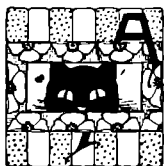


Bumblepuppy on the Range.

BY EDWARD BOLTWOOD.



FEELING of desperation pervaded the home ranch of the Three X outfit in South Dakota. Although it was the time of the gathering of the hands for the beef round-up, which was regarded as a mere pleasure excursion up and down the Belle Fourche in the cool days of September, the usually festal occasion seemed to be darkened by the shadow of a great grief. The boys were depressed. They sulked at meal times. They did not tell stories at night. It wasn't because they were underpaid, although this was undoubtedly true. The reason, as Shorty Garr expressed it, was that they were "locoed by the Britisher."

Mr. Horace Peddie, Q. C., the managing director of the Scotch syndicate which owned the Three X, was making his first inspection of the property. Mr. Peddie had examined the company's lands in South Africa, and intended to make a clean job of it by looking over the American ranch also. His coming had been awaited by his hosts with much anticipatory pleasure, but his actual arrival had been followed by bewilderment and a stinging sense of defeat, and John Heffren, Shorty Garr, and the book-keeper talked it over one evening while they smoked their pipes on the cook-house steps.

"As the old man said," remarked Mr. Heffren, "before this Peddie hit the ranch; 'Tain't no harm,' says he, 'to make him think he's struck a hot crowd. His letters is full of yarns and advice from South Africa, and I'm sick of 'em. Bring around your buckin' bronks,' says the old man, 'and pack your guns and we'll make him think this 'ere western country,' says he, 'is a darned sight wilder than any South Africa on the map. Make it warn for him,' says he, 'and he'll say we sure ought to be paid big for livin' in such a tough place.' And, I put it to you, Tompkins, ain't we done our best?"

The bookkeeper nodded.

"Best?" inquired Garr, disconsolately; "I'll bet we have. The first turn out of the box was when I caught up Hot Biscuit for this e-squire to ride down to the hay camp. Now, Biscuit ain't what you'd call *bad*, you know,—just loony. So I leads the pony around to the office, and there was Peddie dressed up in tight white pants and shiny boots, like he was going to walk the slack wire. He spots me looking at his rig, and he says: 'This is the way we ride in Pretory.' I don't know anything about Pretory, but men have been shot for less in the Bad Lands. So he gets on the horse and puts his toes in the stirrups and leans over Biscuit's neck, like he had a pain in his inside. Biscuit, she slides down a mud bank and turns head over heels, not knowin' what to make of the heft on her shoulders. 'My word!' says Peddie, wiping the gumbo out of his eyes, 'do you ride those brutes every day?' 'Sure,' I says, thinking to get a raise of pay without showing cards. 'By Jove!' he says. 'It's lucky that wasn't a South African pony. When horses over there throw a man they try to eat him up!' I went behind the corral, and I says to myself—"

"Never mind what you said," interrupted the bookkeeper judiciously. "Why didn't you make a play with a forty-five?"

"Listen to me," said Heffren. "I was lopin' down the creek with this English feller day before yesterday. I'd heard the boys claim nobody could get a start out of him, and I thinks, 'John, you are the man for this job, even if you have to make him smell powder.' We came along through Sandy Bottom, him and me, where the box elders is thick and the trail narrer. All of a sudden I begin to look fierce, and cuss, and spy into the underbrush like I see somethin' bad. Then I pulls the gun, and pumps six shells at the trees, swearin' and tearin' and leatherin' my horse. We ran our ponies up on to the rise, and then he said: 'Let's go back and skin 'em.' 'Skin who?' says I. 'Those rabbits,' said he. 'Rabbits!' says I. 'Them was the Powder River gang, and they're on the kill.' 'Well,' says he, 'let's go back and skin *them*. They do that sort of thing most every day in South Africa.' And I couldn't say a dum word."

Garr resumed the mournful tale. "We gave him a meal," said

Shorty, "over to the horse camp. Raw onions and bacon sliced lengthwise — all fat. He said that was the kind of grub they saved for sick hands in the Welt or some such place. Now, I ask you, Tompkins, how can we turn the hair of a Comanche like him?"

"Poker," said the bookkeeper.

