

The FICTION Corner

DOUBLE DUTY

By JOHN H. MOSE

He was so young to have the heavy burden he was carrying, but Martha didn't realize her son was strong mentally as well as physically, nor that he could keep a secret as well as the next person.

"JOEY, supper will be ready in half an hour," called Martha to her son who was entering the spring house with a bucket of milk in each hand.

"O. K., Mom," shouted the lad in response, "I'm through with the milking. I'll be in as soon as I clean up."

Martha watched him a few minutes later as he trudged toward the house. He was big for 14, and with faithful "Shep" trotting along at his heels, Joey made an impressive picture against the backdrop of the setting sun.

"Just like a magazine cover," thought Martha, as tears of pride welled up into her eyes. Her little man, Joey had shouldered a burden during the past year that many a man could not have handled as well. The plowing, planting, fence repairs, and the thousand odd chores that must be completed on a farm had all been mastered by Joey. He seemed to almost relish his role as man of the house while dad was away.

Day after day he had toiled in the fields with the team while other boys his age were swimming, fishing, and berrying, unhampered by the cares of labor. But Joey had seemed impervious to their comings and goings. Many evenings at the supper table, Martha noticed the boy dozing from exhaustion. A spoon or fork would often pause, suspended mid-way between mouth and table. She never gave utterance to this observation of weariness, lest her sympathy extinguish his feeling of being the family breadwinner. Their conversations were those of business partners rather than mother and son.

Martha longed to tuck him in at night, or to hug his tow head to her breast. Little Joey was her only consolation in her longing for Big Joe. Countless times during the lonely nights, she had tiptoed quietly into his room to stand beside the bed where he slept. Often she caressed his blond head or kissed him lightly on the cheek as he lay deep in the refreshing sleep of childhood. Each time, she struggled within herself to check the tears of love and loneliness as she slipped quietly back to her own empty room, fearful lest she waken him and bring his big world tumbling down around him.

Joey was living from day to day in a world of big responsibility, and she could not, in spite of her longing to be more demonstrative toward her 14-year-old, jolt him into reality. She told herself that was the reason why she had never told Joey about his father.

Well-meaning friends had tried to persuade Martha to sell the farm and move to town. Her troubles dated from the day she had received the telegram from the Arizona hospital. Big Joe was never coming back! He had a hopeless case of tuberculosis—it was just a matter of months. But how could she tell Joey? The knowledge of her unshared grief had caused her to shed thousands of inner tears in Joey's presence, and endless nights of heart-breaking sobs in her own room. But she felt that, somehow, they must keep the farm that held so many fond memories.

The first days after she and Joe were married had seemed almost impossible. The work at the barn and in the fields had continued endlessly. At first, she had worked side

by side with Big Joe, and they had sacrificed everything, denying themselves the very necessities of life in order to make the payments on the farm. Then little Joey had come to crown their happiness. A mutual pride and joy which they had shared in watching other things grow on the farm had then been centered in Joey.

Martha had decided that life was practically perfect until one day big Joe had come in from his work in mid-morning. Surprised to see him, Martha had inquired what was wrong. Joe just stared off into space, and then he answered.

"Martha, there's something wrong with me. I'm weak and tired all the time, and I keep coughing and coughing."

For the first time Martha noticed how tired Joe really did look. She suggested that he see a doctor at once, but big Joe said he probably just had spring fever. The following

Saturday when they went to town, she had persuaded him to stop in to see old Doc Crane.

It hadn't taken Doc long to decide that Joe should have some X-rays. The following month the X-rays were taken by the county health officer in the new mobile unit, and Doc Crane's fears had been substantiated. Doc suggested Arizona.

Martha could still remember those two weeks when she and Joe had planned how they could make out if she could keep the farm going. Her father would help and little Joey would continue to school. Big Joe was not to worry, but exert all his effort toward getting well again.

The first year, things had gone very smoothly indeed, until the rheumatism laid her father on the shelf. Martha was desperate. All the spring work lay ahead, and it was impossible to find anyone to take over the work. She had talked it over with Joey, and together they had decided to go it alone. She could still hear little Joey as he said:

"Gee, Mom, I'm big enough to do the work. Grampa let me plow some last year, and I'm lots bigger and stronger now."

