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Calamity Joe

Afterward Called "Cupid"

By CLARISSA MACKIE

Five men on the Flying V ranch watched the approach of the latest addition to the force. He was riding slowly up the trail, his long legs dragging below the stirrups.

"You can sup on trouble now, boys," declared Hen Morgan.

"How's that?" queried his companions curiously.

"This here gent approaching, him who is to be line rider on the Flying V along with the rest of us, is the champion dispenser of bad luck. Wherever he goes he brings calamity with him."

"I've heard about him, then. Ain't his name Joe Bliss?" asked Pete Willis.

"Yes. They call him 'Calamity Joe' because of the sure woe that camps on his trail perpetual," answered Morgan. They sat about the door of the mess house and watched the shambling forms of horse and rider approach them.

Presently the horse scuffed to a standstill, and Mr. Joe Bliss threw a long leg over the saddle and stepped to the ground.

"Howdy, gents?" he said, looking gloomily down at them.

"Howdy, Joe?" said Morgan sadly. "Let me interjoece my feller sufferers" and he gravely mentioned the names of his companions, who all exchanged nods and muttered "howdys" with the newcomer.

"What happened over to Flamm's?" asked Morgan as Bliss sat down and rolled a cigarette.

"Measles," replied Bliss stolidly. "I never had 'em in my life, but old Flamm seemed to be afraid I'd catch 'em, so he fired me. I'd only been there a week."

The next morning they rode forth together, Joe Bliss ahead and the five following in a broken line.

"Seems to enjoy his bad reputashun," remarked Morgan to Freeman.

"Quite some! I been looking for mesle spots all the morning," returned Freeman.

"It won't be measles this time. He changes his calamity every time he changes a job. We'll get something else as sure as eggs is eggs," muttered Morgan.

"If he plants any calamity on this here outfit he'll sure get his," declared Freeman violently, and somehow Joe Bliss heard the words.

"I got ter do something to get rid of that reputation," he admitted to himself and thereupon thought long upon the matter.

And it bore startling results. It took some time to accomplish, but the nature of Calamity Joe's vindication of his ill name will go down in the history of Poorgrass county.

Several weeks passed without anything unfortunate occurring to bear up the evil reputation of the new man. Then one day Joe Bliss received leave of absence and was gone all the morning. At noon as his fellow riders were eating lunch on the fringe of the scattered herd of cattle Joe rode hastily up to Morgan.

"Gents," he said excitedly, "there's some ladies in distress yonder, in Salt canyon. Picnic ladies they are, and some yaller minded individual has stamped their horses. What's them delicate females goin' to do?"

"Huh!" ejaculated Morgan. "Where they from?"

"They say they are salesladies from Finklestein's dry goods emporium in Eagle City."

"What they picnicin' so far from home for?" demanded Freeman.

"Skeered—plumb skeered for fear old Finklestein will change his mind and call 'em back on the job. Why, them girls is so upset about how they're going to get back to Eagle City that they can't enjoy their lunch no-how," exclaimed Calamity Joe.

"Finklestein's, in Eagle City?" queried Smith suddenly. "Why, that's where I bought this here handkerchief. She was a queen, that girl was!"

"Was she a blond?" asked Jepsen eagerly. "I remember a peach of a blond in Finklestein's, who—"

"Nary blond," was Freeman's emphatic reply. "She was a dark eyed queen! I'll go over, Morgan, and help my lady friend out of trouble."

"Huh! You don't even know her name!" snorted Morgan contemptuously. "I guess I'll move along over there myself. I bought a shirt in Finklestein's last week, and I want to ask the red haired lady I got it from if it's a fast color." His handsome face flushed defiantly.

"Maybe there ain't a red haired lady

to the picnic," said Smith disagreeably. "She's there!" interpolated Joe Bliss hastily. "Maybe all you gents could ride over to the canyon and rescue them dames. I ain't much on ladies' company, and so I'll jest look out for the critters."

The five other men consulted together, and finally all rode off in the direction of Salt canyon. Meantime Joe, the harbinger of calamity, stuck to his job and manfully did the work of six herders that sunny day.

"That combination ought to break up that there evil reputashun I've got," he grinned as he rode back and forth. The five men rode single file through the narrow entrance to Salt canyon, and once within its confines a pleasing sight rewarded their coming.

