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# MR. POPE RIDES AGAIN

BY  
WALTER BROOKS

ILLUSTRATED BY PETER ARNO

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*An incredible nag named Ed—who talks, drinks beer, and has a hankering for peace and quiet—knew just what to do when Wilbur was caught with his arm around Richard’s wife.*

This Wilbur Pope had a horse named Ed that he used to go riding on Sundays. Mr. Pope was an advertising account executive five days a week, and on Sundays he liked to get a little peace and quiet, so, after he had had breakfast and read the paper, and before his wife’s friends began dropping in, he would saddle Ed and take to the hills. There are plenty of back roads around Mt. Kisco if you know where to find them, and lots of taverns full of ice-cold beer too. Ed liked peace and beer and quiet as much as Mr. Pope did, so it was a nice arrangement.

Well, there was an abandoned orchard a couple miles from Mr. Pope’s house, and after they had had enough exercise and beer, they used to go up there and take a nap in the shade. And one Sunday when they came ambling through the gap in the stone wall they saw a buckskin pony tied under their favorite tree, and beside him in the grass sat a girl.

“Hell!” said Mr. Pope, and started to turn Ed to go back, but the girl jumped up and waved and called, so he thought he had to go over.

“Why, Wilbur Pope!” said the girl. “Isn’t this nice? I was just wishing someone would come along and talk to me, but I hadn’t hoped it would be you!”

Ed turned around and rolled his eyes at Mr. Pope, but Mr. Pope pretended not to see him.

“I didn’t know you rode, Mrs. Niles,” he said.

“I haven’t for years,” she said, “but now that tires are so scarce, Richard won’t let me use the car Sundays when he plays golf, so I got this pony.”

“Didn’t I hear he was on one of the tire-rationing boards?” said Mr. Pope. “He ought to have tires.”

“He has six brand-new ones in the garage,” said Mrs. Niles, “but he doesn’t feel he should use them yet. . . . But why so formal?” she said, smiling at him. “My friends call me Nita.”

Well, Mr. Pope was not any special friend of the Nileses’, although they lived just over the hill back of his house. But he had met them at several parties which had been anything but formal, and for all he knew, he might have got on quite disrespectful terms with them, for it wasn’t always easy to remember exactly what had happened at parties. So he said, “Sorry, Nita. The formality, I guess, was merely a recognition of the fact that you might not want to be disturbed here.”

“That’s very subtle of you, Wilbur,” said Mrs. Niles, “but whether you disturb me or not, I leave to your intuition.” And she smiled at him with her eyes, which were large and blue.

Well, Mr. Pope had no objection to talking to a pretty girl, but he had come out in search of peace and quiet, and, after all, by this time on Sunday afternoon his own home would be

full of pretty girls, if that was what he wanted. Not to mention Mrs. Pope, who was one of those dark Spanish types that are so terrifying to men, or would be, if the men knew anything. So he said he was afraid he must be getting back.

So Mrs. Niles said she must, too, and she would ride back with him. And she did, and Mr. Pope wasn't bored at all, because she had a trick of turning everything he said into a compliment to herself, and that was a kind of back-handed flattery that made him feel how clever and fascinating he could be even when he didn't try. Ed was pretty bored, though. But of course he couldn't say anything, because he never did to anybody but Mr. Pope, and nobody else even suspected that he could talk.

Well, Mrs. Niles left them at her gate, and they rode on toward home, and neither of them said anything for half a mile. And then Ed said disgustingly, "Pah!"

"Pah yourself," said Mr. Pope. "What's the matter, Ed?"

"Oh, you make me sick," said Ed, "sitting up there gloating over your conquest."

"What conquest?" said Mr. Pope self-consciously.

But Ed just shrugged his shoulders so Mr. Pope's hat fell over his eyes, and then they were home.

