

MARCH 1, 1941

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Title: Ed Holds a Seance

Date of first publication: 1941

Author: Walter Rollin Brooks (1886-1958)

Date first posted: Feb. 21, 2022

Date last updated: Feb. 21, 2022

Faded Page eBook #20220254

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Suddenly there was a thump of hoofs and a terrific war whoop.



BY
WALTER BROOKS

First published *Liberty*, March 1, 1941.

Laughs! Here's that talking horse again in some new, blithely hilarious skulduggery

There was a Mr. and Mrs. Hastings that bought a big place near the Wilbur Popes outside of Mount Kisco. You take the White House and dwindle it a little and add a patio, a dash of Tuscany, set it in thirty acres of park and you get the idea. Mr. Hastings manufactured springs for railroad cars. Mrs. Hastings communicated with spirits.

Well the Popes got acquainted with them and they dined at each others' houses occasionally. But Mr. Pope and Mr. Hastings sort of took to each other. Sunday afternoons when Mrs. Pope's friends had gathered to drink cocktails and give their egos a workout Mr. Pope would jog over on his horse Ed for a long talk with Mr. Hastings. Mrs. Hastings didn't bother them much because the spirits were more active on Sunday and she stayed in at her Ouija board. Sometimes she pushed it around alone but usually a Mr. George Talcott who had introduced her to the mazes of the other world dropped in to assist her.

Well this was nice for Mr. Pope but Ed didn't like it much. Sunday afternoons were the time when he and Mr. Pope used to ramble around Westchester trying different kinds of beer and sitting in the shade to gossip. Because Ed could talk. Only nobody knew it but Mr. Pope and Ed wouldn't talk in front of anybody else. Because he said once an animal let on he could talk where was he? In a circus that's where he was.

Now Mr. Pope was an advertising account executive but although Mr. Hastings was a manufacturer Mr. Pope's liking for him was pretty disinterested. Of course Ed who always put the worst construction on everything thought it wasn't. You can't like the guy as much as all that Wilb he said. Man who passes the plate in church. He just ain't your kind. Why he wouldn't say damn if—I sometimes think said Mr. Pope that if there were a little less damn and a little freer flow to your conversation it might be more acceptable. And what's the matter with passing the plate? Nothing—nothing at all said Ed. Many a young man's made his start that way. Nickel here and a quarter there—it all counts up.

Well said Mr. Pope I don't deny that if Hastings made anything the public bought I might try to pry an appropriation out of him. But car springs! The most they'd do would be notices in trade papers. Well you're always talking about educating the public said Ed. Make 'em car

spring conscious. Make 'em demand Hastings springs. Your mind is free for higher things when traveling on Hastings springs—ain't that what you call inspirational copy? It doesn't inspire me much said Mr. Pope. Anyway it's no use.

Well Mr. Pope did think about Ed's suggestion and even tried a sort of low pressure sales talk. But Mr. Hastings was one of those men who like to make up their own minds and always say no at the first sniff of salesmanship. So Mr. Pope stopped.

Sometimes on Sundays when they got tired talking they would go in and take a whirl at Ouija with Mrs. Hastings if Mr. Talcott wasn't there. She was sort of sensible about Ouija if you can be sensible about such things and didn't mind their skeptical remarks. Mr. Pope was a little afraid of her partly because she was so familiar with the other world and partly because she was so ornamental a part of this one. I guess like most men he was always a little scared of beautiful women though as Ed said he kind of enjoyed his terror.

One of the most persistent of the message bearers from the other shore was a child named Little Edie who talked baby talk. Of course Ouija had to spell everything out and you wouldn't have thought a five year old child could manage any spelling at all much less baby talk. But Edie did. Which makes her quite a remarkable child even for a spirit.

Well one Sunday the Hastings and Mr. Pope were pushing Ouija around and after Mrs. Hastings had got some advice from Little Edie about what to wear at the Farnhams' party Mr. Pope asked what had become of some onyx cuff links he claimed to have lost. So Ouija jumped around and spelled out Pitty pitty links. Yes they're very pretty Edie said Mr. Pope and where are they? In oo dwesser said Edie—in teeny weeny box. Really? said Mr. Pope. Are you sure? Edie sure said Edie. Twoss her heart. Sorry Edie said Mr. Pope I guess I fooled you that time. I haven't got any onyx links.

