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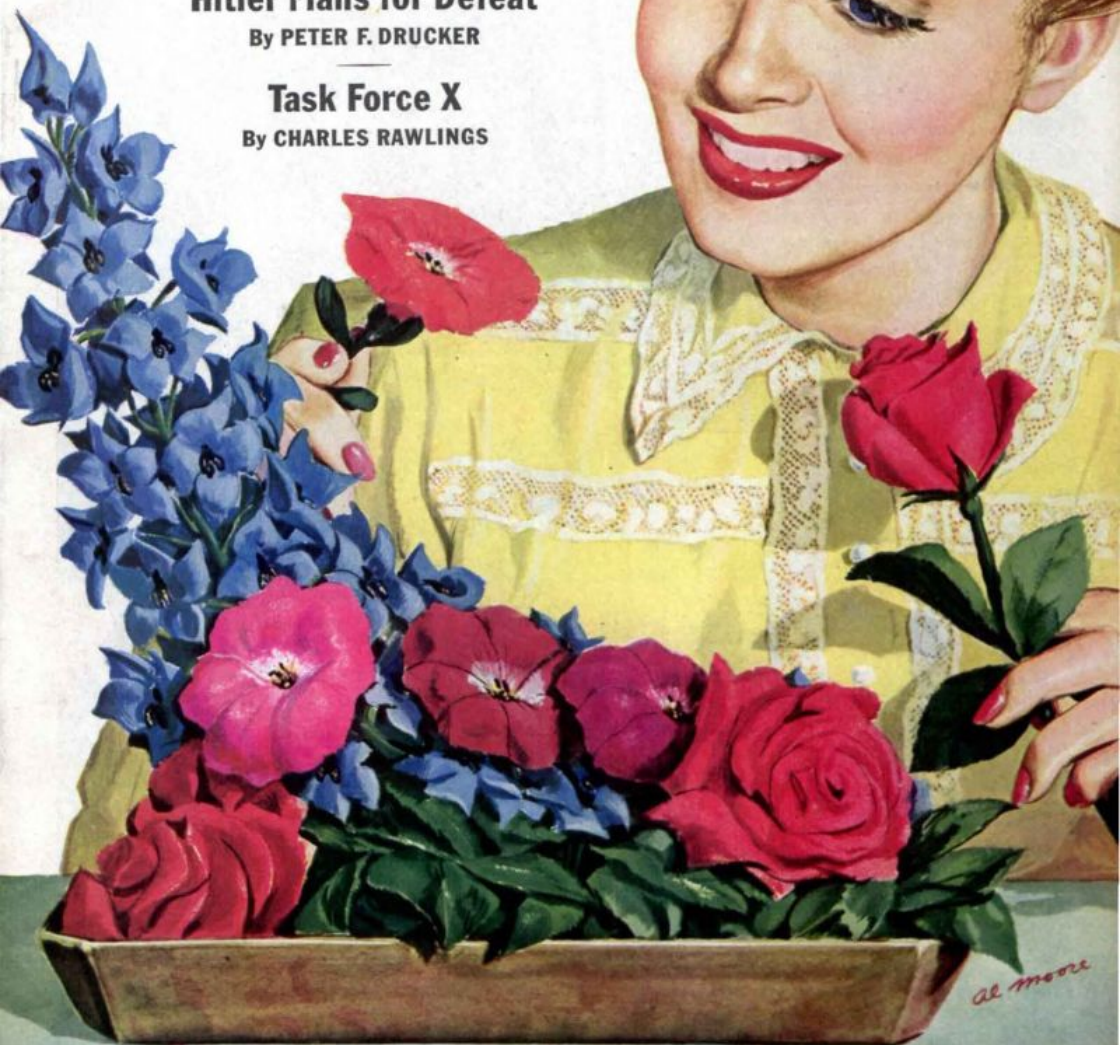
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Hitler Plans for Defeat

By PETER F. DRUCKER

Task Force X

By CHARLES RAWLINGS



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Do Ye Ken Wilbur Pope—

BY
WALTER BROOKS

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Ed, the celebrated talking horse, turns a stately foxhunt into a Pier-A brawl.

When this Wilbur Pope started riding his horse Ed to the station every day to save gas, he rode in his business clothes, because, of course, he couldn't go to the office in riding breeches. But before he had ridden the first mile, his trousers started riding too. They rode up his gartered shanks to his knees. And by the time he reached the station, they were so creased and baggy that his fellow commuters on the platform kept waiting for him to jump. So he took to changing at the office.

