

THE SATURDAY EVENING

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NEW MYSTERY SERIAL

By Hannah Lees
and Lawrence P. Bachmann

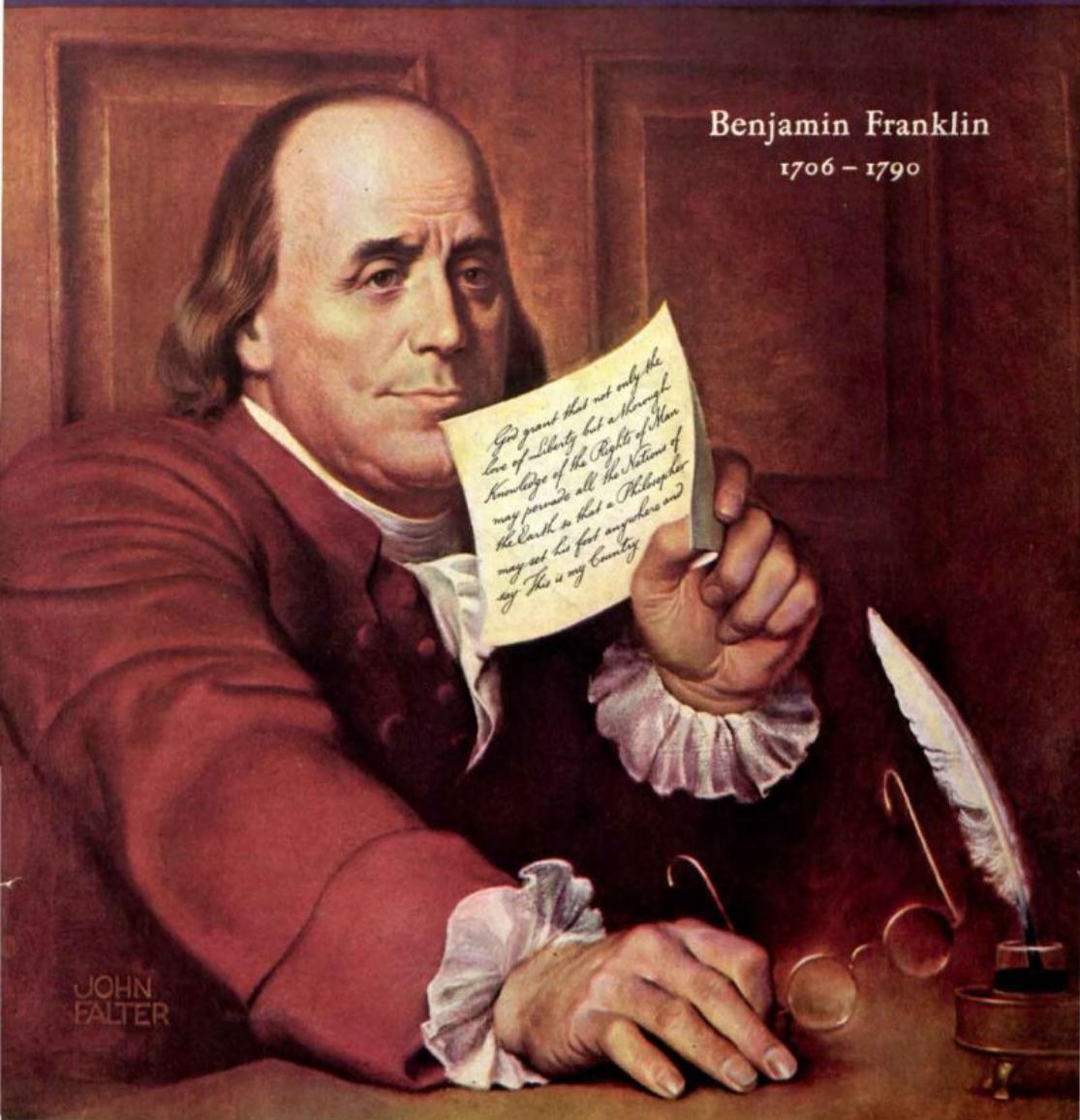
NEEDLE IN THE NAZIS

The Story of Belgium's
Underground Newspaper

By John Kobler

Benjamin Franklin

1706 - 1790



JOHN
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“So I grabs her by the slack of her slacks and heaves her over the hedge.”