Well, the next Sunday when they turned into the orchard, there was Mrs. Niles under the apple tree, and Mr. Pope didn't see how he could get away without being impolite, so he sat and talked to her quite a long time. He tied Ed on the other side of the tree, but, although the horse couldn't see, he could still snort derisively, and every time Mr. Pope said anything, he did. Mrs. Niles didn't think anything about it, except to wonder once if Ed had a cold, but anybody who has ever suspected a kid brother behind the davenport while handing out his best line will know how Mr. Pope felt. He was pretty short with Ed on the way home.

On the following Sunday, when Mr. Pope led Ed out of the barn, the horse said, "Hey, look, Wilb, if you're going to meet the girl friend again, take the car and leave me home, will you? Because I just can't take it."

"You can't take what?" said Mr. Pope.

And Ed said, "That fancy talk you hand out, and where you get it I don't know—you sound like a third-rate Maugham novel."

"I'll pass over that crack," said Mr. Pope, "because I haven't any intention of running into Mrs. Niles today, if I can help it, and I thought we'd go up past Jerry's and through Patten's Woods."

"You mean that?" said Ed, and Mr. Pope said, "Of course I mean it, for I want to have a nice quiet time as much as you do."

"O.K.," said Ed; "then I'll hold my fire."

Well, they had some beer at Jerry's, but just as they were coming out, Mrs. Niles came cantering along, and then it was just like last Sunday. And the three following Sundays were the same. Mr. Pope said he didn't like to be impolite, and of course they had to go past the Nileses' to reach most of the back roads, and what could he do? Ed told him, but Mr. Pope didn't do anything about it.

And then one Sunday, Mrs. Niles looked worried. "Oh, Wilbur," she said as she pulled up alongside him on the road back of her house, "I'm glad we met. Oh, dear, it's just too silly for words, but Richard has found out about us, and he's frightfully angry."

"Found out?" said Mr. Pope. "But what is there to find out?"

"Oh, why, nothing, of course," said Mrs. Niles, "but—well, we have been meeting in that remote place, haven't we? And you know how Richard is!"

“No,” said Mr. Pope. “How is he?”

“Well,” said Mrs. Niles, “he went and phoned Carlotta about it yesterday.”

“Well, I don’t think Carlotta will be much disturbed,” said Mr. Pope, smiling.

Mrs. Niles gave him a wide blue stare and said, “Of course, you would know whether she should be or not. And I do like your being so sure of yourself, Wilbur.”

“Oh, don’t be stuffy,” said Mr. Pope. “You know what I mean.”

“What do you mean?” said Mrs. Niles.

Well, Mr. Pope didn’t have any idea what he meant, but he felt he had to say something—I don’t know why—and so he opened his mouth to say it, but just then Ed decided it would be a good thing to stumble, and he did, and Mr. Pope’s hat fell over his eyes and he bit his tongue, and all he said was, “Hell!”

And Mrs. Niles laughed merrily and said, “Let’s go up to the orchard and talk it over.”

Mr. Pope didn’t want to, but he was mad at Ed for stumbling, so he said, “Let’s.”

So they rode up and sat under the apple tree, and Mrs. Niles said, “Oh, Wilbur, dear, what are we going to do?” and Mr. Pope said, “Well, if Richard doesn’t like your riding with me, perhaps you’d better stop it.”

But Mrs. Niles turned her eyes on him full strength, and the tears welled up, but she blotted them before they ran down and eroded her make-up, and she said, “Oh, you are so hard!”

“No, I am not hard,” said Mr. Pope, “and it has been very pleasant riding together, but \_\_\_\_\_”

“Oh, don’t say it!” burst out Mrs. Niles. “Don’t talk about common sense! I am sick of common sense!” and she began a sort of low sobbing, which, to Ed, behind the tree, seemed pretty artificial, but to Mr. Pope, rather touching. For, after all, she was sobbing for him, and to have anybody sob for you gives you a pretty strong shot in the ego.

So he moved closer and patted her shoulder comfortingly. But he looked around first to see where Ed was. For Ed had once leaned over his shoulder and kissed a girl, and the girl had thought it was Mr. Pope and it had caused quite a lot of trouble. And he felt that a kiss from Ed at this juncture would be a large-scale disaster.