Then Mr. Lamson, the president of the firm, had one of those flashes of inspiration that presidents and even employees of advertising agencies are constantly getting, and suggested that perhaps, with certain accounts, breeches might be a distinct advantage. "Snob appeal," he said. "Connotes county society, the spacious homes of old England, and so on. If you could give Lois Grandin the impression that you belonged to the hunting set, you'd have no trouble with her. I understand she's trying to break into the Flint Ridge crowd. She's bought a big place up there in Rockland County, and I'm told she's bought a few horses from some of these fellows who are getting rid of their stables."

The advertising for Lois Grandin Cosmetics was placed through another agency, but Mr. Pope had been trying to interest Miss Grandin in taking some time on the radio, which she had never used. He had presented his plan, and Miss Grandin had seemed receptive, and had even agreed to talk it over with her production and sales heads. But there the business had stuck, and Mr. Pope couldn't seem to start it moving again.

So he spent a day at the library, doing what the agencies laughingly call research, and then he had his breeches pressed and went to see Miss Grandin.

He had thought the whole idea pretty silly, but the *décor* of the Grandin salon reassured him. Miss Grandin had been one of the first to realize that nothing is so demodé as a modern style that is old-fashioned, and she had recently done a sweeping early-Victorian redecoration of her entire establishment. Mr. Pope had on previous calls acknowledged the charm of the crystal chandeliers, the thick Aubusson carpets and rich hangings, but in the Victorian boudoir that was Miss Grandin's office, he now felt completely at ease. It was the breeches, he decided. They struck the note.

And Miss Grandin's first words were to ask if he had been riding. She was small and dynamic. Severely smart until 1940, she had then, to match her new setting, gone in for daintiness, restrained frills and a certain fluffiness about the coiffure which gave an odd, blurred effect. But there was nothing blurred about her business methods.

"Oh, I ride a bit," said Mr. Pope. "Matter of fact, I was out a little longer than usual this morning, so I didn't change before coming into town. I thought you wouldn't mind, and I wanted to drop in and see if your people liked my plan."

Miss Grandin said that they hadn't yet had time to go over it in detail. "Frankly, I'm afraid I can't hold out much hope. I liked the plan, and if it weren't so expensive and such a radical departure from our usual procedure—which, after all, has been completely satisfactory—But I'll let you know when we've reached a definite decision." And then she asked him if he hunted.

Mr. Pope was rather discouraged. Any chance of selling her, he felt, was pretty remote. But he didn't see why all that research should go to waste, so, after expressing regret that for the past few years he had not had time to hunt much, he went on to discuss the sport. He mentioned the Quorn, and the Devon and Somerset pack, and let it be inferred that in the old days in England he had hunted with both packs many times. He disparaged the American gray fox, which turns and twists, and even sometimes climbs trees, rarely giving you a straight run. He spoke of his own horse, Ed, in terms which would have astounded that animal. A tall clean-limbed hunter who knew all the tricks of the sport and could be ridden on a loose rein, or with no rein at all, over the roughest kind of country. I guess he got rather carried away.

But Miss Grandin got carried away with him. Her eyes glistened, and she got out pictures of her own horses, and of herself costumed for the chase, complete with top hat, and she told him about the Flint Ridge pack, and how she'd been out with them twice, and she ended by asking if he wouldn't like to come up some Saturday and ride with them. "The hounds meet Saturdays, late in the afternoon," she said. "People are so busy nowadays that it's about the only time they can get out. A drag, of course. We have to be sure of getting some action."

Mr. Pope said he'd be delighted and, after he left, thought no more about it. But a week later Miss Grandin phoned. There was to be a meet the following Saturday, and she would like him to come up for the week end as her guest. "Mrs. Pope, too, of course. Does she ride?"

Mr. Pope said she had never hunted.

"Well, she could at least follow along," said Miss Grandin. "I can put her up on Ragamuffin—he's very gentle. I can mount you, too—on Wotan. He's a bit hard to handle, but with your experience—But it occurred to me that you might prefer your own horse. You could ride him up Friday, and Mrs. Pope could come up by train. I'd send a car for her, but I'm afraid that would be a little nonessential."

A week end at Miss Grandin's was too good a chance to be missed. It certainly kept the radio question open.

"Very good of you to think of me," he said. "We'd be delighted to come."