DR. ATWOOD AND MR. ED

BY
WALTER BROOKS

ILLUSTRATED BY PETER ARNO

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Mrs. Van Tessart's corsets were specially made for her at the Baldwin Locomotive Works, but Ed, the talking horse, found a chink in her armor.

Well, it was just after gas rationing set in that this Wilbur Pope began riding his horse from the house to the train and back every day. He did it so Mrs. Pope could have the car. Of course, four gallons a week wasn't a quarter of what Mrs. Pope felt she needed, but it was all there was, and Mr. Pope was able to point out that her reproaches were misdirected.

"You'll have to take it up with the Wilhelmstrasse," he said. Yet the gentle patriotic glow that pervaded him when he and Ed clumped off to the station mornings hardly made up for the feeling Mrs. Pope managed to give him that he was somehow responsible, not merely for the gas situation but for the entire war.

Well, things went along like that for a while, and then one Sunday Mr. Pope saddled Ed, and after they'd stopped in at Barney's for a couple of beers, they went up to their abandoned orchard and sat down under a tree. And Mr. Pope said, "Ed, I've got a piece of news for you."

"Yeah?" said Ed, looking sort of sour. "Well, I bet it's nothing I want to hear, or you wouldn't be starting off with a preamble."

Mr. Pope wasn't as surprised as you or I would have been when Ed spoke—in fact, he wasn't surprised at all, because Ed was really quite a talker. Of course, I know there are people who pooh-pooh the idea that a horse can talk, but they're the same isolationists who pooh-poohed the earth being round. And look at them now. Anyway, Ed never talked to anybody but Mr. Pope.

So Mr. Pope said, "Well, you know Carlotta is busy with this AWVS and the Red Cross and all these committees, and there just isn't enough gas to cover all the ground she has to, and so she thought if I could get a ride to the train with Jed or some of the other men who go by here every morning, she could ride you to some of the meetings."

"Ride me!" said Ed, glaring. "After the things she's said about me? Unh-uh, Wilb. Nothing doing."

"Oh, come, Ed," said Mr. Pope. "Carlotta doesn't mean half she says—you know that."

"Yeah," said Ed. "Well, if she's only meant a tenth, any jury in the country'd give me damages for slander. Besides, suppose she does ride me and falls off. Then you'll blame me."

"She used to ride a lot," said Mr. Pope. "So, if she falls off, I certainly will blame you. I'll expect you to behave like a gentleman. No climbing trees or shying at butterflies or any of that funny stuff."

"Pooh," said Ed, "she'd be as safe with me as with a Shetland pony. It's her that don't like me, not me that don't like her. Anyway, your wife is sacrosanct, as it says in one of them old story papers I found out here in the barn." Ed was pretty well read for a horse.

Mr. Pope said that was nice, and went on to appeal to Ed's patriotism, and at last broke down his resistance to the idea. "O.K.," he said dismally. "*C'est la guerre*. But we don't need to dwell on it. Let's take a nap."

Well, Mrs. Pope dug out the boots and breeches she used to wear, and I must say she looked cute as all get-out in them, and after the first few days Ed began to feel that maybe there were compensations after all. For on the road people turned and looked at them. Of course, they had always turned and looked at him and Mr. Pope, too, but this was different. For now they said, "Ah!" and "Oh, boy!" whereas before they had just said, "Judas!" or something like that. And some of the more ill-bred ones had guffawed.

So Ed began to put on a little style. He held his head high and tried to put a little spirit into his usual clumping trot, and he even talked to Mr. Pope about having his mane roached.

"It's all right for you and me, Wilb," he said, "to go round kind of *dégagé* in our appearance. But I heard some remarks lately. As why as smart a woman as your wife would want to be seen riding something that ought to be on a milk wagon. Well, I ain't got any illusions about myself: I'm plain folks and proud of it. But it ain't right. I'm frank to say I never liked your wife much, but she treats me nice, and it ain't fair to her. And just combing out the burs in my mane ain't enough. Look here, Wilb." He arched his neck. "I got a good neckline. Now you roach that mane and it'll emphasize that line. Give me a little chic, like."

