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IN GREAT BRITAIN THREE SHILLINGS

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PLAIN HORSE SENSE

BY
WALTER BROOKS

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Mr. Pope's horse didn't want any traffic with reporters and gaping tourists, so he wouldn't show off.

A lot of people that I have told about Wilbur Pope's talking horse haven't believed me and some of them have come right out and called me a liar. I suppose that is natural. They're the kind of people that burned people that said the world was round. And it doesn't make any difference to me. Ed isn't my horse. But it did make a difference to Mr. Pope when people wouldn't believe him about it. Because he was an advertising man and it was bad for him in a business way.

Of course Mr. Pope knew how to make people believe things and at first he wanted to draw up a regular advertising campaign with graphs and testimonials and a picture of one of the office boys posing in a white coat as a famous scientist and recording Ed's speech on scientific instruments. But Ed wouldn't stand for it. Mr. Pope took a bottle down to the stable and sat on the manger and argued it out with him. But Ed was adamant.

Look Wilb he said You know what will happen? Reporters and Hollywood scouts and these candid camera lunkheads and people with babies and their lunch in a bag—that's what will happen by the million. And all peeking and snooping. Except for your wife's friends we have a nice quiet life up here in Mt. Kisco. Why spoil it?

I respect your desire for privacy Ed said Mr. Pope but this is rather a special case. Nothing doing said Ed firmly. If you hadn't shot off your mouth about me in the first place nobody'd think you were goofy. Too much talk is your trouble. Well it isn't going to be mine. H'm said Mr. Pope, Of course, you know Ed I can shut you up and cut off your oats. No you can't said Ed You're too kind hearted. Well I guess you're right said Mr. Pope and he got up and went into the house and took Mrs. Pope to the movies. But he had had a good deal out of the bottle while he was talking with Ed and so he kept nodding off to sleep and then coming awake with a snort and saying excitedly Where am I? Where am I? So they didn't have a very good time.

Well Mr. Pope didn't say any more about Ed's talking but he had already said too much and had to take a lot of kidding from his associates for advertising men are great kidders. But when the clients begin to kid look out. And Mr. Pope's began to. And one day he had to go in to the head of the firm Mr. Weatherbee and tell him that Mr. Elihu Diddums of the Colonial Occasional Chair Co. had decided to place his account elsewhere. For Mr. Diddums like all manufacturers had a great sense of the dignity of his product and he did not care to have his advertising in the hands of a man who chatted with animals. And I suppose he was right for if he would not take occasional chairs seriously who would? I know I won't.

Well Mr. Weatherbee was pretty mad. And he told Mr. Pope that there was this about it—the advertising business was one thing and Baron Munchausen was another and the two didn't mix. Mr. Pope kind of smiled at this as who wouldn't? and Mr. Weatherbee got still madder

and he puffed up and delivered a talk on the dignity of the profession which he kept ready for such occasions and then he said he would give Mr. Pope one more chance.

Well Mr. Pope knew what that meant. It meant that he would have to replace the lost account with that of the Groly Marine Engine Corp, which he had been working on. He had got up several presentations for Mr. Groly all hand lettered in three colors and had spent many hours working on Mr. Groly but in order to get the account he had to take it away from Bishop & Oppper with whom Mr. Groly was as well pleased as any manufacturer ever is with his agency. But anyway he went over to see Mr. Groly again.

But Mr. Groly was in a frolicsome mood and would not talk business. All he wanted to talk about was these stories he had heard about Mr. Pope's horse and he certainly did squeeze the last drop of fun out of the subject. But at last he got serious and he said Frankly Pope all this horse business has put us rather off your outfit. I grant you your stuff is clever. But is it sound?

So Mr. Pope put up an argument. The big appeal of the Groly engines was that they were fool-proof and for years their slogan has been A Child Can Run It. Bishop & Oppper had continued with variations of this and with fair success. But recently they had sent out a page ad showing a child operating a Groly and coming in first in a motorboat race with the caption And A Little Child Shall Lead Them. This had offended some religious groups and so Mr. Pope was able to cast some pretty sour slurs on Bishop & Oppper. He did this indirectly of course for advertising ethics forbids knocking a competitor. It is a sort of blasphemy.