Then he paused. Wotan! Good heavens! Miss Grandin might be astonished at the discrepancies between the aristocratic picture he had given of Ed, and the actual appearance of the horse, but he certainly wasn't going to climb aboard any snorting terror by the name of Wotan. Ed was formed neither by nature nor by experience to cut a dash in the hunting field, but Mr. Pope knew that he could at least stay on him. So he said he'd ride Ed up Friday. And Miss Grandin said she'd phone Mrs. Pope about trains, and hung up.

Well, Mr. Pope's wife was no different from anybody else's wife—she didn't like to have social engagements made for her. But, fortunately, she thought a week end at Miss Grandin's would be amusing. "And I look forward with screams of joy, Wilbur," she said, "to seeing you take your first fence. If I didn't know that Ed couldn't jump over a row of old bottles, I'd be worried."

"Don't worry about Ed," said Mr. Pope. "I admit he'd probably stop to see if there was anything in the bottles before he jumped. But anyway, in this kind of a hunt they drag a bag of

anise over a prearranged course, and the hounds follow that scent instead of the fox, and I understand they fix it up so there's always a gate handy for the less skillful hunters."

So Friday morning Mr. Pope saddled Ed and set out on the long ride up to Rockland County. For the first few miles neither of them said anything. I suppose you think there's nothing very queer about that, but you can take my word for it that it was pretty unusual. Because while really the most you can say about this horse of Mr. Pope's is that he was certainly a horse, there were unusual features about him. For one thing, he could talk. And it wasn't any parrot talk either. He had strong opinions, and he expressed them in strong language. Which was only natural, as he had, after all, been brought up in a stable.

But although they had many arguments, Ed and Mr. Pope got on well. "You and me, Wilb," Ed used to say, "we make a good team. We agree in our tastes and disagree in our opinions, and arguments make life interesting if you know that before you come to blows you can always settle 'em with a bottle of beer."

Well, this morning Mr. Pope felt an argument coming on, and to forestall it he stopped at Barney's and bought Ed a bottle of beer. But Ed was still grumpy. He drank his beer and wiped his mouth on Mr. Pope's shoulder and, when Mr. Pope was in the saddle again, he said, "I don't like to carp, Wilb, but this seems a darn-fool excursion to me. In the first place, I hate these week-end visits. I never can sleep a wink in a strange stall. And on top of that, we've got to hunt."

Mr. Pope said it would be just a pleasant canter across the fields.

"In a pig's eye it'll be a pleasant canter," said Ed. "It's the same as a steeplechase, only you don't have a chance to look over the course beforehand. And for you and me to jump a wall, Wilb, is just plain suicide."

"Nonsense," said Mr. Pope. "You can jump. How about that Van Tessart hedge?"

"Sure I can jump," said Ed, "with nobody on my back. Or with somebody that knows his stuff. But with a hulk like you, that's got a seat like a sack of coal——"

"All right, all right," said Mr. Pope. "If we can't jump 'em together. I'll get off and we'll go over separately. We'll manage. But for heaven's sake try to put a little style into it when we get there. There's a lot hangs on this for me. I'll appreciate it if, when Miss Grandin and her friends are around, you'll stand up straight, and not lean against trees and give your usual imitation of an animal on the verge of collapse."

This made Ed sore, and they continued to wrangle until late in the afternoon, when they reached Miss Grandin's. Ed was led off to the stables by a groom, and Mr. Pope was shown into a huge living room, where Miss Grandin and Mrs. Pope and a slim foreign-looking man were having tea by the fire. Mr. Pope was stiff, for the ride had been longer than he was accustomed to. Usually, he and Ed cantered sedately for a few miles, with an occasional stop for beer, and then found a secluded tree under which they talked and napped the hours away. But he managed to bow to Miss Grandin and to the stranger, who was introduced as Prince Tchetchensky, and to sink without groaning into a deep chair.

Mr. Pope had heard about Prince Tchetchensky. He was one of the first among the droves of White Russian refugees who had flown to these shores after the revolution. He had come without the sack of family jewels which was standard equipment for refugees in those days, but, at the touch of his title, doors had flown open, and by the time quotations on Russian nobility in an oversold market had reached an all-time low, he had consolidated his gains and, at only slight loss of social prestige, had become known as one of the three smartest dress

designers in New York. He had also more recently become known as one of Lois Grandin's most important unlisted assets.