“There, there,” he said, and he reflected that it was rather pleasant to comfort a girl who was crying. For Mrs. Pope only cried when she was mad, and if you tried to comfort her then, you would probably lose an eye.

So he went on patting, and Mrs. Niles went on sobbing and talking, and she made it pretty plain that whatever her husband said, she wasn’t going to stop seeing Mr. Pope. She seemed to take it for granted that Mr. Pope felt the same way. Mr. Pope didn’t, but he had a kind of antiquated chivalry toward women which made it ungallant to inform them in so many words that you did not care to see them if it might mean a poke in the nose. So, like a darn fool, he put his arm around her and said, “But really, Nita, I do think we’ll have to stop seeing each other.”

And they were sitting like that when Mr. Niles came panting up from where he had left his car in the road at the foot of the hill.

Mr. Niles was mad, all right. He grabbed Mrs. Niles by the arm and pulled her to her feet and said, “You get on your horse and go home! . . . And as for you, Pope——” he said.



They were sitting like that when Mr. Niles came panting up from where he had left his car at the foot of the hill.

“Oh, don’t be an ass, Niles,” said Mr. Pope. “Nita was just telling me that you had misunderstood our meetings—which have been entirely by chance and——”

“Yeah,” interrupted Mr. Niles. “I saw her telling you,” and he advanced threateningly.

Mr. Pope had no intention of getting into a fight over somebody he didn’t care if he never saw again, and he felt pretty silly too. He couldn’t figure out how he had ever got into such a situation. He tried not to look as guilty as he felt—for, after all, he had been sitting with his arm around the guy’s wife—and he said, “I don’t mean anything in Nita’s life. We’ve happened to meet—Hey, quit, you fool!” he shouted, side-stepping a furious right swing that Mr. Niles had aimed at his jaw.

Well, Mr. Niles towered half a foot above Mr. Pope, and Ed, who had been peeking around the tree, decided it was time for a diversion. So he hauled off and kicked the buckskin pony in the ribs. The buckskin reared and smacked Ed on the nose, and it was several minutes before Mr. Niles and Mr. Pope got the squealing animals separated. Then Mr. Pope prudently mounted.

Mrs. Niles was weeping bitterly with one eye and watching the two men with the other, and Mr. Niles was feeling of his shoulder, where one of Ed’s hoofs had grazed him, and he said, “You watch your step, Pope; I warn you.”

“Oh, come, Niles,” said Mr. Pope. “Don’t be medieval. You can’t stop my riding.”

“I can stop your riding with my wife,” said Mr. Niles, “and don’t you forget it.”

“Well,” said Mr. Pope, “I gather you encouraged Nita to ride to save wear on your tires, and if you wouldn’t be such a hog about your car and would let her use it, she probably wouldn’t have much interest in riding, and then she certainly wouldn’t meet me. But as there are only a certain number of dirt roads around here——”

“What arrangements I make with my wife are my business.”

“And my opinions are mine,” said Mr. Pope, “and I must say that a man who has six brand-new tires tucked away and still won’t let his wife use his car——”

“Who told you that?” shouted Mr. Niles; and Mr. Pope said, “Oh, a little bird,” and rode quickly off.

“You kicked Niles in the shoulder, Ed,” he said as they ambled home. “You ought to be more careful; you might have killed the guy.”

“Yeah,” said Ed, “and then you could have got a divorce and married your Nita.”

“Don’t talk nonsense,” said Mr. Pope. “I wouldn’t marry her if she were the last woman on earth.”

“Yeah?” said Ed. “Well, you certainly acted like she was the last woman on earth. Gee, I can’t figure you out, Wilb,” he said. “You mean you ain’t making a play for her?”

“Certainly not,” said Mr. Pope.

“Then maybe it’s as well I didn’t hit the guy’s head, like I intended,” said Ed. “But if that’s so, you certainly missed your cues.”

Mr. Pope asked, “How so?”