So Joey had become the man of the family. Then the telegram had

come. Big Joe would never be coming back. There were those who thought Martha cruel for not telling the boy that his Dad wasn't coming home. At times, she thought she must tell him, but she postponed it, feeling that, somehow, the right time would come . . . a time when he might be strong enough to stand the heartbreak. Perhaps in a few weeks before Joey returned to school, or when Miller moved in to sharecrop the farm.

The summer had come and gone swiftly. Already the first suggestion of impending autumn was noticeable in the coloring of the countryside. The crops had been abundant, and the harvests were good for Joey and Martha. Many had bestowed compliments and Joey glowed with pride when the men had remarked about the size of the yield during the threshing season.

Returning home from a Saturday shopping trip, the two were making big talk about the coming school term.

"We sure were lucky to get Mill-



"Just like a magazine cover," thought Martha, as tears of pride welled up into her eyes.

er, weren't we, Mom?" asked Joey. "Yes, son," replied his mother, "And not a bit too soon either. I don't know what I would have done with you going back to school if we hadn't found someone to take over this winter."

Suddenly Martha knew that the time had come to tell Joey the unhappy secret which she had carried now for more than a year in her grief-stricken heart. But how could she bring herself to do it? She must strive to make it as easy as possible.

She swung the car into their lane, and pulled to a stop in the yard before the kitchen door. The purchases were quickly unloaded, and Joey lit a fire in the big kitchen range. Now was the time! Even before she removed her wraps, Martha laid her arms across Joey's shoulders, and began.

"Joey, dear, there's something I've been wanting to tell you for a long time. I've been so proud of you this summer, and I . . . Well, somehow it seemed I just couldn't spoil everything you were working so hard for with bad news. Now you're going back to school, and we're so fortunate to have Miller coming."

"I want you to work hard at school this fall," she continued as she noted the questioning look in his eyes. Then she simply related, "God decided that you and I had a job to do together, Joey . . . Your Father will never be able to come home. In fact," she continued as she struggled to hold back the tears, "he may have only a few more months to live."

There was a long moment of silence . . . a moment which lasted an eternity for Martha. "Oh, dear God, make him understand," she prayed silently.

Joey didn't say a word but drew his mother's face to his own and kissed her, tenderly and boyishly. He patted her softly on the cheek.

"Aw, gee, Mom, I understand," he said, and the tears stood in the corners of his eyes. Martha could see how brave he was trying to be. "Now I better take care of my feeding," he said somewhat hoarsely. "Can we have the pecan roll we got in town for our supper, Mom?" he asked as he changed from his suit coat into his overall jacket. The coat was thrown carelessly across the seat of a nearby chair. Martha watched him walk slowly from the room, a firm set to his shoulders.

"He took it like a man," she thought, as she removed her own wraps. Then she saw his coat lying on the chair, and smiled, thinking, "He acts like a man in some ways, but when it comes to his clothes, he's all boy." She picked up the coat to hang it properly. As she did so, a small notebook and some papers tumbled from the inside pocket. Gathering them up to replace them, Martha was startled at the sight of the yellow envelope. Could it be?

It was! Among the contents of Joey's pocket was the well-worn and much read telegram from the tuberculosis sanitarium



HOW IS YOUR 'A' PITCH?

If it isn't one thing it's another. Now the United Nations is asked to call an international conference on the "A" pitch. This is not a southpaw baseball maneuver. The "A" pitch is the basic pitch in music, and Dr. Hermann Zeissl, head of the Austrian delegation to the U. N. cultural organization, charges that almost no country is adhering to the standard pitch as established in 1885 in Vienna.

Maybe at last here is a clue to what's really wrong with the world! Has man grown careless about his "A" pitch?

Is the world in the shape it is in because of Sour Notes?

Is it possible that the cry, "Sound your 'A'!" brings on trouble all over the earth?

Dr. Zeissl says that the Vienna conference set the standard "A" pitch at 435 cycles a second. Through the years it has been knocked around like everything else, it appears. Here in America, for instance, 440 cycles is observed in the best circles. In the "Sweet Adeline" and "Since You Were Sweet Sixteen" . . . it swerves all over the lot, from as low as 422½ bid to 500 asked, we hear.

It is declared by Dr. Zeissl that the original tuning fork used to set the international "A" pitch and keep the world on key has been preserved in Vienna. He wants everything reset by it. It is not as ridiculous as it sounds (no pun). Nobody has yet been able to put the finger on what is really disturbing the earth so much.