Mr. Pope said he didn't think it would work. "You're plain folks, Ed," he said. "Your line is solid worth, not chic."

"Rats!" said Ed. "You know as well as I do that you put plain folks in a tail coat and you can't tell the difference."

"You can't tell them from the waiters, you mean," said Mr. Pope. "You'd better leave well enough alone. Anyway, it's the contrast that appeals to Carlotta. She knows she's smart, and if you aren't, why, that makes her look all the smarter."

"You mean the worse I look, the better she'd like it?" said Ed.

"Well, something like that," said Mr. Pope. "Only there isn't any need of making a special effort. Just be yourself."

"Gosh, you don't encourage any illusions, do you?" said Ed gloomily.

Well, it was about this time that Mrs. Pope started taking a first-aid course. The classes were held at Mrs. Mervin Van Tessart's, which was a large estate about five miles from the Popes', and Ed didn't like it there because as soon as Mrs. Pope had dismounted under the elaborate porte-cochere, he was seized by a groom and led off to the stables. On one occasion he did succeed in getting out of the box stall where he was incarcerated and sneaking up behind the shrubbery to within earshot of the group of note-taking women on the lawn.

"And I give you my word, Wilb," he said to Mr. Pope, "I was never so shocked in my life. If I'd had the say-so, I'd have taken your wife right out of there and brought her home. There was a woman standing there and lecturing to 'em—decent looking girl too. 'And now,' she says, 'we have convulsions.' Well, that kind of startled me, till I see she was just going to talk about 'em, not have 'em. But then she went on to talk about—my gosh. Wilb—bleeding and gangrene and protruding viscera—and all those women hashing it over! By the Lord Harry, in my day women didn't talk about such things!"

"Your delicacy does you credit," said Mr. Pope.

"Yeah, you can laugh," said Ed. "I call it morbid. But say, who's this Van Tessart dame where these classes are at? Grim old girl, ain't she?"

Mr. Pope explained that the Van Tessarts were unreconstructed society of the old school. Between them they headed most of the local volunteer organizations. Mrs. Van Tessart had taken a fancy to Mrs. Pope and had got her appointed as her lieutenant in the AWVS, as well as to several important committees. "Don't, for heaven's sake, try any funny business with Mrs. Van Tessart," said Mr. Pope, "or your popularity with Carlotta will be just a fond, vanished dream."

"Trust your old Uncle Ed to know which side his hay is buttered on," said the horse. "I could see they all kind of smooch up to her. I never see a woman could sit up so straight in a chair."



"It's the pay-off, Wilb," Ed whispered. "She's bought 'em and she'll burn 'em. It's our last chance to make a deal. You grab the letters and I'll give Sam a toss."

"It's partly her corsets, which I understand are specially made for her at the Baldwin Locomotive Works," said Mr. Pope. "But mostly it's her determination to be correct. She's

never made a social or tactical error in her life. And her husband runs her a close second. They say he admits to one error: he voted for Harding.”

“Well, I know one mistake she made,” said Ed. “In a box stall you hear things folks in the front parlor don’t know about.” He rolled his eyes toward Mr. Pope. “But I dunno’s I ought to tell you. I ain’t much of a believer in repeating gossip.”

“I know,” said Mr. Pope; “you prefer to invent your own.”

“You want to hear it or not?” Ed demanded.

Mr. Pope assured him that he was not interested.

“Oh, well, you’ll worm it out of me sooner or later,” said the horse. “Yes, sir, she made the mistake of being born on the wrong side of the tracks. She ain’t any more society than what I am.”

“Nonsense!” said Mr. Pope. “The Van Tessarts——”

“I’m not talking about Van Tessart,” interrupted Ed; “I’m talking about her. I might have known anyone was as high and mighty as her was poor stock. Listen, Wilb. I was standing in my stall, sort of dreamin’ about this and that, and I heard Mrs. Van Tessart’s voice ordering the stableman to go up to the house and fix some faucet, and then she came into the stall next to me. And a minute later I heard some other footsteps, and a man’s voice says, ‘Hello, May.’

“‘I told you never to come here in the daytime,’ says Mrs. Van, very sharp, and the man says, ‘I need a lot of money, May. Never mind what for. . . . No, wait a minute,’ he says. ‘You got to hear my proposition. How much would you pay if I turned over all those letters to you—the whole bunch?’