O Mr. Pope said Mrs. Hastings reproachfully you shouldn't fool Edie that way. O look! she said. For Ouija was darting all over the board. Naughty bad mans it spelled. Oo makes fun of oos 'ittle Edie. Go way bad mans! O come Edie said Mr. Pope I'm sorry. I—Edie do way spelled Ouija. Never tum back. And though they coaxed her Ouija wouldn't move again.

Well said Mr. Hastings I'm sorry Edie's gone. But suppose you try some of your other familiars Evelyn. So Mrs. Hastings tried. She called them by name and pleaded and cajoled but Ouija wouldn't move. This is curious she said. I've never known—Isn't there any one here who wants to communicate? And a deep voice over by the window said Dom Pedro Milan in here.

Mrs. Hastings gasped and turned pale and her hands went to her mouth but the two men didn't notice. They jumped up and ran to the window. But there was nobody there—nobody that is except Ed who was standing looking off with a wistful expression across the summer landscape. Darned funny said Mr. Hastings. Did you hear what I heard Pope? Sounded like a voice said Mr. Pope but I don't know what it said. Queer thing—acoustics. With conditions just right I suppose a voice down by the garage would sound almost as if it was in the room. Didn't you hear it Evelyn? said Mr. Hastings. I—I heard something said Mrs. Hastings. Not clearly. I—really it startled me so dear that I think—if you'll excuse me—And she left the room.

Well the two men talked about it for a while but didn't get anywhere and Mr. Pope left. When he and Ed were out of the drive he said I hope you're not going to start doing spirit voices Ed. What was the idea of that outburst? I'm sorry Wilb said Ed but I just couldn't hold in any longer. Look. If you'd been tied outside that window all these Sundays when Mrs. H. and that Talcott guy were getting the dope on their former lives together—well you'd bust out

too. Not that Talcott ain't smart. He's figured the only way to get anywhere with Mrs. H. is by some of this mystic hocus-pocus and boy has he got good connections on the other side of Jordan! He's got her convinced that he and she was lovers back in former lives only a cruel fate always parted 'em. Usually the cruel fate was a guy about her husband's height and general get-up. I see said Mr. Pope—and this Dom Pedro? He's the head spirit who passes out most of the information said Ed. Spanish priest or something who was just going to marry 'em in fifteen-something when a guy hammers on the door. In the King's name! So they drag Talcott up to the palace and the King says My boy Cortes and his mob are just starting out to take over Mexico and you're drafted. You got just about time to get to the dock.

I see said Mr. Pope. So he sailed away and never came back. Not until just recently said Ed. Only now he's Talcott instead of Don Balthazar Parmesan. Go on said Mr. Pope Mrs. Hastings couldn't swallow all that stuff. O she laughs at it some said Ed but she's sold on it. Sure. The guy's come back to claim his bride. O he's got something all right. Why Wilb when old Dom Pedro comes through on the Ouija board and Talcott begins remembering things—you know—the throb of the guitar and the swooning scent of the what's-it in the velvet Spanish nights—I dunno Wilb. It's kinda like being in church.

Mr. Pope couldn't think of anything to say to this so he said it. He was worried though. If Talcott's line was good enough to impress a cynical old horse like Ed it must be pretty hot. And Mr. Hastings wasn't the man to grab Talcott and twist his head off. He'd just sit back proud and silent until Don Balthazar ran off with his wife. But there isn't anything I can do he said.

He didn't know he'd spoken aloud until Ed said O I don't know. All those Spanish cavaliers were always galloping around on horseback weren't they? He's remembered so much he certainly hasn't forgotten how to ride in four hundred years. Coax him out and let him try my paces. Ed giggled. Boy I'll jolt some of the grandee out of him. No said Mr. Pope we mustn't interfere between husband and wife. It isn't done. Hell said Ed what's Talcott doing? Anyway you're so fond of this Hastings—But Mr. Pope said no again firmly and Ed didn't say any more.

Well a few evenings later the Hastings came over and after dinner they were all walking around in the garden and just as Mrs. Hastings and Mr. Pope went past the door of the barn where Ed lived a voice said Hey so naughty bad mans how about my supper? Mrs. Hastings gave a little shriek and her hands went up to her mouth. Mr. Pope ran into the barn. Shut up you fool he whispered as he dumped a measure of oats in the manger. Mrs. Hastings is out there. I was coming out to feed you.

