

"DUMMY JOE"

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"The Rose Celeste," "The Fates of Three," etc., etc.

The story of
a man whose
silence spoke
louder than
words

Illustrated by
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Joe was sitting upright, rigid as he had died that awful night. A letter was found in his pocket, sealed and stamped, and with the address partly written: "Miss Amy ———" Had he changed his mind, or——?

"DUMMY JOE" was the mail carrier. His mail route was from Lloydminster, across the Saskatchewan river, to Scentgrass Lake, and was the longest and loneliest in Saskatchewan. The route was as the man and the man as the route, both were notorious for their silence; hence Joe's sobriquet: "Dummy Joe."

Who was he? From whence did he come?

One day the job of mail carrier was empty, and the old postmaster of the Scentgrass postoffice, who had grown too sciatic for the long, wearisome trip himself, was searching his mind as to where to get a driver, when Joe blew in.

There was not a thing in Joe's appearance to recommend him for the job; on the other hand, there were all the obtrusive marks of the tender-foot to discredit him under the suspicious and disdainful scrutiny of the rough pioneer postmaster, who scratched his gray head long and laboriously with the well-bitten end of his stump of a pen and scowled dubiously at the smart eastern togger of the applicant. The one and only thing that restrained a blunt negative was the claim of the young man that he was well used to horses, which claim he proved to the letter. So they let him take the job, rather than gave it to him.

From the first he was strangely reserved and taciturn. He evaded questions, evaded them politely in a quiet, peculiar way that gave no offence to the questioner. The postmistress, a well known busybody in everybody's affairs in the settlement and an adept in the art of "worming" into the business of others, failed to elicit a gleam of information from him in spite of her many and determined attacks. He was as close as a Chinaman.

Matters had stood thus for two years. Joe Smith was his name; he had had some experience with horses; he neither sent nor received any mail; he was always even-tempered; his habits were regular; he was punctuality itself, for he was always on the dot to face the trail, no matter what weather was outside.

His gaunt figure, generally clothed in a sheepskin lined coat, had become familiar and a recognized unit in the order of things at the stopping places, and he had accepted and had become accustomed to his name, "Dummy Joe," so accustomed, in fact, that he had ceased to smile in his quiet way when so addressed. His horses were the only creatures for which he appeared to have any definite interest. They were his first and last care; no matter how late, or tired, or hungry he might be, they received the same consideration. The nags responded to his attentions. From two ragged, ill-matched cayuses, he produced quite an enviable team; tough, long-winded, good-goers and fresh to the finish on the long, hard trail.

SO Joe was left alone with his job; only the women, their curiosity unsatisfied, remained, as it were, lying in ambush to surprise him at some moment into talking.

Since the New Year, the cold had increased and the storms had become unusually severe. Joe had had some trying journeys this winter, but had come through with the mail all right and with

hardly a comment upon the tremendous difficulties he had had to overcome.

It was the bitterest day in the bitter month of February, and he sat in the warm kitchen of the postoffice waiting for the bags which the postmaster was now sealing. He was meditating upon the grim fight he would soon be called upon to wage against the stiff blizzard that awaited him outside. The soft, noiseless, chilling current from the remorseless north was now lifting and drifting the powdery snow and packing it into a hundred barricades across the trail. The track would soon be obliterated, but the thought brought no sense of fear; his steady nags, even without his hand to guide them, knew every inch of the trail. Yes, he would again make it all right, if the nags could face the storm.

The postmistress was making bread and cookies, her busy stout arms dusted with flour. She glanced at Joe, as he sat twirling his hat in his hands and gazing at the glowing ashpans of the stove.

"You'll have a bad trip, this one, Joe," she said in her sharp, but not unkindly, way.

"Yes, ma'am," he answered in his usual short way.

"I guess this is the worst winter you've put in yet?"

"Yes, ma'am."

"Where you come from it ain't so bad?"

"No." He shook his head and twirled his hat a trifle quicker.

"Ever been in British Columbia, eh, Joe?"

"No, ma'am."

He looked toward the inner room, where the back of the postmaster was visible stooping over the mailbags. An uneasy light came into Joe's eye; his mood to-night did not assist him to so easily turn her questions aside. He longed to be gone.

"I guess the winters down east ain't near as bad as here?" she continued with obstinate persistency.

"I guess not," Joe answered very measuredly and slowly. The postmistress saw clearly he was evading her attack; she grew a little vexed and felt she would have liked to literally shake his secret from him. She again glanced at him as he sat and twirled his hat, with his eyes on the back of the postmaster. She was tempted to give him what she felt, a hard dig.

"Any one can see you've not been used to this kind of life. Your people are well fixed, I'll bet!"

Joe looked around at her in his peculiar way and uttered a mere monosyllable in

reply: "So!" He immediately got up and went into the room where the postmaster was working at the bags.