Well, Mrs. Pope had never met a prince before, and she put her best foot forward. She put it forward with great charm, and it was plain that the prince was captivated, but after an hour or so, it was also plain that Miss Grandin was getting uneasy.

When they went up to dress for dinner, Mr. Pope spoke of it. "I wish you wouldn't play up to Tchetchensky quite so hard. Carlotta," he said. "You're antagonizing Miss Grandin, and that's the last thing I want to do."

"Pooh!" said Mrs. Pope. "Why don't you play up to her, then, if you want to sell her on your program? Pay her a few good gross compliments. If I'm any judge of character, that's the line to take with her."

"You may be right," said Mr. Pope, "but I still don't see any sense in getting her sore."

"She'll get over it," said Mrs. Pope. "I like to hear the prince; he has a fascinating accent."

"He ought to have," said Mr. Pope. "He works hard enough at it. He can speak as good English as I can, if he wants to."

"I should hope so!" said Mrs. Pope. Then she kissed him. "Don't be stuffy, darling. I've got to get a little fun out of this. Maybe he'll design a dress for me."

"Maybe he'll design a plaster cast for me after tomorrow's run," said Mr. Pope, who knew it was no use to argue any more.

At dinner there were several new faces, and by the raw and weatherbeaten look of them, Mr. Pope deduced that they were members of the Flint Ridge Hunt. It was odd that Miss Grandin had settled among a people whose appearance was an always-present challenge to her professional skill. For obviously those skins had never been treated with any product more sophisticated than yellow laundry soap.

Next to Mr. Pope sat a Mrs. Meecham, short, compact, with uncultivated gray hair and a face that would have defied a geologist's hammer. "Understand you've been out with the Quorn," she said.

Mr. Pope admitted that several years ago in England he had been out with that celebrated pack, but he did not enlarge upon the experience. He hoped she would mistake his reticence for modesty.

"Not much huntin' left in England now," she said. "Can't feed their hounds. Nobody to ride to 'em if they could, except a few old fogies like meself. Well, we keep it up, but it won't be for long. Non-essential, if anything is." She turned to listen to Prince Tchetchensky, who, with none of Mr. Pope's diffidence, was recounting experiences in the hunting field.

The prince had no need for diffidence, and Miss Grandin listened with visible pride. She threw an occasional hopeful glance at Mr. Pope, but Mr. Pope's hunting experiences remained locked in his bosom.

The evening was more of the same. To escape a conversation which was becoming increasingly horsy, Mr. Pope joined Miss Grandin and an elderly brother and sister named Cosgrave at the bridge table. But Mrs. Pope and the prince sat in a corner and giggled, and Miss Grandin couldn't keep her mind on the cards. She was becoming petulant—a bad sign in a prospective client—and at last she broke up the game. Mr. Pope was relieved when, soon afterward, the guests left and Miss Grandin hustled them off to bed.

"What extraordinary people, Wilbur," said Mrs. Pope. "What Miss Grandin sees in them I can't imagine."

"Tchetchensky is queer, all right," said Mr. Pope.

"You know I don't mean him," said Mrs. Pope. "I mean those Cosgraves, and that Meecham woman, who looks as if she did up her hair with a rake."

"I didn't think you were even aware of them," said Mr. Pope. "You and Sasha were so cozy."

"Well, good heavens," said Mrs. Pope, "he was the only person in the room who didn't talk exclusively about the seamy side of horse life."

"I've tried to explain to you, Carlotta," said Mr. Pope, "that this is a business trip. If La Grandin thinks I can help her socially, she may favor my plan. If I can get through tomorrow without being discredited, she'll be grateful. But not if you go away with her prince in your pocket."

Mrs. Pope giggled. "Wait till she sees Ed!"

But Mr. Pope said that was where she was wrong. "It says in all the hunting books that the only way you can judge a hunter is in the field."

"Really?" said Mrs. Pope. "Well, you and Ed will come to judgment at your first fence, I guess."

"Let's go to sleep," said Mr. Pope. "Tomorrow's a tough day, however you look at it."

After breakfast Mr. Pope went out to see how Ed was getting on.

He found him in a bad temper. "If it wasn't for letting you down, Wilb," Ed said, "I'd have been halfway home by this time. These Grandin horses may be real highbred hunters, but they ain't got any more manners than a blue jay. And there's a horse in the next box—Wotan, his name is—ain't that German, Wilb?—well, anyway, every time I stick my head out, he sticks his head out and looks down his long nose at me, and then he goes back in and kinda giggles to himself for half an hour. And that ain't all," said Ed. "About half an hour ago the Grandin woman come along with a tall, dressy guy—"

"Prince Tchetchensky," said Mr. Pope.