And Ed said, “Well, my guess is she ain’t making a play for you either. Not a serious one, anyway. She wants to use that car, and if old whoosis can be made to think her riding is just a blind to meet some guy she wants to build a nest with——”

“Could be,” said Mr. Pope.

“Is,” said Ed. “And what’s more,” he said, “if you really make a good strong play for her, she’ll be scared pointless. And we’ll have our orchard back,” he said.

But Mr. Pope thought it was a terrible idea. “If you think I’m going all out to try to scare her off,” he said, “you’re crazy.”

“You think maybe you’d be stuck with her?” said Ed. “Well, you’re stuck with her now, for what do you bet we run into her again next week?”

Mr. Pope didn’t answer and they rode home. And there was more trouble. For, as they rode up the drive, they saw Mr. Pope’s car, and some people looking at it, and well they might look at it, for the right front fender was smashed and the front tires looked as if they had been chewed by lions.

Mrs. Pope ran up to Mr. Pope, and said, “Oh, Wilbur, I am afraid I have wrecked our front tires, for I ran off the road and into a barbed-wire fence.”

Mr. Pope said, “Oh,” and looked at the tires, and then he said, “Well, that ends our jolly motoring days for the duration; for, as you know, I have only the one spare.”

“Well, I said I was sorry,” said Mrs. Pope defiantly, “and you might ask if I’m all right.”

So Mr. Pope did, and Mrs. Pope said she was, and Mr. Pope asked how it happened.

“Well, I had Jed Witherspoon with me,” said Mrs. Pope.

“Ah,” said Mr. Pope, “and were you driving with one hand or something?”

“Well, in a way,” said Mrs. Pope, “because I had to slap his face, and we were on a curve and I sort of lost control.”

“Couldn’t you have waited until pulling up before slapping him?” said Mr. Pope.

“No,” said Mrs. Pope, “because he would have misunderstood if I had stopped the car.”

“Well, it’s too bad,” said Mr. Pope, “and I still think it might have been simpler to have pulled up and then to have removed his misunderstanding, than to have spoiled two perfectly good tires.”

“Oh, you do!” said Mrs. Pope angrily.

And Mr. Pope said firmly, “Yes, I do!”



And Mrs. Pope said, “Well, you’re a good one to talk! Running about and making a spectacle of yourself with that little Niles creature every Sunday!”

So Mr. Pope rode Ed over to the barn.

“Well, Ed,” he said, “I guess you’ll have to take me to the train mornings now. I haven’t a car any more.”

“Yeah?” said Ed. “And where do you park me—in that lousy garage of Duffy’s?”

“Oh, it won’t be so bad,” said Mr. Pope, “and you’ll probably hear a lot of good stories.”

“There’s only three good stories, and I know them,” said Ed, and he began to complain.

But Mr. Pope was sore about the car, and he said, “Don’t give me an argument. Maybe later I can get some retreads, but until then we ride.”

“You might apply to Niles’ rationing board,” said Ed.

“You’re a big help,” said Mr. Pope.

Well, Mr. Pope spent an unpleasant evening, during which it became plain that Mr. Niles had indeed talked to Mrs. Pope, and with considerable imaginative detail. In the morning he went out to saddle Ed to ride to the station. And there in the middle of the barn floor were two brand-new tires.

“Hey, Ed,” he said. “What’s this?”

“Oh, them?” said Ed in an offhand way. “Oh, those tires. Yeah. Well, what do you know!”

“What do you know?” said Mr. Pope.

And Ed said, “Oh, Wilb, I might as well tell you. I sneaked over to Niles’ place last night and picked ’em up for you.”

“Good Lord, Ed,” said Mr. Pope, “you mean you stole them? And how’d you get in his garage?”

“Well,” said Ed, “I sort of leaned against the door, and it flew right open, and then Niles came out to see what the noise was, but I’d pulled the door to, and I just sort of joined two cows that were standing in the next field, till he went in the house. Then I went back and stuck my head through a couple tires and brought ’em over. . . . Now look,” he said, as Mr. Pope started to blow up. “Don’t be a sap, Wilb. Get those tires on and drive to the station, and nobody’ll ever know the difference.”