"All fixed, Joe! I should persuade you to stay over. The storm's a bad one already, and it's getting worse. Maybe you'd better stay over?"

Joe shook his head. "No, no, we'll get through—somehow."

He shouldered the bags and passed out into the storm.

They knew it was useless to try and detain him, but it was not without misgivings they watched him into the sleigh and saw him wrap himself in his rugs and drive off into the blizzard.

TWO weeks later a search party found Joe. He was sitting upright, rigid as he had died, frozen to death in his sleigh only five miles from the post. The horses, unable to face the storm, had turned from the trail, and on the lee side of a small bluff the three had perished together during that awful night.

In the pocket of Joe's overcoat they found his pocket-book; it contained two letters, one sealed and stamped, but the address on this was only commenced: "Miss Amy ———," as though the writer had been either interrupted while writing or had changed his mind and refrained from completing it. The latter supposition seemed justified by reason of the soiled and aged appearance of the envelope. The second letter was stamped and fully addressed, but not sealed. It was addressed to Mrs. M. Moorehouse, then the name of a small town near Toronto, Ontario. They read the contents of the letter; it was addressed to his mother:

"My dear Mother:

"I am alive and well. To-night something urges me to break this long and cruel silence and to write you, dear Mother, the only one I felt never entirely believed the odious charge they brought against me, a charge beyond my power to disprove. My father—Heaven knows how I always respected him and you!—my Amy, my wife that was to be, my very nearest friends, too, all, all believed me criminal; but you, I know, in spite of all appearances, felt your son was not a thief. See how I hang even on such a consolation in my banishment! I do not know to this day who stole that money from my care, nor where it went. Whoever did this deed, I have borne his crime and his punishment. God forgive him, for he truly needs forgiveness! I have overcome the bitterness I carried away in my heart; I have lived honestly and soberly. I have saved \$200 at the most monotonous, spirit-wearing occupation a

man can be condemned to. It has done me good; it has curbed my pride, but not broken my spirit. I have two fast, true friends, my horses.

"The winter might be a little shorter, the sun might be a little brighter, and the world appear a little less gray, if I were sure my mother did really believe in her Ever loving son,

GEOFF."

At last the postmistress' curiosity was partly satisfied. She would have read the contents of the other letter, but her husband, partly out of respect for the law, and partly because of a dim uneducated sympathy for his unfortunate mail carrier and his secret, forbade her. The letter with the incomplete address they enclosed in the one to his mother and sent both along by post.

The remains of the poor mail carrier they placed in a rude, home-made coffin and buried him in the little wind-swept, lone burial ground on a knoll not far from the postoffice, marking the mound with a simple wooden slab. Then the postmaster scrawled a few lines with his stubbed pen to Joe's mother, stating the sad news of her son's death and saying, in a postscript, that his few possessions could be had at any time, or she might say how they were to be disposed of.

It was some time before he received a reply. This came in the form of a letter from an eastern lawyer, advising him that Mrs. Moorehouse had been dead some months and asking if he knew the reason why the letter addressed to Miss Amy ———, now Mrs. Fielder, had not been posted, as it contained a matter of great personal interest to the lady addressed, and quite unexpectedly furnished a clue to the actual perpetrator of the theft which Mr. Moorehouse had been so unfortunately charged with; also, that it was a matter of great concern to all the late Mr. Moorehouse's friends, and especially to his father, who was prostrated with grief, to learn how he had spent his time, his circumstances, how he met his death, and where buried. A cheque sufficient to cover any expenses was enclosed.

The postmaster replied in his illiterate way as fully as he could, and nothing more was heard from the lawyer. The postmistress' curiosity seemed to be fully satisfied at last.

ON a glorious mild evening in the June following a powerful motor car lurched over that rough trail. It reached the little out-of-the-way settlement and pulled up at the postoffice. There were two occupants besides the driver, a fashionably dressed gentleman and an extremely pale lady, whose face and demeanor indicated suppressed nervousness or anxiety; her fair hair contrasting strongly with the entire black in which she was dressed. The man quietly and briefly desired to be directed to the cemetery. The way was pointed out by the postmaster and a small weed-encumbered place which was enclosed within a rude, disjointed paling fence. It was situated on a knoll between two straggling poplar bluffs. Within that place lay all that remained of that which was mortal of the unfortunate and abused mail carrier.

The car proceeded at a slow pace toward the place and stopped at the fence. The gentleman alighted and assisted the lady from the car. He would have accompanied her (Continued on page 36)

WILL MY BOY BE A MINISTER?

IT is the hope of nearly every mother that her son will turn out to be a minister, knowing that if he has clerical tendencies, he must naturally be devout. However, many a boy who tried to be something else and failed would have made a good minister. Find out if your boy is fitted for a ministerial life. Read Professor Farmer's remarkable article in the May issue.