Around a campfire were seated half a dozen girls. Most of them were pretty, and all were attractive. The queenly brunette and the "pencny" blond and the red haired dame all were there, as well as three others.

All of them sprang up from the picnic feast around which they were gathered and viewed with alarm the approach of the cattlemen.

Morgan was in advance, and, whipping off his hat with a graceful sweep, he addressed the red haired divinity.

"Excuse me, miss, but we are the rescue party," he said pleasantly.

"What you going to rescue?" demanded the red haired one imperiously, while the others drew close together and giggled.

"We was informed that some yallow hearted varmint had stamped your horses," said Morgan calmly.

"Yes," said the imperious one stiffly. "It's all true, but we don't need any rescuing. We're going to get home all right."

"How?"

"Walk," she returned calmly. "Any objection?"

"Yes, ma'am," said Morgan emphatically. "We don't let ladies walk twenty miles when they're out for a holiday time—not in Poorgrass county."

"I'm sure they're very kind, Mabel," spoke up one of the other girls.

"You know, we were saying just before they came that we didn't know how we were going to get home," added the queenly brunette, with a flashing smile at Freeman.

"I suppose it is well meant, and we are obliged," said the spokeswoman suddenly. "Perhaps you gentlemen can tell us how to get our horses back. They belong to Dan Ferry, the liveryman at Eagle City."

In response to these amenities on the part of the red haired dame the five rescuers slipped from their horses and awkwardly submitted to Morgan's elaborate ceremony of introduction to six ladies whose names were unknown to any of the cattlemen.

In their guise of members of a rescue party they were invited to partake of the lunch and having done so entered into serious consultation as to the best methods of discovering the miscreant who had run off the horses or stamped them and also the all important question of how Finklestein's salesladies were to be returned to Eagle City that evening.

At last the unfortunate picnicers consented gracefully to submit to the better judgment of the men, and it was agreed that each lady should ride one of the Flying V horses and that its owner should walk beside the horse so as to ride it back when their deed of chivalry should have been accomplished.

Of course all this required much discussion in general and then in tete-a-tetes, where names were exchanged and there was much merry badinage as past purchases of "gents furnishings" at Finklestein's emporium were recalled.

It was Smith who scouted around and found one of the missing ponies grazing out on the plain. He quickly mounted his own horse and caught the animal, and in this way there was provided a mount for the sixth lady, who was suffering from the toothache and cared little whether she was furnished with an attendant cavalier or not.

It was she who hurried them homeward at sunset, when her companions had decided to ride back to Eagle City in the moonlight.

They formed a procession as they set forth on the twenty mile journey to Eagle City. The toothache lady led the way, and the others straggled after with a man at every horse's bridle. This was, of course, necessary, because never had there been collected together such a number of vicious, ill tempered brutes as the horses that belonged to Messrs. Morgan, Freeman, Smith, Jepsen and Pete Willis, and the fair riders appeared timid.

At dawn the five weary cattlemen rode slowly into the camp. Calamity Joe was on watch and without a word handed cups of hot coffee to his friends.

"You gents are some heroes," he ventured, breaking into their reveries of tender looks exchanged and engagements promised for Wednesday evening to come, for the Flying V men were bachelors all.

"I reckon so," said Freeman absently. He was wondering if he could earn enough to support a certain blond beau-

ty in case she would marry him.

Morgan suddenly looked up and caught Calamity Joe's attention with a sharp glance.

"Who do you reckon run off them bosses?" he asked.

"I dunno!" declared Joe.

"You was seen doing it and might as well own up," shrewdly said Morgan.

Then Calamity Joe confessed his duplicity. He told how he had waited his opportunity and, hearing about the proposed picnic of Finklestein's clerks, had himself stampeded their horses and thus created a situation whereby his comrades could rescue the fair-dames and at the same time make their acquaintance.

In the guise of a matchmaker Calamity Joe had hoped to hide his unfortunate reputation.

And he did, for ever after they called him "Cupid," and he was obliged to officiate as best man at so many weddings that he almost regretted the step he had taken.

After all, the foreman of the Flying V declared that Joe had brought calamity in his wake, for five of his best men married within a year and started ranches of their own.

But he retained Joe Bliss because there were no signs of his getting married and straying off.

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—Birmingham Age-Herald.

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—New York Sun.

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