"Sounds like you were catching cold," said Ed. "Well, she says, 'Let's have a look at Mr. Pope's horse,' and they come and looked at me, and then they just turned and looked at each other, and the prince says, 'Mon Dew!' or something, and then Miss Grandin says, 'Sasha, you don't suppose Pope is trying to make a fool of me in front of the entire hunt?'"

"'He may not be trying,' says the prince 'but I'm afraid he may succeed. Yet,' he says, 'this horse is like no other horse I have ever seen; he may be a famous jumper. For his lines closely resemble, it seems to me, the lines of the kangaroo.' 'I wish I'd never asked him!' says Miss Grandin, and then the prince says, 'We must do something about it,' and they walked away."

"H'm," said Mr. Pope. "They don't think much of us, do they?" He shook his head doubtfully and left.

At three o'clock the horses were led around, and they all mounted to ride to the meet. It had been a trying day so far for Mr. Pope. If he looked one way, there were Mrs. Pope and Tchetchensky giggling together, and if he looked the other way, there was Miss Grandin glowering at them. He had tried to distract her with compliments and with hunting reminiscences, but she had plainly entered him in her ledger in red ink.

It was a cold clear day. The earth was frozen hard and lightly sprinkled with snow. Too lightly, Mr. Pope thought, and shuddered as he looked down at it; and Miss Grandin must have read his mind, for, as they started down the drive, she pulled up beside him on her plump little bay mare, Colette, and said, "Your horse seems to be going a little lame. Do you really think you ought to ride him today? I'm sure the Cosgraves would mount you."

“Oh, that’s just Ed’s natural gait,” said Mr. Pope easily. “He’s not a showy horse, but he’ll surprise you when he gets warmed up.”

“I dare say,” said Miss Grandin dryly. She gave Mr. Pope a puzzled, suspicious look, then trotted on ahead to catch up with Mrs. Pope and the prince.

Prince Tchetchensky rode Wotan, a tall, vicious-looking chestnut, and beside him on the dappled pony, Ragamuffin, Mrs. Pope looked like a little girl. That wouldn’t please Miss Grandin either, Mr. Pope thought, as he trailed them down the road. But after a minute the prince dropped back.

“I hope you will not be offended, Mr. Pope,” said the prince, “but Miss Grandin has told me that you have a fine hunter which you are to ride today.”

“Correct,” said Mr. Pope. “This is him.”

The prince smiled knowingly. “Mr. Pope, let us not beat about the barn. There is some mystification here which is to Miss Grandin most disturbing. A hunter which has not the lines of a hunter, a rider who has—you will pardon me—neither the seat nor the hands of a——”

“Now wait a minute,” said Mr. Pope. “You’re outrunning your line of communications. Miss Grandin is afraid that her friends will find my horse’s performance in the field slovenly, and that this may humiliate her—is that it?”

“Really, is there need to argue the point?” said Tchetchensky. He tapped Ed lightly on the shoulder with his crop. “Those withers! Those hind quarters!” And he trailed the crop over them.

There was a convulsive heave underneath Mr. Pope that tipped his hat over his eyes, and a hollow thump, followed by a number of profane-sounding Russian words. When he recovered his seat and his vision, he saw Wotan rearing angrily and being pulled down by the angry prince. On Wotan’s sleek side was a long gash.

Tchetchensky was furious. “So you want to play rough!” he snarled, forgetting his accent. “All right; look out for yourself!” And he cantered on ahead.

“Now you’ve done it!” said Mr. Pope. “You’ve marred Miss Grandin’s prize possession. You darn fool, what did you have to kick him for?”

“Brother, I ain’t begun yet,” said Ed, and at that moment, from a gate ahead of them, a pack of hounds streamed out into the road, followed by two men in red coats and a dozen assorted riders.

Mr. Pope had lagged behind to chide Ed, and the introductions were over when he trotted up. Under the eyes of a larger audience than he was accustomed to, Ed attempted to put on what he conceived to be the style that Mr. Pope had demanded of him. He pranced heavily, he held his head high and rolled his eyes, he lifted his lip in an aristocratic sneer.