“You darned fool,” said Mr. Pope. “Those tires have got serial numbers on ’em, and anyway, I don’t drive with stolen tires. We’ll have to get ’em back somehow.” He glanced apprehensively out of the barn door, and then picked up the tires and rolled them into the harness closet. “Well,” he said, “I haven’t time to think about it now. Come on; I’m late for the train as it is.”

Well, that evening Mr. Pope made Ed promise to take the tires back, and he and Mrs. Pope went off to the movies with the Brintons. When the Brintons brought them home, it was late, and they were just starting into the house when they heard a pounding out in the barn, and they went out to see what it was. As they got nearer they heard muffled shouting, and it seemed to come from the harness closet, so Mr. Pope switched on the light and unlocked the harness-closet door, and out tumbled Mr. Niles.

Well, that was quite a surprise. Mrs. Pope screamed, and Mr. Pope said, “Well, for heaven’s sake!”

And Mr. Niles, who gave the general effect of having been well shaken up in an ash can, put his face close to Mr. Pope’s and said between his teeth, “You’re going to regret this, Pope, till the last day you live!”

Well, Mr. Pope could see that the two tires were no longer in the harness closet, and they weren't in sight anywhere around the barn either. Ed was in his stall, munching away stolidly on a wisp of hay.

"I don't know what you're talking about," he said, "and perhaps you'd better explain why I find you skulking in my harness closet."

"Skulking!" yelled Mr. Niles. "Skulking!" and his voice rose to a shriek, and then he got hold of himself and said, "I don't know how much you know about this, Mrs. Pope, but I don't propose to drop it, even if your husband returns the tires he stole from my garage last night, and while I am sorry to embarrass you, I don't intend to let him out of my sight until I can get the police here."

"Oh, come," said Mrs. Pope. "Why should you think Wilbur would steal your tires?"

"He was the only one who knew I had them," said Mr. Niles. "My wife told him, and that was why I came here to look for them."

"Ah, yes, your wife," said Mrs. Pope thoughtfully. "Well, Wilbur might try to steal your wife, but I don't think he'd steal your tires."

"But I found them here," said Mr. Niles.

"Yeah?" said Mr. Pope, who had just received a reassuring wink from Ed. "Well, where are they?"

"Wherever you hid them after you shoved me into that closet," said Mr. Niles, "and if you want to——"

"Just a minute," interrupted Mrs. Pope sharply. "Wilbur couldn't have shoved you into any closet, because we've been at the movies all the evening. But I'd like to get this thing cleared up myself, and so you can watch Wilbur if you want to, while I go in and phone the police." And she left the barn.

Well, it was half an hour before a police car turned into the driveway, and it was an unpleasant half hour for Mr. Pope, for Mr. Niles just stood and glared steadily at him, without saying a word. Mr. Niles' story was that he had driven over and found the missing tires in the harness closet, and he had just rolled them out when somebody slammed the door on him and locked him in. "It was Pope all right," he said, "because I heard him laugh, and he came back a couple of times and laughed at me, and I suppose we will find the tires hidden somewhere around here, officer."

"Well, it don't seem to me——" began the trooper, scratching his head, and then he said, "You say you were at the movies, Mr. Pope?"

"With Mr. and Mrs. Brinton," said Mrs. Pope, "and you can easily phone them and check up."

"No," said Mr. Pope; "let him make a complete search. Then, when I sue Niles for making this charge, as I certainly intend to do, we'll have a complete story."

So the trooper searched. He examined the tires on Mr. Pope's car and he searched the house and the barn and every bush and tree on the place.

And while he was searching, Mr. Pope took a measure of oats in to Ed.

"Where are they?" he whispered, and Ed said, "Make him look in his garage. I took 'em back. Boy, did the guy use scurrilous language!" he said with a giggle. "After I shoved the door to, I had to sit against it until I could turn the key with my teeth, and my, my, such talk!"