"He says," Heffren replied, with a hopeless air of weariness, "that the only cards he ever plays is whist, and at home he has follered that game every night for twenty years."

"Oh, that kind, is he?" said Tompkins, meditatively. "Well, we'll give him a whirl."

It happened that Mr. Peddie was decidedly "that kind." Whist was his religion, Cavendish his Bible, and his club knew no more constant devotee of the silent game.

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That night four men sat about a card table in the office — Mr. Peddie, Q. C., John Heffren, Tompkins, and Joe Robinson, the foreman. A pair of gaudily painted lamps illumined the cozy room; pipes and cigars were in full blast, and a bottle and glasses were placed in hospitable proximity to the players. Everything foreshadowed an enjoyable evening, but the deliberate solemnity of the Americans would betray to any one but a stranger the existence of a momentous plot.

"Who'd expect," said the Englishman, "to have a quiet rubber on a cattle ranch? By Jove! it's luxurious, it's effeminate. In South Africa the wild devils are not beyond checkers."

"Fifty-three," announced Tompkins, thumping down the last of a pack of cards. "All set. Heffren, it's you and I against 'em."

Mr. Peddie lifted his eyebrows in incredulous inquiry.

"Fifty-three?" said he. "Is that right — for whist?"

"Certainly," Tompkins replied, without blushing. "Fifty-two and the joker. It's your deal, Mr. Peddie."

"What are we playing for?" growled Robinson. "The same old thing?"

"Sure," said Heffren, laying a revolver on the table. "What did you suppose — soap?"

"Well, I wanted to know beforehand," Robinson replied,

sticking an unsheathed bowie in his belt, "so's I wouldn't be caught afoot when the cattle is running."

These manifestations did not escape the Londoner, and he looked furtively at his partner. Tompkins was critically inspecting the edge of an axe, which he finally laid on the floor under his chair, and the deal was hastily finished.

"Look here, you know," said Mr. Peddie, "there's a card left over."

"That's the trump," said Robinson. "Where did you learn this game?"

Mr. Peddie gasped and Tompkins led the king of diamonds. The foreman promptly played a spade.

"No diamonds, partner?" asked Peddie, in the most silky and approved across-the-table voice.

"Yes," Robinson answered in apparent surprise, "a few."

"But you didn't play one, you know."

"Well," interposed Tompkins, contemplating the handle of his axe, "it's his own hand. Let him play it."

"Perhaps you don't understand the great American improvements in this game," said Robinson politely. "You see you don't have to follow suit unless you want to."

"And all ties go to the Kitty," volunteered Heffren, slapping down the joker and pulling in a trick.

"It makes a pretty game," Robinson added. "You'll like it."

Like it! The unhappy club man could not have been tortured more effectively by the rack of the Inquisition. He was like a devoted monk, forced to be present at the desecration of a cathedral by a horde of barbarians. The politeness of a guest, backed by the impressive exhibition of weapons, stifled his protests, but the Chancellor of England could not have felt so outraged if he had been tied to his wool sack and compelled to witness a game of tag in the House of Lords. It was not even bumblepuppy. It was like a game from "Alice in Wonderland." When Robinson claimed that "Big Casino" outranked the ace, Mr. Peddie writhed in silent anguish. When Heffren, at the end of a hand, proceeded to add the points on the cards "to see who had game," Mr. Peddie's horrified eyes blinked rapidly with emotion. But when Tompkins told him that it was the leader's

privilege to play two cards at once in order to guard against emergencies, Mr. Peddie staggered to his feet and gesticulated violently.

"Gentlemen," he cried, "I have been in rough places before. I have been in the hardest land and among the hardest people in the world. I refer to South Africa." Heffren groaned. "But," continued Peddie, "never have I seen such barbarities as I have witnessed to-night, and, by the Lord Harry, I hope I never will again! Men who do such things will do anything, by George! This country may be all right to make money in, but it's not fit to live in. Mr. Robinson, by Jove, sir! you'll find my bag packed in the morning."

Far into the night the conspirators celebrated the sagacity of the bookkeeper. "Good enough to play whist with Peddie" is now the highest compliment which can be paid a card-player at the Three X.