“She kind of hesitates, and I got my eye to a crack. This guy was middle-aged and pretty seedy looking. Finally she says, kind of offhand, ‘I’ve given you money, off and on, for twenty years, Sam. But I did it because I was sorry for you. I don’t think letters written thirty years ago would be of much interest to Mr. Van Tessart, or to anyone else. If you want forty or fifty dollars——’

“The old guy snorted and says, ‘You ain’t foolin’ anybody, May. Love letters written thirty years ago to a livery hand—no, they ain’t anything in themselves to stir up trouble. It’s what they tell about who your folks was before you went splurgin’ around Europe on the money Wes left you. I guess you didn’t tell Van Tessart you’d been the wife of a garage mechanic, and your money come from an invention he invented. How’d he like to know your ma was a scrubwoman, and about your Uncle Joe goin’ to the pen? It’s all referred to plain in the letters.’

“‘And how would you manage to connect me with them today?’ she says.

“‘I guess you forgot the snapshots,’ Sam says. ‘You took your maiden name when you went to Europe, and that’s the name that’s signed to them—May Gregg. I guess one of these tabloid newspapers wouldn’t have much trouble seein’ the connection.’

“Well, she kinda weakened when he mentioned newspapers, but she said she’d have to get back to her guests, and she’d see him again in a week. He kind of griped about that, but had to give in. Funny, never mentioned his price. But ain’t that a story, Wilb?”

“It is indeed,” said Mr. Pope.

“She’ll have to keep this old boy dark, whatever it costs,” said Ed. “Sam don’t fit into the Van Tessart meal you any better’n a toad in a fruitcake. You and me, Wilb, we’re vulgar, but we ain’t common. We can pass for white any time we have to. But this old wump, he’s commoner’n red suspenders.” He thought a minute. “But, boy, she’s tough! I dunno’s I blame

her. You can't ever afford to pay these birds their asking price. Because they'll ask for more, anyway."

"I wouldn't know," said Mr. Pope. "I haven't your experience in blackmail."

"Hey, listen," said Ed; "don't look down your long nose at blackmail. Any time you want to start a nice little business, just say the word. No capital required, as it says in the ads. I got enough raw material to split this county wide open. And, boy, what I mean, it's raw! You'd be surprised what some of these nice folks'll say in front of a horse. You'd think they'd blush."

Well, it was one afternoon about a week later that Mr. Pope came home and found trouble.

Mrs. Pope came rushing out to meet him, and she said, "Oh, Wilbur, I'm so glad you've come! That terrible horse! He's ruined everything!" And she began to cry.

"You mean Ed?" said Mr. Pope, and she said, "I certainly do mean Ed. He attacked Mrs. Van Tessart. He rushed into the garden where we were having our first-aid class—Wilbur, you never saw anything look so fiendish—and he threw Mrs. Van Tessart right over a hedge. It was horrible! One of her men came running and got hold of him and managed to quiet him, and I had Evelyn bring me home."

"Where's Ed?" said Mr. Pope, and Mrs. Pope said, "I had to leave him there, of course. They locked him up, and I told them to send for a vet or something and have him disposed of. Wilbur, he's simply gone mad!"

Mr. Pope didn't wait to hear any more.

"I'll settle this," he said, and he ran out and got into his car and drove over to the Van Tessarts'.

Well, he didn't stop at the house, but went right around to the stable. Ed was locked in a box stall with a man on guard at the door.

"I want my horse," said Mr. Pope.

The man shook his head. "I'm sorry, Mr. Pope," he said. "I can't let you have him. The vet says he's dangerous, and we're waiting for the truck to take him away."

"Is that so?" said Mr. Pope. "Well, the horse is my property, and nobody's going to take him away but me. Open up."

"Well, I don't know," said the man. "I'll have to phone the madam. But I don't know can she talk, and Mr. Van Tessart ain't got here yet."

"You mean she's been hurt?" said Mr. Pope, and the man said, "Well, not exactly, but she's kind of shattered, like."

"There's no sense telephoning," answered Mr. Pope. "Come on, get out of the way."

But at that moment there was a tremendous crash and the door of the box stall was driven from its hinges. The man vanished with a yell, and Ed stepped out.