No one said a word. Even the horses looked, shook their heads as if to clear their eyes, and looked again. Then Mrs. Meecham, in a bowler hat, astride a stout gray, called pleasantly to Mr. Pope, and Miss Grandin recovered herself. She introduced him and then they trooped after the hounds through a gate and across a field. Mrs. Pope and one or two others stayed behind; they were to follow by road. And almost before he realized it, the hounds were in full cry and Mr. Pope was cantering along between Miss Cosgrave and the prince toward a half-broken-down stone wall.

The hounds poured over the wall, the red coats followed. Mr. Pope saw Miss Cosgrave rise in the air; then he, too, was rising and he clutched at Ed’s mane.

“Sit back, dope!” Ed hissed as he landed smoothly. “Don’t show so much affection in public. It ain’t done.”

Tchetchensky, watching him all the while with a faint smile, had taken the wall beside him. Miss Cosgrave was ahead now, but the prince seemed to be holding Wotan in. He dropped back so that Wotan's head was at Mr. Pope's knee, while the rest of the field swept by. But Mr. Pope had other things to worry about. There was a rail fence coming—a rather low fence, but the rails looked stout. He took a deep breath and leaned forward for the rise. But as Ed gathered his hind quarters under him for the jump, the prince cut him sharply across the legs with his whip.

It was a stinging blow, and under the stimulus of it, Ed's co-ordination went to pieces. His hind legs jumped before his forelegs had left the ground, with the result that he turned a sort of clumsy cartwheel into the fence, while above him, Mr. Pope, performing a sort of complementary cartwheel, cleared the fence and landed sprawl on a conveniently placed brush pile.

To see the earth tilt suddenly and sweep across the sky is a shattering experience. Mr. Pope lay still. He was not comfortable, but he was safe. If that terrible rending sound he had heard had been the splintering of his own frame, there was plenty of time to try to find out about it. But he became aware that Ed was peering down at him, asking if he was all right.

Mr. Pope bounced a bit experimentally, then sat up. "I—I guess so. How about you?"

"Busted the top rail with my shoulder," said Ed. "But I'm plenty tough. Come on, get up. We got some murder to do."

"I told you we'd climb the fences separately if we couldn't make 'em together," said Mr. Pope, as he swung stiffly into the saddle. "But I guess we'd better try sticking together for the next one. . . . Hey, wait for me!" he shouted, as Ed bounded almost out from under him.

"We're in a hurry," said Ed. "That prince guy give me the whip just as I jumped. That's why we spilled. And, boy, will I spill him and that red camel he's riding when I catch up with him! White Russian, is he? He'll be a red Russian if I get my hoofs on him!"

"Me too," said Mr. Pope. "If we ever catch him." Something of the excitement of the sport touched him, and he rose in his stirrups and yelled.

"At-a-boy, Wilb!" shouted Ed. He was mad clean through, and his thundering gallop was covering the ground at a speed that astounded Mr. Pope. "We're hunting princes today!" he shouted. "Boy, will we nail his brush to the barn door!"

But though they passed several riders before they reached the road, the prince was still far ahead. They went up the slope, across stubble fields and down into another valley. They pounded past Miss Grandin, who stared in astonishment—as well she might, for Mr. Pope was yelling at every bound, while Ed was shouting, "Do ye ken Wilbur Pope, and his good horse Ed?" to the tune of John Peel.

The hounds checked once, but found their line again before Ed could overtake his enemy. It was during this part of the run that the hunt was joined by two soldiers in a jeep, who bounced along for a time, cheering wildly, and then disappeared and were never seen again. And then the hounds checked again, and before they went on, Ed caught up.

Tchetchensky turned, and what he saw evidently alarmed him, for he spurred Wotan to a run. But though Ed was in a lather, he was by no means blown. He swung his head and snapped at Tchetchensky's knee, like a salmon at a fly. The prince tried to fend him off with his crop, and Wotan, thrown off his stride, bit at him. The two horses, snapping and feinting at each other, drove down side by side toward a fence through which the hounds had just scrambled.

"Yippee, Wotan!" Ed yelled. "The Valkyries are after you!"

The red coats soared over the fence. Mrs. Meecham soared after them. The stragglers had veered to the right, where there was a gap, so that no one saw what happened. Wotan, unused to being heckled at his jumps, was running jerkily at Ed's left. And then, just as Tchetchensky leaned forward for the leap, Ed whirled sharp right, swinging his heavy hindquarters against Wotan's hip, and with Mr. Pope draped around his neck, trotted down along the fence. There was a rattle and a thud behind them, and when Mr. Pope had returned to the saddle he tugged Ed to a standstill.

