his revolver into the air. The spasmodic jerking of the blue legs abruptly ceased.

"Yuh'd better give up quietly. We're bound to get yuh," an officer shouted from the roof by way of parley.

The cattleman did not answer except by the smashing of glass. He had forced his way into two houses within the past hour. He was now busy breaking into a third. The window had not yielded to pressure. Therefore he was knocking out the glass with the butt of his revolver.

He crawled through the opening just as some one sat up in bed with a frightened exclamation.

"Who—s—s—s—s it?" a masculine voice asked, teeth chattering.

Clay had no time to gratify idle curiosity. He ran through the room, reached the head of the stairs and went down on the banister to the first floor. He fled back to the rear of the house and stole out by the kitchen door.

The darkness of the alley swallowed him, but he could still hear the shouts of the men on the roof and answering ones from new arrivals below.

Five minutes later he was on board a street car. He was not at all particular as to its destination. He wanted to be anywhere but here. This neighborhood was getting entirely too active for him.

CHAPTER IX

The Gangman Sees Red.

Exactly thirty minutes after Clay had left him to break into the house, Johnnie lifted his voice in a loud wail for the police. He had read somewhere that one can never find an officer when he is wanted, but the Bull-of-Bashan roar of the cowpuncher brought them running from all directions.

Out of the confused explanations of the range-rider the first policeman to reach him got two lucid statements.

"They're white-slavin' a straight girl. This busher says his pal went in to rescue her half an hour ago and hasn't showed up since," he told his mates.

With Johnnie

they made a noisy attack on the door of Number 121. Almost instantly it was opened from the ins. Four men had come down the stairs in a headlong rush to cut off the escape of one who had outwitted and taunted them.

Those who wanted to get in and those who wanted to get out all tried to talk at once, but as soon as the police recognized Jerry Durand they gave him the floor.

"We're after a flat-walker," explained the ex-pugilist. "He must be tryin' for a roof getaway." He turned and led the joint forces back up the stairs.

Thugs and officers surged up after him, carrying with them in their rush the Runt. He presently found himself on the roof with those engaged in a man-hunt for his friend. When Clay shattered the window and disappeared inside after his escape from the roof, Johnnie gave a deep sigh of relief. This gun-play got on his nerves, since Lindsay was the target of it.

The handy-legged range-rider was still trailing along with the party ten minutes later when its scattered members drew together in tacit admission that the hunted man had escaped.

The gang-leader was in a vile temper. If this story reached the newspapers all New York would be laughing at him. He could appeal to the police, have Clay Lindsay arrested, and get him sent up for a term on the charge of burglary. But he could not do it without the whole tale coming out. One thing Jerry Durand could not stand was ridicule. His vanity was one of his outstanding qualities, and he did not want it widely known that the boob he had intended to trap had turned the tables on him, man-handled him, jeered at him and locked him in a room with his three henchmen.

"Young or old?" asked the cattleman.

"Young—a girl."

"Excuse me." The host was off in an instant, almost on the run.

But the woman had gone, swallowed in the semidarkness of a side street. Clay followed.

Beatrice turned to her father, eyebrows lifted. There was a moment's awkward silence.

"Mr. Lindsay will be back presently," Whitford said. "We'll get in and wait for him out of the way a little farther up the street."

When Clay rejoined them he talked in a low voice with Beatrice's father. The mining man nodded agreement and Lindsay turned to the others.

"I'm called away," he explained aloud. "Mr. Whitford has kindly promised to play host in my place. I'm right sorry to leave, but it's urgent."

His grave smile asked Beatrice to be charitable in her findings. The eyes she gave him were coldly hostile. He knew Beatrice did not and would not understand.

The girl was waiting where Clay had left her, crouched against a basement milliner's door under the shelter of the steps.

"I—I've looked for you everywhere," moaned the girl. "It's been—awful."

"I know, but it's goin' to be all right now, Kitty," he comforted. "You're goin' home with me tonight. Tomorrow we'll talk it all over."

He tucked an arm under hers and led her along the wet, shining street to a taxicab. She crouched in a corner of the cab, her body shaken with sobs.

The young man moved closer and put a strong arm around her shoulders. "Don't you worry, Kitty. Your big brother is on the job now."

He knew her story now in its essentials as well as he did later when she wept it out to him in confession. And because she was who she was, born to lean on a stronger will, he acquitted her of blame.

CHAPTER X

Johnnie Makes a Joke.

As Kitty stepped from the cab she was trembling violently.

"Don't you be frightened, I'll pardon. You've come home. There won't anybody hurt you here."

The Arizona ran her up to his floor in the automatic elevator.

