

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 witnesses 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 City to become a motion-picture actress. She is marked as fair prey by a fellow traveler, Jerry Durand, gang politician and sports gambler. Perceiving his intention, Lindsay provokes a quarrel and throws Durand from the train.

CHAPTER III

The Big Town.

When Clay stepped from the station at the Thirty-fourth Street entrance New York burst upon him with what seemed almost a threat. He could hear the roar of it like a river rushing down a canyon. Clay had faced a cattle stampede. He had ridden out a blizzard hunched up with the drifting herd. He had lived rough all his young and joyous life. But for a moment he felt a chill drench at his heart that was almost dread. He did not know a soul in this vast populace. He was alone among seven or eight million crazy human beings.

He had checked his suitcase to be free to look about. He had no destination and was in no hurry. All the day was before him, all of many days. He drifted down the street and across to Sixth avenue.

Chance swept him up Sixth to Herald square. He was caught in the river of humanity that races up Broadway. He wondered where all this rush of people was going. What crazy impulses sent them surging to and fro? And the girls—Clay surrendered to them at discretion. He had not supposed there were so many pretty, well-dressed girls in the world.

"First off I'm goin' to get me a real city suit of clothes," he promised himself. "This here wrinkled outfit is some too woolly for the big town. It's a good suit yet—most as good as when I bought it at the Boston store in Tucson three years ago. But I reckon I'll save it to go home in."

He stepped in front of a store above which was the legend "L. Bernstein,

dened 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 a 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 crossed 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 at the early three-figure streets 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 hose sprayed from the nozzle of the hose around 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 sick 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."

"Thank so? Val, yust one teng I lak to tell you. I got no time for d-n-fute 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 clogging 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 slapped 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 upon 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 tell!" rose out of the waters. The janitor could not un-



A Smothered "Vat Tell!" Rose Out of the Waters.

derstand what was happening to him. He did not know that he was being treated to a new form of the water cure.

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 feel you, by d-n, if you don't turn me loose!" roared the big man in a rage.

The range-rider grinned gaily 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, Ole," he explained, and his voice was full of genial sympathy. "I'll bet a dollar Mex you'd sure like to bent 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 dead-end," 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.

"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 unconcern.

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

"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 shrieking so that his arms and legs stuck out like shaposis. The color had run and left the goods a peculiar bluish-looking overall blue.

She lit a gas-jug 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—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 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 barkin' up Swedes an' tyn' '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 his red head. "The janitors, a Swede, anyhow. He just guesses it. I came to make sure 'at I'll be sorry for troubling yuh, miss."

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

"No." The forehead under the red tatchet 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 mud-headed Swede."

"His Bark is Much Worse Than His Bite," the Girl Exclaimed to Clay.

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-five-dollar suit that L. 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 gestured like the lifted wings of a startled cocker. "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 sell a suit of clothes it is about 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' na."

Clay Whitford was of the West himself. He had lived his 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 bid him from all the police in New York.

Whitford told Stevens to bring in the fifty-five-dollar suit so that he could glaze 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 sally.

"He wanted to get the coat on with alacrity. The steves 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 to the park with Miss Whitford. That young woman came up to say good-bye to her new acquaintance.

"Will you be here when I get back?" "Not for 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."

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. Your 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!" grunted 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."

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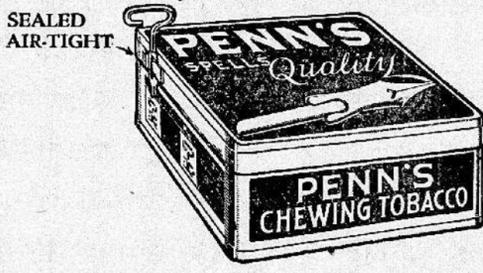
"I'll certainly do that, Miss Whitford."

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"I'll be here."

"If the police don't get you."

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"They won't," he promised serenely.

"When you're ready, Res," 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 on 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 flamed 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 panny' out pay gold?" Lindsay asked Kitty.

Bit by bit her story came out. It was a common enough one. She had been flim-flammed out of her money by the ill-famed school of moving-picture actors, and the sharpers had captured her.

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

Clay 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



"Say, Where Do You Get This Movie Stunt Stuff?"

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 know that on the train even when I—when I was men 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."

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 naively.

(Continued next week)

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