"Blast you, Ed," he said, "we've got to go back. We may have killed the guy."

"Rather neat, what?" said Ed complacently. "Bit of judo I learned from my old teacher, Okidoki. Well, I'd like to view the corpse myself."

"I hope no one saw us," said Mr. Pope.

"Nothing to see. I refused the fence, and princely-wincey jumped it. If he busted his royal bones, it ain't our fault." And he trotted through the gap and back to where the prince was lying on his back, the reins still in his hands, and Wotan standing over him. "'A soldier of the Legion,' " hummed Ed, "'lay dying in Algiers.' "

Mr. Pope dismounted and knelt beside Tchetchensky, who looked up at him with almost saintly resignation. "You've done for me, Pope," he said without rancor.

A procession of ants with very cold feet started up Mr. Pope's spine. "Can't be as bad as all that," he said heartily. "Let me help you up."

"It is useless," said the prince calmly. "I think my back is broken. I have tried twice to get up, but I am paralyzed."

Miss Grandin must have been watching them, for she cantered up, flung herself off her horse and on to the prince's bosom.

"Sasha!" she cried. "Oh, Sasha, what have they done to you?"

The prince put up a feeble hand and stroked her hair. "Do not cry for me, my dear. Your Sasha has only a little time left now—only until sundown. The lion with the broken back—is it not so?—he always dies at sundown."

"Only it's the snake," Ed murmured.

Mrs. Pope, who had seen the accident from the road, had now ridden up, and remembering her first-aid lessons, asked the prince if he could wiggle his toes.

Miss Grandin looked up and scowled malignantly through her tears at this piece of levity, but Tchetchensky merely smiled with godlike forbearance, and continued in a weak voice, evidently determined that his last words should be something pretty good. But it was hard to tell whether he was addressing Miss Grandin or Wotan, who, held there by the rein, was also hanging over him solicitously.

Mr. Pope had felt Ed nudge him several times, and had shaken his head irritably to keep the horse quiet, but now Ed pushed his nose over his shoulder and whispered, "Look at Wotan's forefeet, you dope!"

Mr. Pope looked. Then he bent and took the rein from Tchetchensky's flaccid hand and led Wotan over to the fence. "All right, Tchetchensky," he said. "Suppose you get up now."

"You fool!" flashed Miss Grandin. "Telling a man with a broken back to get up!"

"He merely wishes to undo what he has done—I give him credit for that," said the prince nobly. "But let us not have our last few moments together, my Lois, marred by——"

"Oh, get up!" said Mr. Pope impatiently. "Your back isn't broken. You couldn't get up because Wotan was standing on your coattails."

There was a hushed silence, broken at last by Mrs. Pope's giggle.

She controlled it; then, “Oh, gosh!” she said, and giggled again. But the prince seemed not at all embarrassed. He got up and brushed himself off, as Mrs. Meecham and Mr. Cosgrave cantered up to ask if anything was wrong.

“Nothing,” said Mr. Pope quickly. “Tchetchensky had a bit of a fall, but he’s all right.”

The prince looked at him, raised his eyebrows slightly, then nodded an acknowledgment of his reticence.

“I—I’ve got to get out of here, Wilbur,” whispered Mrs. Pope. “There seems to be something wrong with my diaphragm; I simply can’t look at him without beginning to giggle.”

“You’d have shown more penetration if you’d giggled when you first met him,” murmured Mr. Pope. “Better go on, then. I suppose we’ll follow home.”

Leaving the prince to give his version of the accident to Mrs. Meecham and Mr. Cosgrave, Miss Grandin came over to Mr. Pope. “You won’t say anything—about Sasha, I mean?” she pleaded.

“You’ll admit it’s a good story,” he said. “But neither Carlotta nor I will tell it, I promise you. And that goes,” he added, “regardless of your radio decision.”

Mrs. Meecham interrupted any further talk. “You’re not a hunting man, Mr. Pope,” she said. It was a statement.

“No,” he said, “I am an advertising man.” And added, without quite knowing why he did so, “I came up really to see if I could sell Miss Grandin a radio program.”

“Oh, but you do hunt, Mr. Pope,” put in Miss Grandin. “You mustn’t be so modest.”

“I hunted today,” said Mr. Pope.