Well, pretty soon the trooper and Mr. Niles came back, and the trooper was good and angry, and he said, "Well, Mr. Pope, Mr. Niles may have seen those tires here, but they aren't

here now, and I've checked with Mr. Brinton on the phone, and you certainly couldn't have locked Mr. Niles into the closet. So what do I do now?"

Mr. Pope said it seemed obvious to him that Mr. Niles suffered from delusions and that perhaps they'd all better go over and look in the Nileses' garage. So Mr. Niles got into his car, which he had left out in the road, and the trooper took the Popes in the police car, and they drove over. And sure enough, there were all of Mr. Niles' six tires in a neat pile in the corner of his garage.

Well, Mr. Niles didn't have much to say, but Mr. Pope had plenty. "Well, there you are, officer," he said, "and if you ask me, hoarding of this kind is pretty darned unpatriotic—particularly in a member of a tire-rationing board."

"I bought those tires long before rationing started," said Mr. Niles, but in a rather subdued voice.

"Who's to say?" said Mr. Pope. "You might be as mistaken about that as you were about where they were. . . . Eh, officer? Not a nice story, if it got around locally." The trooper shook his head and looked with disgust at Mr. Niles. "Now, you take me," said Mr. Pope. "You saw my car. I've had to quit using it. And here's a member of the board who has six new spares. Six! Don't seem fair, does it?"

The trooper said it didn't.

"Now, of course," Mr. Pope went on, "I wouldn't have been justified in stealing two of these tires. But if I told you that I offered Mr. Niles fifteen dollars apiece for two of them and that he refused to let me have them——"

"You never tried to buy any tires of me!" exclaimed Mr. Niles.

"You see?" said Mr. Pope, and the trooper nodded.

"Oh," said Mr. Niles, looking at Mr. Pope with his eyes narrowed, "I begin to see too." He thought for a minute. "I don't get this thing at all," he said. "I don't know how you did it, or why. But you can make things unpleasant for me. All right, Pope. I won't apologize, but you can have two of those tires."

"That's fine," said the trooper. "That's fine. And you gentlemen——"

"We're satisfied, I think," said Mr. Pope, pulling out his checkbook.

"Yes," said Mr. Niles grudgingly, "and thank you, officer. I'm sorry I called you out. If there's anything I can do for you any time——"

The trooper grinned. "I'll remember that," he said, "whatever else I forget."

Well, the following Sunday, Mr. Pope and Ed went out as usual. Ed felt pretty good, because he wasn't going to have to spend most of the week in Duffy's garage, waiting for Mr. Pope to come back from the city, and he wanted to celebrate, so Mr. Pope had stuck a bottle of whisky in his pocket. Ed hadn't wanted to go up to the orchard, but Mr. Pope said he'd be darned if he'd be driven out of such a peaceful spot by any darned girl, and anyway, he said, after the bawling-out Niles gave her, she wouldn't try it again. Ed wasn't convinced, but he wanted to get at the bottle, so they went up and sat under their tree and passed the bottle back and forth and had a nice time.

By early afternoon they were pretty well oiled, and they sang and shouted and carried on until the orchard sounded like a reunion of the class of 1910. But Ed was still kind of nervous, and finally he said, "Maybe we're making too much racket, Wilb, if that pest is galloping around on her pony."

"Pooh!" said Mr. Pope.

But Ed said, "Pooh all you want to, but she won't give up so easy."

“She don’t want me,” said Mr. Pope.

“She wouldn’t leave her happy home for you,” said Ed, “but I know her kind. She’s a scalp hunter, and until she’s tore your scalp off, she won’t quit.”

“You mean if she knew she could get me,” said Mr. Pope, “she’d have no further interest?”

“Sure,” said Ed.

And Mr. Pope said, “Well, that’s easy. If she shows up, I’ll tear off my own scalp and hand it to her, and then we can go on drinking.”

“Is that a promise?” said Ed.

And Mr. Pope said, “Sure. Pass the bottle.”