Mrs. Hastings had come to the door of the barn. Mr. Pope? she called. Was it—? That voice—I thought I'd heard it before. Nobody here said Mr. Pope coming out. It's a funny thing he went on that we're always hearing voices in that barn. Very odd isn't it? Yes, very odd indeed said Mrs. Hastings. That sort of baby talk too that Little Edie uses. Really Mr. Pope I think the Psychological Research Society would be very much interested. O I'm sorry said Mr. Pope but I'm afraid that wouldn't do. That kind of publicity is bad for an advertising man. Well said Mrs. Hastings perhaps you're right. But you wouldn't mind if I just tried a little experiment would you? O no said Mr. Pope doubtfully. Not at all.

So they went a little way into the dark barn. Your horse is here isn't he? said Mrs. Hastings. They're usually so frightened of the supernatural—O Ed never pays any attention to anything any one says to him said Mr. Pope so I guess he wouldn't mind a disembodied voice. So Mrs. Hastings said firmly Is anybody here that wishes to communicate with me?

Well there wasn't any sound for a minute and then a dreadful falsetto voice said 'ittle Edie dot message for Mr. Hasty. For Frank! said Mrs. Hastings. O get him will you? Or no—I'd better. He doesn't believe in this sort of thing and I'll have to persuade him. So Mrs. Hastings ran to get her husband.

Say look Ed said Mr. Pope quickly. Cut this out will you? 'ittle Edie say nuts to oo Mr. bad mans Pope squeaked Ed. How'm I doing Wilb? You're doing us into one hell of a mess said Mr. Pope bitterly. Oo! said Ed. Bad mans say naughty word to 'ittle Edie—What's all this Pope? said Mr. Hastings coming up.

Mr. Pope decided to play safe. Darned if I know he said. We heard some sort of voice in here and Evelyn asked some questions and apparently got some answers though I didn't hear anything. You didn't hear Little Edie? said Mrs. Hastings. I heard something said Mr. Pope but I thought it might be mice. Mice! exclaimed Mrs. Hastings. Wolves is more like it. Listen Frank. Are you here Edie? And the voice squeaked Edie here. There said Mrs. Hastings—didn't you hear that? Sorry said Mr. Pope I didn't hear anything. By the way where's Carlotta? She ran in when that voice came said Mr. Hastings. Scared I guess.

Well Edie said Mrs. Hastings have you a message? Message for Mr. Hasty said Ed. Mr. Hastings make spwings—jouncy-jouncy? Well not too jouncy said Mr. Hastings peering about. People don't like it. Edie like jouncy—not like squeaky bumpy said Ed. Edie fink lots of mans—ride on choo-choo—like to ride on jouncy Hasty spwings. I see said Mr. Hastings thoughtfully. I suppose you can't hear any of this Pope? Do you really mean you're hearing something? said Mr. Pope. This seems rather dull. Come on. Let's go in and play cards. Not dull at all said Mr. Hastings and Mr. Pope didn't like the way he said it. Is there any more Edie? said Mrs. Hastings.

So Ed went on. He had worked up a dreadful approximation of the sort of presentation Mr. Pope might have made and he brought in the Journey Jitters that people get from riding on the wrong kind of springs and outlined a rather grandiose campaign. It was probably the first advertising presentation ever made in bona-fide baby talk in the United States of America. And when he got through nobody said anything for a minute and then Mr. Hastings said Is there a light in here? So Mr. Pope turned on the light and then Mr. Hastings went carefully all over the barn.

What on earth are you looking for Frank? said Mrs. Hastings. Wires said her husband. Smart of you Pope to wire your barn for sound. But frankly I'm disappointed in you he went on coldly. Good heavens man you have a perfect right to try to get me to advertise. But not in this underhand way. And I must say it wasn't very clever of you to believe I took any stock in this spiritualism.

Just a minute said Mr. Pope. I give you my word I never heard of these Journey Jitters or any of the rest of it before in my life. O said Mr. Hastings so you did hear it? I thought so. Since you probably wrote the script. The gibe stung Mr. Pope's professional pride. Listen he said. If I'd written that script it would have made some sense and it wouldn't have been in baby talk either. I don't know said Mr. Hastings. I suppose it's really cleverer this way. Little Edie wouldn't know much about advertising. Well we live and learn. Come along Evelyn.