But Mr. Groly was unconvinced and at last he said No no Pope I'm afraid it's no sale. Just on account of this horse business? said Mr. Pope incredulously. But my dear Mr. Groly—No use said Mr. Groly emphatically. And then he laughed and said Tell you what: prove to me that that horse of yours really can talk and I'll give you the account. You will? said Mr. Pope Why that's easy. I'll ride him over to your place—you're only about four miles from Mt. Kisco—and you can have a talk with him yourself. So Mr. Groly said that would be fine and he invited Mr. Pope to bring Mrs. Pope and Ed and come over Sunday and spend the day.

So that night Mr. Pope told Mrs. Pope about the invitation but he didn't say anything about the condition attached to it because Mrs. Pope didn't believe that Ed could talk either. She had never heard him say anything except when Mr. Pope was around and she said Mr. Pope was just doing ventriloquism and pretending to have Ed say a lot of things to her that he didn't dare say himself. But Mr. Pope wanted to talk it over with Ed so he went down to the stable and began to tell him about what had happened.

But Ed was in kind of a bad humor. What the hell is an occasional chair? he asked No don't tell me. I don't believe I could bear it. Well so you lost the account? What do you want me to do—wear hearse plumes? So as Ed was in no mood to be helpful Mr. Pope decided not to tell him about Mr. Groly. He'd just ride over and trust to luck that Ed would talk. There was no use appealing to his better nature. He didn't have any.

Well they went over to Mr. Groly's on Sunday. It was one of these big estates by *House & Garden* out of Renaissance Italy and there were pergolas and pools and a lake with Groly motorboats as thick on it as pennies in a collection plate and Mrs. Pope was delighted. Although she was mad at Mr. Pope for riding over on Ed and making her drive alone in the car. But Wilbur is so attached to that horse she explained to Mrs. Groly You know it's quite touching. Well the horse may do your husband a good turn yet said Mr. Groly and he took Mr. Pope aside and said Well Pope are you going to make him talk to me?

We'll have to wait a while said Mr. Pope. Ed's sort of cranky to-day. Well any time said Mr. Groly with a laugh. I've waited fifty-two years to hear a horse talk and an hour or so more won't make any difference. Moor him out by the garage and come in and have a cocktail.

Look Wilb said Ed when Mr. Pope was loosening the saddle girths. You aren't trying to put something over on me are you? Going to show me off to that little fat guy or anything? Well suppose I was? said Mr. Pope. Suppose I told you that my whole future depended on your saying a word or two for me to him? Wouldn't you do that for me? No said Ed. If your future as an advertising man depends on a horse's recommendation you'd better try the law or the ministry. Besides you know these fancy places give me a pain in the neck. Why couldn't we have ridden over to Gus's to-day and had a couple pails of beer? I suppose you'll be sitting around drinking champagne out of cut glass goblets all afternoon. Well don't expect to find me here when you come back. I put you on your honor Ed said Mr. Pope flinging the reins over Ed's neck.

Well it was a bigger party than Mr. Pope had expected for about twenty people sat down to lunch in the pergola and who to Mr. Pope's disgust was one of them but Mr. Opper of Bishop & Opper. There was champagne at lunch too as Ed had predicted. And Mrs. Pope sat next Mr. Groly who paid her a good deal of attention and was soon calling her Carlotta and even more informal things and I don't know that anybody could blame him for that except perhaps Ed who never could understand what Mr. Pope saw in her. She had the sultry kind of Spanish beauty that has been the making of many a correspondent.

Well the guests went to work on the champagne with a will and the champagne reciprocated nobly and by the time lunch was half over the servants were kept so busy filling glasses that they stopped serving food entirely. And nobody noticed. Mr. Pope says there was a kind of a golden haze over everything and some of the others noticed it too and they had to shout to make themselves heard through it. Perhaps that explains some of the things that happened later. I don't know. Mr. Pope was pretty well sozzled all right and so were most of the others but if he says the things happened I believe him. For *in vino veritas*.

Well anyway on one side of the pergola and behind Mr. Pope was a long sort of lattice covered with vines and by and by he heard a cautious whisper—Hey Wilb! He reached a hand down behind his chair and made emphatic go-away motions with it but it was repeated so Mr. Pope pretended a spider had fallen down his neck and he got up and went around the lattice and there was Ed. Hey Wilb said Ed how about a little drink? O go away Ed said Mr. Pope wearily. Why do you try to complicate things for me like this? Well I'm thirsty said Ed and then he snickered. Say Wilb he said you know that guy Opper? Sitting next to that fat Groly woman that looks like a tomato in chiffon? Well I thought you'd like me to spike his guns for him so I sneaked up behind them a minute ago and when they weren't looking I imitated his voice and paid her a good gross compliment. I thought she'd smack him in the eye. But do you know what she did? Ha, haw! She squeezed his hand under the table and then she whispered in his ear—and boy! has she got him terrified! He can't hardly swallow. O gosh Ed said Mr. Pope I wish you'd stay away. O. K. said Ed huffily I might have known that's all the thanks I'd get. Well don't forget the champagne.