“I see.” Mrs. Meecham looked speculatively at Miss Grandin, then smiled a granite smile at Mr. Pope. And after a minute she said, “Perhaps I should tell you there is something I saw today I feel I should speak to the Master about.”

“You mean Tchetchensky’s fall?” said Mr. Pope.

“I mean your fall,” she said. “When he cut your horse.”

“He did what?” exclaimed Miss Grandin.

“Lashed Mr. Pope’s horse just as he was taking the jump. Rather a serious offense. May be one of his Cossack customs, but we don’t tolerate such things here.”

“You don’t mind my saying that you are mistaken?” said Mr. Pope.

“Not at all. But——” Mrs. Meecham frowned. “H’m—I see. Very well, then. I’ll say nothing about it. Since—well, I saw a number of things today.” She looked at Ed. “That horse is no hunter,” she said bluntly. “You’re lucky to be alive.”

“He suits me,” said Mr. Pope.

“Suits me too,” said Mrs. Meecham. “Would you sell him to me? . . . No, I thought not. You’d be a fool if you did. But I like intelligence, in horses and men. My poor dear husband—but never mind that. H’m.”

Miss Grandin’s eyes were like doorknobs. That Mrs. Meecham should actually offer to buy a horse that even she could see had no more breeding than a hoptoad was too much for her. “Would you really ride him?” she asked.

Mrs. Meecham lifted eyebrows at Mr. Pope and he nodded. In two minutes the stirrups had been adjusted and she was on Ed’s back. Mr. Pope mounted the gray.

“Sick of overbred hunters meself,” she said. “No brains, nothing but style. This should be an adventure.” She looked at Mr. Pope approvingly. “By the way,” she said, “I’ve the impression that you and Mrs. Pope might like to be my guests at the next meet.”

“Why, you’re extremely kind,” he said. “But as neither of us hunts——”

“Hunt or not, as you like. I’ve a good cook. And I might like to hear about this radio program. Complete mystery to me, radio. Like to know something about it.” And without waiting for Mr. Pope to accept, she reined Ed toward the road.

“Well!” exclaimed Miss Grandin.

It was dusk when they reached Miss Grandin’s. Exactly what happened as they were all dismounting was never quite clear. Mrs. Meecham, who was still sitting Ed, said she saw nothing. But there was a jostling and stamping among the horses, and a yell from the prince. “That damned horse, Pope!” he shouted. “He’s attacked me again! He’s torn my coat!”

“Nonsense!” boomed Mrs. Meecham. “You tore your coat when you fell!”

The prince swore and limped into the house.

Mrs. Meecham reined Ed around so that his head was at Mr. Pope’s elbow. And as Mrs. Meecham was rather pointedly examining the handle of her crop. Mr. Pope quickly snatched at the piece of cloth that was dangling from Ed’s mouth and stuffed it into his pocket. It was one of Tchetchensky’s coattails.

“Great old girl,” said Ed, as he and Mr. Pope started down the road toward home the next morning.

“Oh, she’s all right,” said Mr. Pope. “She’ll come round.”

“Hell, I don’t mean Grandin,” said Ed.

“You mean Mrs. Meecham?” said Mr. Pope. “Yes, she did us a good turn, all right. How’d you get on with her?”

“Her and me are like that,” said Ed, pricking up his ears and pointing them toward each other. “Most intelligent person I ever met. Bar none,” he said significantly. “We agree on everything.”

“You agree that you’re quite a horse, you mean,” said Mr. Pope. “But, good Lord, you didn’t talk to her, did you? You know if you start talking to other people besides me——”

“Sure, sure,” said Ed. “Look, Wilb let’s cut cross lots here and take a few fences, hey?” And without waiting for consent, he shouted, “Hark away!” and started off at a canter.

But Mr. Pope pulled him up. “Good gosh,” he said, “didn’t we smash enough fences yesterday? I guess Mrs. Meecham went to your head. Look, Ed; look up the road there a piece. Isn’t that a tavern? How about a nice cold beer?”

Ed stood still a minute. “Yeah,” he said. “You got your choice between a clean gallop across the fields in the bracing morning air, and a drink in a stuffy dive. And what do you take? The dive! Yeah,” he said. “Well, so do I. Come on, Wilb. And then we’ll go home and nail the prince’s brush to the barn door, like I said we would.”

[The end of *Do Ye Ken Wilbur Pope?* by Walter Rollin Brooks]