Mr. Pope couldn't trust himself to say anything to Ed. When the Hastings left he went in the house. Mrs. Pope was reading. It's about time she said. Why—where are the Hastings? Mr. Pope said Mrs. Hastings had had a headache so they'd decided to go home. Without saying good night or anything? said Mrs. Pope. Wilbur you didn't insult them or anything? Well said

Mr. Pope, you see they thought they got some sort of spirit communication—I don't want to hear about it said Mrs. Pope. I don't believe in such things and anyway I think they're wicked and dangerous. Very queer people the Hastings.

Well for a week or two Mr. Pope didn't hear anything about the Hastings and then one day Mrs. Hastings called him up at the office. She said Mr. Talcott had been very much interested in what she'd told him about the voice in the barn and she wondered if she couldn't bring him over some evening to try it out. Mr. Pope had been pretty worried about the voice business. He knew that if Mr. Hastings repeated the story and it got around that he'd tried to get a contract through fake spirit manifestations it might ruin him professionally. If I refuse he thought they'll think the whole thing was a put-up job. So he made a date with her for nine thirty a couple of evenings later.

Mrs. Pope said she wouldn't have anything to do with it and she went out that evening to the theater with a Mr. Joshua Harrington who isn't of any importance in this story. After dinner Mr. Pope went out to see Ed and told him about it. I'm going to take you over to Barney's he said and tie you up and have him look after you for the night. Aw heck Wilb said Ed I don't see why I should have to move out just because somebody feels like throwing a séance. Nevertheless you're going said Mr. Pope.

Mrs. Hastings and Mr. Talcott were a little late and it was good and dark when they went into the barn. This seems an extraordinary thing Pope said Mr. Talcott. To get any communication by voice you have to have a medium. Yet from what Evelyn tells me this voice seems to come from nowhere. Let's try said Mrs. Hastings. And then in a loud clear voice she said Is there any one here who wishes to communicate? There was no answer. Aren't you here Little Edie? she asked. And a deep muffled voice said Edie eatum too much supper. Edie got bellyache. No can come. She send friend. Me big Chief Umslapooey.

Great Scott! said Mr. Talcott. What a voice! That's no control we've ever worked with Evelyn. Mr. Pope had been as startled as the others when the voice boomed out. But he recognized it. He saw at once that Ed had got loose and was now standing outside by the back wall of the barn looking in the window. He started to go round him up and then thought better of it. They'll just think I'm going to fix the machinery he thought. I'd better stay. And he said aloud Sounds like utter nonsense to me. Probably some local hobbledehoy having fun with us. O I don't know Pope said Mr. Talcott. The Indian chief is a quite common control.

Tell us who you are said Mrs. Hastings. Me big Injun Chief Umslapooey said Ed. Me killum many paleface—drinkum blood. Wow! He ended with an Indian yell. All right, all right said Mr. Pope crossly. No need to rouse the neighborhood.

This is really remarkable said Mr. Talcott. Even with a medium I've never heard anything like it. Have you a message for us? he asked. Me got message said Ed. Many people got message. Dom Pedro here too. You knowum somebody name Don Balthazar? Mr. Pope heard Mr. Talcott give an exclamation of surprise and Mrs. Hastings said Why of course! Dom Pedro say ask him if he remember when he sail away on big ship from Cadiz said Ed. Of course I do said Mr. Talcott and then to Mr. Pope he said This seems to be part of a story that we got from Ouija in which Evelyn and I were—well sort of actors. It's amazing George! said Mrs. Hastings. How could any one know? No one could but us whispered Mr. Talcott. But listen.

Dom Pedro say Don Balthazar and Doña Inez much in love said Ed and added a couple of explosive kisses by way of illustration. Well—goodness! said Mrs. Hastings. You remember

why he go in ship? asked Ed. Let me see said Mr. Talcott obviously trying not to give too much away to Mr. Pope. Wasn't it that the King wanted her to marry somebody else and so he had Don Balthazar forcibly arrested and given command of one of Cortes' ships? That what Don Balthazar say said Ed—Dom Pedro say different. He say put-up job. He say Doña Inez want to marry Don B. But Don B. already got wife in Burgos—'nother in Toledo. Don B. scared. Go to King and say Give me ship. Sure say King. King glad to get Don B. out of country. He make pass at Queen too.

Ed stopped and nobody said anything for a minute. I don't remember anything like that said Mr. Talcott finally. You're making this up. How could any one George? said Mrs. Hastings. Nobody could know the first part of it but us. Are you still here chief? Ugh! said Ed. How do we know you're telling the truth? she asked. You turn on light said Ed. Look on floor.