So Mr. Pope went back. And as he sat down Mr. Groly got up and steadied himself with a hand on Mrs. Pope's shoulder and said in a loud voice Well Pope where's that hawking torse—I mean talking horse of yours? Let's have him in and hear what he has to say about the political situation. And everybody shouted Speech! Speech from Ed! We want Ed!

Well then Mr. Pope suddenly saw what he was up against and that Mr. Groly had just asked him there to make a monkey of him. But he pulled back his cheeks in a desperate grin and said Well Mr. Groly Ed is kind of shy and I'm afraid if we ask him in and spring this on him suddenly he might faint right away. And he went on to make a little humorous speech about Ed, tending to show that the whole thing was a joke. But there had been too much gossip about the thing and although everybody laughed they continued to look at Mr. Pope with the joyful expectancy of those about to see a friend publicly mangled. So Mr. Pope said O what the hell! and went out to get Ed.

Well of course Ed wouldn't talk. He just stood looking sullen. And at last when everybody had said everything funny he could think of Mr. Groly said Well Pope I guess it's no sale then. And he looked at Mr. Opper and grinned and Mr. Opper grinned back although not as happily as he would have if Mrs. Groly had not been eying him so indulgently. So Mr. Pope saw that all was lost and he shrugged and said Well Ed I'll keep my word to you anyway. And he dumped the ice out of a bucket and called for a bottle of champagne and emptied it into the bucket and gave it to Ed. Ed drank it in two gulps then looked up sort of startled at Mr. Pope, hiccuped, winked roguishly, and walked off stepping very high.

Well there was sort of a let-down after that and as soon as lunch was over the guests wandered away with champagne buckets toward the lake, and some of them went out in Groly boats. Mr. Groly took Mrs. Pope out in one and Mrs. Groly took Mr. Opper off to see her roses. Mr. Pope looked around for Ed but didn't see him anywhere so he sat down on a bench on the dock and brooded.

Well he had been brooding for some time when there was the sound of some commotion up toward the house. There were shouts and a gabbling and indistinct thumps. The voices subsided but the thumps came nearer and Mr. Pope turned to see Ed bearing down on him with mane and tail flying. Ed looked pretty wild and he was grinning like a clown. Look out you fool! yelled Mr. Pope jumping up You'll be in the lake! Out of the way Wilb said Ed as his hoofs thundered on the dock. I'm going for a little cruise. Mr. Pope made a grab for the bridle and missed and Ed's shoulder knocked him sprawling into the water.

When Mr. Pope came up he grabbed at the first thing handy which was the gunwale of a fast Groly Speed Queen. As he pulled himself over the side he was horrified to see Ed sitting in the cockpit. The horse had evidently made a clean leap into the boat. Cast off Wilb said Ed and get the engine started. We're goin' on a piratical cruise. O come Ed said Mr. Pope this is a hell of a way to act and—But Ed raised an iron-shod hoof. Mutiny! he roared. Cast off, you lubber! I'm captain of this craft. We're going to rove the bounding billow my hearty and sink every ship that floats. We'll ram the hell out of 'em. And he began to sing in a terrible roaring voice—O a life on the briny deep, and a home on the bounding main! So Mr. Pope looked at the iron shoe and then he cast off and started the engine.

They swept out in a curve from the dock with foam flying in a cloud about them and bore down on the nearest boat which contained a Mr. and Mrs. Montgomery Beals who lived in Poughkeepsie in a large old-fashioned house with only one bathroom. With a hoof on the wheel Ed drove into them obliquely, sideswiped and capsized them. Hope they can swim he said and catching sight of the boat in which were Mrs. Pope and Mr. Groly he shouted Treasure ship on the starboard beam! and whirled the wheel to bring them over his bows. My God Ed said Mr. Pope Look what you're doing! That's Carlotta! Good clean water never hurt anybody said Ed with a wink and held on his course.