"I've got a friend from home stayin' with me. He's the best-hearted fellow you ever saw. You'll sure like him," he told her without stress as he fitted his key to the lock. In another moment Lindsay was introducing her casually to the embarrassed and astonished joint proprietor of the apartment.

"Heat some water, Johnnie, and make a good stiff toddy. Miss Kitty has been out in the rain."

He lit the gas-lamp and from his bedroom brought towels, a bathrobe, pajamas, a sweater and woolen slippers. On a lounge before the fire he dumped the clothes he had gathered. He drew up the easiest armchair in the room.

"I'm goin' to the kitchen to jack up Johnnie so he won't lay down on his job," he told her cheerily. "You take yore time and get into these dry clothes. We'll not disturb you till you knock."

When her timid knock came her host brought in a steaming cup. "You drink this. It'll warm you good."

"What is it?" she asked shyly.

"Medicine," he smiled. "Doctor's orders."

While she sipped the toddy Johnnie brought from the kitchen a tray upon

Jerry shook his head. "Nope. Let him go, Pete."

The policeman walked up to the Runt and caught him roughly by the arm. "Move along outa here. I'd ought to pinch you, but I'm not gonna do it this time, see? You beat it!"

Durand turned to one of his followers. "Tall that fellow. Find out where he's stayin' and report."

Helplessly Johnnie went staggering down the street. He did not understand why he had been treated so, but the instinct of self-preservation carried him out of the danger zone without argument about it. Even as he wobbled away he was looking with unwavering faith to his friend to right his wrongs. Clay would fix this fellow Durand for what he had done to him.

Clay did his best under the handicap of a lack of entente between him and the authorities to search New York for Kitty. He used the personal columns of the newspapers. He got in touch with taxicab drivers, ticket-sellers, postmen, and station guards. All the time he knew that in such a maze as Manhattan it would be a miracle if he found her.

But miracles are made possible by miracle-workers. The Westerner was a sixty-horse-power dynamo of energy.

He felt responsible for Kitty and he gave himself with single-minded devotion to the job of discovering her.

When Clay met Kitty at last it was quite by chance. As it happened, Beatrice was present at the time.

He had been giving a box party at the Empire. The gay little group was gathered under the awning outside the foyer while the limousine that was to take them to Shanley's for supper was being called. Colin Whitford, looking out into the rain that pelted down, uttered an exclamatory "By Jove!"

Clay turned to him inquiringly.

"A woman was looking out of that doorway at us," he said. "If she's not in deep water I'm a bad guesser. I thought for a moment she knew me or some one of us. She started to reach out her hands and then shrunk back."

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which were tea, fried potatoes, ham, eggs, and buttered toast.

The girl ate ravenously. It was an easy guess that she had not before tasted food that day.

Clay kept up a flow of talk, mostly about Johnnie's culinary triumphs. Meanwhile he made up a bed on the couch.

Once she looked up at him, her throat swollen with emotion. "You're good."

"Sho! We been needin' a lit' sister to brace up our manners for us. It's lucky for us I found you. Now I expect you're tired and sleepy. We fixed up yore bed in here because it's warmer. You'll be able to make out with it all right. The springs are good."

Clay left her with a cheerful smile. "Turn out the light before you go to bed, Miss Colorado. Sleep tight. And don't you worry. You're back with old home folks again now, you know."

Tired out from tramping the streets without food and drowsy from the toddy she had taken, Kitty fell into deep sleep undisturbed by troubled dreams.



The Runt Was Costless and in His Stockinged-Foot.

The cattleman knew he had found her in the nick of time. She had told him that she had no money, no room in which to sleep, no prospect of work. Everything she had except the clothes on her back had been pawned to buy food and lodgings. But she was young and resilient. When she got back home to the country where she belonged, time would obliterate from her mind the experiences of which she had been the victim.

It was past midday when Kitty awoke. She found her clothes dry. After she dressed she opened the door that led to the kitchen. Johnnie began to bustle about in preparation for her breakfast.

"Please don't trouble. I'll eat what you've got cooked," she begged.

"It's no trouble, ma'am. If it's a thing on earth I enjoy doin' it's sure cookin'." Do you like yore aigs sunny side up or turned?"

"Either way. Whichever you like, Mr. Green."

While she ate he waited on her solicitously. Inside, he was a river of tears for her, but with it went a good deal of awe. Even now, wan-eyed and hollow-cheeked, she was attractive. In Johnnie's lonesome life he had never before felt so close to a girl as he did to this one.

"I—I don't like to be so much bother to you," she said. "Maybe I can go away this afternoon."

"No, ma'am, we won't have that a-tall," broke in the range-rider in alarm. "We're plumb tickled to have you here. Clay, he feels thataway too."