So Mr. Pope put on the light. On the floor before them was a rose. Good heavens said Mrs. Hastings picking it up it's from my garden! One of our very choicest blooms—a Mme. Humphrey Schlumberger. Now how on earth—I've seen that done before said Mr. Talcott. It's one of the stock tricks. Yes but George—from my own garden! said Mrs. Hastings. Mr. Talcott seemed a little rattled. Put out the light Pope he said. I want to ask a few questions.

So the light was snapped off and Mr. Talcott said See here chief. From all we've heard of Don Balthazar he was an upright and honorable man. Upright like a snake said Ed. When he sail away he stealum Doña Inez' jewels. When he get to Mexico he forgetum all about Doña Inez—have big harem—all Injun. He kill many Injun brave—take their wives. Mrs. Hastings laughed suddenly. You see Evelyn said Mr. Talcott like all spirit communications it's more than half nonsense. You have to pick out what's of any use. I think you're understating said Mrs. Hastings. I'm beginning to see how much nonsense there really is. O it's inexplicable all right. I thought at first maybe it was a hoax and Mr. Pope was responsible. But nobody could have known of the Don Balthazar story because we've never spoken of it to any one else. Really George I think we'd better drop it. As you wish Evelyn said Mr. Talcott with simple dignity. How about a light Pope?

Wait! said Ed. Me big Chief Umslapooy. Why you think me come here? Me want revenge! Revenge on Don Balthazar who steal my squaw. O come chief said Mr. Talcott nervously. Don Balthazar step outside said Ed. We fight duel. Not on your life said Mr. Talcott. I've seen some of these poltergeist manifestations and I'm just not having any. Throwing rocks and so on.

Mr. Pope began to see light. O let's go out he said. We aren't afraid of a voice are we? Come on Talcott. Mr. Pope bad mans said Ed. Swear at little children. But brave man. Ugh! Not like the white-liver Talcott. O all right said Mr. Talcott nervously.

The two men went outside. It was as dark there as inside the barn. Mr. Talcott shivered. And suddenly there was a thump of hoofs and a terrific war whoop and a huge white shape careened around the corner of the barn and bore down on them. Mr. Talcott gave a yell and fled. And as Mrs. Hastings came out of the barn door her husband's voice said For heaven's sake Pope what was that?

I—I haven't any idea said Mr. Pope. Hello Hastings. I thought you—well after what happened here before—Forget it said Mr. Hastings. I certainly didn't intend to come but you remember the voice that Sunday at my house? I heard it about an hour ago. I was reading and I thought I heard some one down in the rose garden. I stuck my head out and that voice said Better go over to Popes'. So I drove over. I've been here quite a while.

O said Mr. Pope. Yes said Mr. Hastings. And after all I've heard—well perhaps I've been wrong and there is something in this spiritualistic stuff after all. Not that I pretend to understand it. But I do think perhaps I was a little hasty that day. Evelyn? O there you are. I don't think it's much good for you to wait for George. And Pope—come over Sunday. Maybe we could work out some angle on that advertising.

By and by Mr. Pope went back into the barn. Hey Wilb said Ed's voice get this damn thing off the old chief will you? Mr. Pope snapped on the light. Ed stood in his stall with his head through a hole in a sheet which was draped over his withers. Stole this off the line and tore a hole in it said Ed. Darn near broke my neck when I stepped on a corner of it coming around the barn. Good Lord! said Mr. Pope. It's one of those monogrammed things that Carlotta—Yeah said Ed. You'd better hide it. Look Wilb how'd you like the rose trick? Big chief pickum posy hey?

You might have spared their show blooms said Mr. Pope. A rose by any other name than Mme. Schlumberger said Ed. You know I was just thinking. Whyn't we take this spook racket up seriously? I been rambling around nights a lot lately and with what you guess and I know about this neighborhood we could tear the place wide open. Why not just straight blackmail? said Mr. Pope. It's simpler. He went to the closet and took out a glass and a bottle of whisky. He poured out a drink and handed the bottle to Ed. Here he said you communicate with the kind of spirits you understand. Ed tipped back his head. There was a diminishing gurgle and the bottle dropped to the floor. Mmm! he said big chief likum firewater. Guess you're right Wilb. All I did was try to help you and what do I get? I get to stand outside that window some more Sunday afternoons. And I still don't see what you like in that guy.

THE END

[The end of *Ed Holds a Seance* by Walter Rollin Brooks]