It might very well be that trouble with the "A" pitch is it. Music hath charms to soothe the savage breast, the poet said, but the global music we have been getting hasn't been doing the job, obviously. Savage breast soothing has declined 76 per cent in the last 10 years, our statistician reports.

Who can estimate to what extent defective "A" pitch is responsible for all that has happened to us since the early thirties? Hitler was a musician in a small provincial way. Maybe he was away off the Vienna standard of 435 cycles to begin with.

This department is for an international conference, but fast. The thing must be looked into. How does President Truman stand? Has America an "A" pitch policy? Are we in accord with England and France and Italy?

It is possible Russia has sabotaged the "A" pitch and is there in a pumpkin shell somewhere some papers that will show this up?

When Vishinsky, Molotov and Stalin clear their throats and sing "Mi-mi-mi," are they anywhere near the same key as the rest of us? Let's get to the bottom of this. (Provided, of course, it doesn't cost too much. That's what we're afraid of.) We look for a proposal for an American I. A. P. P. C. (International A Pitch Preservation Commission) with unlimited funds. If we can help the world back to the Vienna "A" string standard by discussion, all very well, but, fair warning, no LOANS!

THEN AND NOW

Benedict Arnold in his grave Coldly his opinion gave: "They got me swiftly, face to face, Without a pumpkin in the case! "There was no long drawn-out delay— Treason was treason in my day: I fled, but if I stayed I'll bet The probers would be probing yet!"

Dear Hi: Giveaway programs are just like the old dish nights in theaters. Except that now you get a house to match the dishes!

This morning I greeted my grocer: "Hello, Mac, what's up?" He replied: "Everything!"

BLUE BARRON

RESPIRE

The long campaign is over. Done are those trips and drives; The candidates feel better, And, mister, do their wives!!!

VANISHING AMERICANISMS

"Here's two dollars; get yourself something nice for Christmas."

"I want a good tree if it costs as much as a dollar fifty."

"I'd like to get ten five-dollar gold pieces."

A slot machine giving hot coffee has been introduced in the subway but we assume you get the hard roll with jam in the train doorway as usual.

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The term "pressing" means setting the iron directly down upon fabric and lifting it directly up without to and fro action. Woollens should always be pressed to avoid ruining the shape of the garment and the surface finish of the material. Likewise, laces, nets and other delicate materials should be pressed to avoid tearing the material.

Chungking

China's wartime capital, Chungking, was noted for its vast system of new and old tunnels piercing the surrounding hills. From these rocky labyrinths, equipped with seats and lights, the city's population of hundreds of thousands kept civic life going through years of relentless Japanese bombing.

When Graydon McCulley and Chester Housh of the national turkey federation presented Truman with two birds for his Christmas dinner, weighing 40 and 14 pounds, McCulley remarked that Housh raises from 50,000 to 100,000 turkeys every year on his Elkton, Virginia, farm.

"That's remarkable to an old farmhand like myself," observed the President. "When I was a boy in Missouri, I figured I was doing pretty well if I raised five turkeys a year."

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In Case of Fire

Always be prepared for fire. When entering buildings, choose your nearest exit and alternate path of escape. Locked or obstructed exits or fire hazards should be reported. If burned in a fire, report for medical treatment. Many burns or smoke inhalations which do not at first seem serious have fatal results.

Louis Ranks at Top

Joe Louis certainly must be rated with the top champions. But that was Louis at his best, some years ago. In his two stands with Jersey Joe Wolcott, the Blasting Bomber of other years was not the Louis we used to know.

Advancing years and a few rolls of fat had gotten in their killing work. Louis can still punch, but if his opponent decides to keep out of range, Louis can do little about it.

My Creed

I HAVE the faith to know that this deep sorrow Weighing upon my heart will lift at last; That I shall waken on some glad tomorrow, Happy once more, the troubled darkness past

And I have hope—I keep its fire burning, Although my soul and body be distressed— The hope that somehow with the old earth's turning This pain will cease, and time will bring me rest

Oh, I believe that He who walks beside me Closer than any lover, any friend, Will lead at last, no matter what betide me, Into the sunlight at the journey's end.

Grace Noll Crowell