Well, they had hardly had two more drinks when Ed said, “Oh-oh!” and pointed with one hoof to the gap in the stone wall, and Mr. Pope looked, and there was Mrs. Niles on her pony.

“Why, Wilbur,” she said, dismounting, “how nice! I thought maybe after what Richard said——”

“Who’s Richard?” said Mr. Pope, and he shook his head to clear it. “My, Nita,” he said, “you’re purry as a pitcher!”

“Am I your Nita?” said Mrs. Niles lightly.

“One man’s Nita ‘nother man’s poison,” said Mr. Pope.

“Why, Wilbur, I believe you’re tight!” she said, and she looked at the bottle, and then at Ed, who had rolled over and was lying in the grass with his eyes shut. “And your poor horse!” she said. “He’s tired out!”

She led her pony around the other side of the tree to tie him, and Ed opened one eye.

“Remember your promise,” he whispered.

Mr. Pope frowned. “Oh, now listen, Ed,” he began, but Ed put his mouth close to Mr. Pope’s ear.

“You keep this up,” he muttered, “and you’ll have to slug it out some bright Sunday with Nilesy. Be a man, Wilb.”

“Yeah,” said Mr. Pope, “but——”

“O.K.,” said Ed, jumping up, “then I’m leaving and you can walk home.”

Mr. Pope caught at the bridle, but missed it.

“Oh, all right,” he said.

“What did you say?” asked Mrs. Niles, coming back and sitting down beside him.

“Just addressing my charger,” said Mr. Pope. “Poor old Ed,” he said, “I’ve ridden him pretty hard today.” Then he shook his head sadly. “But I can’t help it,” he said. “I’m about at the end of my rope, Nita.”

“Why, what do you mean?” she said.

And he said, “Well, we can’t go on like this.”

Mrs. Niles screwed up her eyes and looked at him.

“What on earth are you talking about?” she demanded.

“Talking about us,” said Mr. Pope. “Two loving hearts serrated by a few words mimbled by a munister—I mean mumbled by a minister. Nice word, ‘mimbled.’ I remember—I mean, I remember when we were married, the minister——” He stopped as Ed gave a loud snort, and then said, “Well, anyway, there’s too many m’s in that, and as I was going to say, I told Carlotta last night that you and I——”

“You what?” shouted Mrs. Niles. “Oh, Wilbur, you fool! You don’t mean you went and ——”

“Sure, I did,” said Mr. Pope; “I went and did. Well, we got to accept the ineffable, haven’t we? And what we got to do, we got to go tell Richard right away.”

“Tell Richard!” screamed Mrs. Niles, jumping to her feet.

“Sure, sure,” said Mr. Pope. “We go to him hand in hand and tell him frankly and freely—Why, Richard’s a human being just like us,” said Mr. Pope—“in many respects, that is—and after all, if we really want to marry each——”

“You’re drunk!” interrupted Mrs. Niles harshly. “Why, I never heard such a lot of nonsense in my life! Good heavens, just because I stop and talk to you once in a while——”

“Why, Nita,” said Mr. Pope, “you distinctly said——”

“Well,” said Mrs. Niles, untying the pony’s reins, “I’ll distinctly say now that you’re a conceited fool, and—why, I wouldn’t marry you if you were the last man on earth!”

“You and her too,” said Ed, opening one eye as Mrs. Niles cantered off.

“Yeah,” said Mr. Pope. “Well, Ed, the orchard’s ours again.”

“Yeah?” said Ed, sitting up.

“What do you mean, yeah?” said Mr. Pope. “You heard the line I handed her.”

Ed yawned and sat up. “Dear me,” he said, “I must have dropped off. Same old line, was it, Wilb?” Then he grinned. “Oh, I won’t kid you, Wilb; I heard it all, and you done fine. I didn’t think you had it in you. And maybe you wouldn’t have had it in you if you hadn’t had a lot of good whisky in you too. Yeah,” said Ed, “some folks take women for their inspiration, but me, I take whisky. Pass the bottle, Wilb.”

[The end of *Mr. Pope Rides Again* by Walter Rollin Brooks]