"I could keep house for you while I stay," she suggested timidly. "I know how to cook—and the place does need cleaning."

"Sure it does. Say, wha's the matter with you bein' Clay's sister, jes' got in last night on the train? Tha's the story we'll put up to the landlord if you'll gimme the word."

Johnnie told the story of the search for her, with special emphasis on the night Clay broke into three houses in answer to her advertisement.

"I never wrote it. I never thought of that. It must have been—"

"It was that scaliawag Durand, y'betcha. I ain't still wearin' my pinfeathers none. He was sore because Clay had fixed his clock proper."

"I've got no place to go, except back home—and I've got no folks there but a second cousin. She doesn't want me. I don't know what to do. If I had a woman friend—some one to tell me what was best—"

Johnnie slapped his hand on his knee, struck by a sudden inspiration. "Say! Y'betcha, by Jollies, I've got'er—the very one! You're d—n—you're sure whistlin'. We got a lady friend, Clay and me, the finest little pilgrim in New York. She's sure there when the gong strikes. You'd love her. I'll fix it for you—right away. I got to go to her house this afternoon an' do some chores. I'll bet she comes right over to see you."

Kitty was doubtful. "Maybe we better wait and speak to Mr. Lindsay about it," she said.

"No, ma'am, you don't know Miss Beatrice. She's the best friend. Why, I shouldn't wonder but that she and Clay might get married one o' these days. He thinks a lot of her."

"Oh! Kitty knew just a little more of human nature than the puncher. Then I wouldn't tell her about me if I was you. She wouldn't like my bet'n here."

"Sho! You don't know Miss Beatrice. She grades 'way up. I'll bet she likes you fine."

When Johnnie left to go to work that afternoon he took with him a resolution to lay the whole case before Beatrice Whitford. She would fix things all right. If there was one person on earth Johnnie could bank on without fail it was his little boss.

It was not until Johnnie had laid the case before Miss Whitford and restated it under the impression that she could not have understood that his confidence ebbed. He had expected an eager interest, a quick enthusiasm. Instead, he found in his young mistress a spirit beyond his understanding. Her manner had a touch of cool disdain, almost of contempt, while she listened to his tale.

She asked no questions and made no comments. What he had to tell met with chill silence. Johnnie's guileless narrative had made clear to her that Clay had brought Kitty home about midnight, had mixed a drink for her, and had given her his own clothes to replace her wet ones. Somehow the cattleman's robe, pajamas and bedroom slippers obtruded unduly from his friend's story. Even the Runt felt this. He began to perceive himself a helpless medium of wrong impressions.

"I suppose you know that when the manager of your apartment house finds out she's there he'll send her packing." So Beatrice summed up when she spoke at last.

"No, ma'am, I reckon not. You see we done told him she is Clay's sister jes' got in from the West," the puncher explained.

"Oh, I see." The girl's lip curled and her clean-cut chin lifted a trifle. "You don't seem to have overlooked anything. No, I don't think I care to have anything to do with your arrangements."

Beatrice turned and walked swiftly into the house. A pulse of anger was beating in her soft throat. She felt a sense of outrage. To Clay Lindsay she had given herself generously in spirit. She had risked something in introducing him to her friends. They might have laughed at him for his slight social lapses. They might have rejected him for his lack of background. They had done neither. He was so genuinely a man that he had won his way instantly.

Pacing up and down her room, little fists clenched, her soul in passionate turmoil.

turning, Beatrice went over it all again as she had done through a sleepless night. She had given him so much, and he had seemed to give her even more. Hours filled with a keen-edged delight jumped to her memory, hours that had carried her away from the falseness of social frippery to clean, wind-swept, open spaces of the mind. And after this—after he had tacitly recognized her claim on him—he had insulted her before her friends by deserting his guests to go off with this hussy he had been spending weeks to search for.

Not for a moment did she admit, perhaps she did not know, that an insane jealousy was flooding her being, that her indignation was based on personal as well as moral grounds. Something primitive stirred her—a flare of feminine ferocity. She felt hot to the touch, an active volcano ready for eruption. If only she could get a chance to strike back in a way that would hurt, to wound him as deeply as he had hurt!

Pat to her desire came the opportunity. Only's card was brought in to her by Jenkins.

"Tell Mr. Lindsay I'll see him in a few minutes," she told the man.

The few minutes stretched to a long quarter of an hour before she descended. As soon as his eyes fell on her, Clay knew that this pale, slim girl in the close-fitting gown was a stranger to him. Her eyes, star-bright and burning like live coals, warned him that the friend whose youth had run out so eagerly to meet his was hidden deep in her today.

"I reckon I owe you and Mr. Whitford an apology," he said. "No need to tell you how I happened to leave last night. I expect you know."