Mr. Pope looked around despairingly. The four or five other motorboats on the lake were skittering for the shore. The dock was crowded with guests and servants and among them Mr. Pope made out Mr. Opper focusing a camera. That finishes it! he moaned. It was no good reasoning with Ed who was roaring out Sixteen men on a dead man's chest so loud that he couldn't hear him anyway. It's *fifteen* men Ed said Mr. Pope hoping to distract him. But Ed was for once willing to concede a minor point. O. K. he said and began again—Fifteen men on a dead man's chest. And then the Speed Queen at the moment of leaping on her prey suddenly swerved and hummed past, sending a wave over the other boat that half swamped it and drenched its occupants.

Three times the pirate craft made the circuit of the lake with Mr. Pope expostulating and Ed either singing nautical ballads some of the words of which it is fortunate I don't even remember, or sitting with head thrown back and a victorious smile on his long face. At last Ed said Well Wilb we've swept the seas and they are ours. Let's go conquer the land. And then he hiccuped suddenly. He put a hoof over his mouth and said Pawdon me. And then he hiccuped again pretty fundamentally and the smile disappeared and he looked at Mr. Pope in a startled way and said Gosh Wilb I hope I haven't got you in wrong?

O no said Mr. Pope you haven't done a thing Ed. Only entirely ruined my reputation and my future. You understand they think it was me singing those songs? And Opper has even got pictures of us out here. And then as he stopped the engine and they drifted in toward the dock he told Ed about his shattered hopes for the Groly account.

Well Ed was beginning to sober up now and he looked thoughtfully at Mr. Pope for a minute. Then his ears came up and he gave a neighing laugh. *I got it Wilb!* he exclaimed. And as they were getting close inshore he stretched out his neck and whispered something in Mr. Pope's ear. Yes said Mr. Pope but—So Ed whispered something in his other ear and then sat up and said Keep her out a ways. We don't want to land yet. And let me handle this.

Well by this time Mr. Groly had brought Mrs. Pope ashore and she went into the house for dry clothes but Mr. Groly joined the others on the dock. Come in here Pope you crazy fool! he shouted and the others shouted with him and waved bottles encouragingly.

Mr. Pope started to yell apologies but Ed drowned him out. You're the dumbest cluck I ever tried to do work for Groly he roared. Can't you recognize a good advertising stunt when you see one? Advertising stunt! said Mr. Groly You'd be a good press agent for a lunatic asylum Pope. Bring that boat in here. Now wait a minute Mr. Groly began Mr. Pope but Ed cut in again. By God Groly he said have I got to beat it into you with a club? You don't need to be a mechanic to run a Groly engine. Just plain horse sense. Get it? *Horse* sense. With that picture that Opper took of a horse running the boat. A horse. Groly. Hell we've *proved* it to you—here's your demonstration and witnesses and everything.

Well then Mr. Groly began to get it. Horse sense he said. Yes. By George there's something in it! A lot in it! Hey Opper what pictures did you get?

But Mr. Opper wasn't being co-operative. See here Pope he said coming forward if you think I'm going to turn over those pictures to you you're mistaken. I've got some dandies if you too. Test and demonstration my eye! I'm going to send a set of them to every newspaper and advertising man in town. I'll teach you to steal my accounts. O.K. said Ed. Keep 'em if you want to and I'll tell what went on in the summerhouse a little while ago. I guess we'll be about even at that.

Well when she heard this Mrs. Groly gave a terrified look at Mr. Opper who turned sort of blue and came up to her and they talked for a minute. Then they went over to Mr. Groly and

Mr. Opper took the film out of his camera and gave it to him and then went away. And then Ed and Mr. Pope came ashore and Mr. Pope went up to talk about the details of the new plan with Mr. Groly while he was changing into dry clothes.

So that evening when the Popes left Mr. Groly clapped Mr. Pope on the shoulder and said Well Mrs. Pope you ought to be proud of this husband of yours. I told him if his horse could talk I'd give him my account. I still don't believe the horse can talk, but he got the account from me anyway. He's one of the cleverest men in the business. And one of the soundest. And Mrs. Pope looked down at her dress which had been freshly pressed by one of the maids and said Yes. He's got horse sense. I often wonder where he gets it from.

Well Ed would never tell Mr. Pope what he had seen in the summerhouse or what the row had been in the servants' quarters when he had come galloping down to the lake. But a few days later when Mr. Pope showed him Mr. Opper's photographs of their cruise he was pretty proud. One enlargement he liked particularly. It showed him sitting up straight and in profile. That's a fine photo eh Wilb? he said. I like that sort of proud unconquered look I have. It don't do you justice said Mr. Pope. Eh? said Ed Why I think it's very flattering. That's what I mean said Mr. Pope.

[The end of *Plain Horse Sense* by Walter Rollin Brooks]