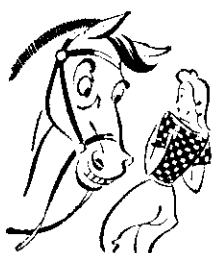


A Horse Called Josephine

(Written and illustrated for "The Listener" by N.B.)

S HEARING over, a ride along the road to the next farm is suggested. Josephine, they tell me, is saddled and waiting.

I feel pretty good about this; my experience on livery stable horses gives me confidence—so do my new jodhpurs! Mincing to the stable (my pants are a bit tight at the knees, but they look very snappy), I am suddenly confronted



with an enormous raw-boned, big-kneed, snaky-necked chestnut mare, who ogles me with a white and wicked eye! Heavens, is this Josephine? I had imagined something small, dark, and docile.

This creature seems to me to have all the potentialities of a Jezebel—as well as the proportions of an outsize giraffe! "If you want to ride round the sheep, I'll take another horse," I protest magnanimously. It's no good. Out of the five horses on the place, Josephine is the only one on deck, so to speak. Toby, I find, is too fat for ordinary girths and his own O.S. girth he has burst during a particularly heartfelt sigh. Raven isn't shod, and can't go on the road. Betsy has a girth gall, and Jim is blind in one eye, and my farmer thinks his habit of veering always to starboard might put me off!

So pulling myself together, I approach Josephine with what I hope is a confident swagger, and endeavour to put my foot in the stirrup, which I find is about on a level with my ear. Josephine watches me calculatingly, and waits till I have my foot well in, then she capers around in ever widening circles while I hop hopelessly, till a sound of tearing distracts her, and I scramble on. It is only the knee out of my new pants—it might have been worse! Incidentally, why they trim the mane of horses as big as this beats me—after all, you must have something to hold on to!



We are off! After the first 10 yards I am quite convinced that Josephine is a direct descendant—or possibly the reincarnation—of Pegasus. To fly is her one ambition. Trying to take off in any direction occupies nearly all her time, and if she touches the ground at all it is on a stomach-rocking "three-point landing." This can't go on, I think. She'll tire. Not she. We are getting further away from the earth at every moment!

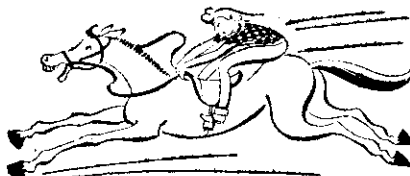
Oh for Jim, the horse who only veers to starboard, I moan, while Josephine continues to sidle, bounce, goose-step, gyrate and, in short, perform every physical manoeuvre possible to a frustrated four-legged creature who thinks she ought to be able to fly but can't!

We have come about a mile. The farm we are to visit is five miles away! Not having a parachute with me, I decide to turn back. Josephine gives one ecstatic sniff, realises that we have turned "into the wind," and with ears back and tail streaming, plunges without warning into a gallop!

Maybe this all for the best, I think, letting her have her head, and clinging desperately to the pommel. Anything to get it over quickly. She is sure to stop at our gate—horses always do. The wind screams past, the gate approaches—Josephine if anything gains speed! Of course she doesn't stop—I might have known.

Half a mile further on I manage to pull up at the top of a steep hill. I get back my breath, so unfortunately does she, then, too excited to do anything but gallop, we hurtle back in our tracks. All hopes of her stopping at the gate leave me. I begin to feel as though I am riding a pendulum which will swing back and forth past the gate indefinitely, and maybe if I am lucky will at length run down and stop!

The gate looms up. Cheers! The family, seeing my plight, have dashed out in a body and spread across the road. We prop-prop, and stop!



"She's sure to stop at the stable," reaches me faintly as, once through the gate, Josephine gathers speed again for a final dash down the runway! Not wanting to be scraped off on the stable door, I cower low over her neck. I needn't have bothered. The stable doesn't mean a thing to Josephine. Nothing short of a hangar would stop her now!

We end up in a corner of the sheep yard from which there is no exit. Without delay, I slide off and stagger into the shearing shed. Poor Josephine. From here, which only a day or so ago seemed such a chamber of horrors, but which now seems a peaceful haven, I can pity her!

After all, she is a pathological case. The only trouble is that I think I am one now, too!

Correction

IN the caption of a photograph last week, Raymond Massey was incorrectly mentioned as being featured in "This Is War!" from 3YA this Sunday, February 21. He will be heard from the Commercial stations on that date, and from the main Nationals (including 3YA), on February 22.

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