"Why take the trouble? I think I understand." She spoke in an even, schooled voice that set him at a distance. "Your friend, Mr. Green, has carefully brought me the details I didn't know."

Clay flushed. Her clear voice carried an edge of scorn. "You mustn't judge

by appearances. I know you wouldn't be unfair. I had to take her home and look after her."

"I don't quite see why—unless, of course, you wanted to," the girl answered, tapping the arm of her chair with impatient finger-tips, eyes on the clock. "But, of course, it isn't necessary I should see."

Her cavalier treatment of him did not affect the gentle imperturbability of the westerner.

"Because I'm a white man, because she's a little girl who came from my country and can't hold her own here, because she was sick and chilled and starving. Do you see now?"

"No, but it doesn't matter. I'm not the keeper of your conscience, Mr. Lindsay," she countered with hard lightness.

"You're judging me just the same. If you'd let me bring her here to see you—"

"No, thanks."

"You're unjust."

"You think so?"

"And unkind. That's not like the little friend I've come to—like so much."

"You're kind enough for two, Mr. Lindsay. She really doesn't need another friend so long as she has you," she retorted with a flash of contemptuous eyes. "In New York we're not used to being so kind to people of her sort."

Clay lifted a hand. "Stop right there, Miss Beatrice. You don't want to say anything you'll be sorry for."

"I'll say this," she cut back. "The men I know wouldn't invite a woman to their rooms at midnight and pass her off as their sister—and then expect people to know her. They would be kinder to themselves—and to their own reputations."

"Will you tell me what else there was to do? Where could I have taken her at that time of night? Are reputable hotels open at midnight to lone women, wet and ragged, who come without baggage either alone or escorted by a man?"

"I'm not telling you what you ought to have done, Mr. Lindsay," she answered, with a touch of hauteur. "But since you ask me—why couldn't you have given her money and let her find a place for herself?"

"Because that wouldn't have saved her."

"Oh, wouldn't it?" she retorted, dryly.

He walked over to the fireplace and put an elbow on the corner of the mantel.

"Lemme tell you a story, Miss Beatrice," he said presently. "Mebbe it'll show you what I mean. I was runnin' cattle in the Galluros five years ago and I got caught in a storm 'way up in the hills. When it rains in my part of Arizona, which ain't often, it sure does come down in sheets. The clay below the rubble on the slopes got slick as ice. My hawss, a young one, slipped and fell on me, clawed back to its feet, and bolted. Well, there I was with my laig busted, forty miles from even a whistlin' post in the desert, gettin' wetter and colder every blessed minute."

"There wasn't a chance in a million that anybody would hear, but I kept firin' off my forty-five on the off hope. And just before night a girl on a pinto came down the side of that uncurried hill round a bend and got me. She took me to a cabin hidden in the bottom of a canon and looked after me four days. Her father, a prospector, had gone to Tucson for supplies and we were alone there. She fed me, nursed me, and waited on me. We divided a one-room twelve-by-sixteen cabin. Understand, we were four days alone together before her dad came back, and all the time the sky was lettin' down a terrible lot of water. When her father showed up he grinned and said, 'Lucky for you Myrtle heard that six-gun of yore's pop!' He never thought one evil thing about either of us. He just accepted the situation as necessary. Now the question is, what ought sife to have done? Left me to die on that hillside?"

"Of course not. That's different," protested Beatrice, indignantly.

"You're trying to put me in the wrong. Well, I won't have it. That's all. You may take your choice, Mr. Lindsay. Either send that girl away—give her up—have nothing to do with her, or—"

"Or—?"

"Or please don't come here to see me any more."

He waited, his eyes steady on her. "Do you sure enough mean that, Miss Beatrice?"

Her heart sank. She knew that she had gone too far, but she was too imperious to draw back now.

"Yes, that's just what I mean."

"I'm sorry. You're leavin' me no option. I'm not a yellow dog. Sometimes I'm 'most a man. I'm goin' to do what I think is right."

"Of course," she responded, lightly. "If our ideas of what that is differ—"

"They do."

"It's because we've been brought up differently, I suppose." She achieved a stifled little yawn behind her hand.

"You've said it." He gave it to her straight from the shoulder. "All yore life you've been pampered. When you wanted a thing all you had to do was to reach out a hand for it. Folks were born to wait on you, by yore way of it. You're a spoiled kid. Ask me to turn my back on a friend, and I've got to say, 'Nothin' doin'.' And if you was just a few years younger I'd advise yore pa to put you in yore room and feed you bread and water fer askin' it."

The angry color poured into her cheeks. She clenched her hands till the nails bit her palms. "I think you're the most hateful man I ever met," she cried, passionately.

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