"Hi, Wilb," he said. "I knew you wouldn't leave me to languish in a prison cell. Let's get out of here."

"What on earth have you been up to?" demanded Mr. Pope as they cantered unmolested down the drive and through the iron gates.

"I been framed," said Ed. "Judas, Wilb, I only done what you or anybody else'd have done. I come over here with your wife, and this lackey led me off to a stall just like always. By and by I got kind of bored and full of onwee, so I slipped my halter and sneaked over to see how the first-aiders was getting on."

"My gosh, when I peeked over the hedge there was a regular free-for-all going on! Half the women had the others down and was pommeling 'em, and this Van Tessart dame was sittin' astride your wife's back and jabbin' her in the short ribs."

“Well, if your wife had been on top, I wouldn’t have interfered, but being she was under my protection, I just sailed over the hedge and grabbed this old devil by the—— Say, Wilb, you were right about those corsets. You couldn’t get a grip on her any more’n you could on a hot-water boiler. I was going to kick her first, but I thought: *That’s no way to treat a lady, however savage.* So I grabs her by the slack of her slacks and heaves her over the hedge.”

“Oh, good Lord!” moaned Mr. Pope.

“Yeah?” said Ed. “Well, what would you have done?”

“Hardly that,” said Mr. Pope. “Gosh, Ed, they were just practicing artificial respiration. It’s part of the course.”

It was some time, however, before he could convince Ed. “If I ever saw a barroom fight,” said the horse, “that was it. Why, a couple of ’em had even dropped out of the fight and was getting bandaged up on the side lines.” But the fact that Mrs. Pope had abandoned him, had even acquiesced in the death sentence imposed by Mrs. Van Tessart, convinced him. “Gosh, Wilbur,” he said, “I’m awful sorry. But how could I know? I never see a bunch of ladies acting like that before. I guess I got too old-fashioned ideas to understand these modern women.”

“Well,” said Mr. Pope, “you acted in good faith, and I’ll stand by you. We’ll drop these keys at the garage and have someone go after my car, and then go home and see what happens.”

Late that evening Mr. Pope went out to the stable. He snapped on the light and sat down on a box and sighed wearily, and then he said, “Well, I’ve partly squared you with Carlotta.”

Ed said he guessed she took some squaring.

“I told her the truth,” said Mr. Pope. “I painted a pretty touching picture of you, Ed. Rushing to the defense of your mistress. ‘Faithful old Ed,’ I said; ‘he’s devoted to you, Carlotta, and——’”

“That ain’t the truth,” said Ed.

“Well, you were trying to protect her, anyway,” said Mr. Pope. “She sees that. But she feels she has got to stand well with the Van Tessarts. Aside from Mrs. Van Tessart’s liking her and putting her on committees and things, they’re great friends of the Kimshaws. And as you know, Kimshaw controls my best account. So when old Van Tessart called me up a little while ago—well, I guess it was kind of an indignity his wife suffered. Anyway, he says I have to get rid of you.”

“Oh, yeah?” said Ed.

“No use being truculent,” said Mr. Pope. “He says he hasn’t consulted his lawyers yet, or the police. But if I persist in my refusal to get rid of an animal which is plainly a public menace, the police will take you away and the lawyers will sue. Now, whether they could do it or not, I don’t know. My guess is, they could.”

“Public menace, eh?” said Ed, looking pleased. “Look, Wilb, we got the squeezers on that dame. All you got to do is drop a word about——”

“No!” said Mr. Pope sharply. “Let’s hear no more about that, Ed. We can’t go in for blackmail.”

“O.K.,” said Ed bitterly. “You’re one of these noble jerks that’ll sacrifice their best friend rather than do something ungentlemanly. Well, I guess there’s nothing further to say. Dish me up to the lions and let’s get it over with.”

“Oh, don’t be a fool!” said Mr. Pope. “I said I’d stand by you. But Carlotta insists that you must be sold. So I’ve got a plan——”

“Reject it unconditionally,” said Ed. “I know you won’t stand between me and those Van Tessarts. A horse ain’t got any social position. Look, Wilb; I don’t mind discussing my own funeral when the date ain’t set. It’s kinda nice and weepy figurin’ out your own last words and thinking how bad folks’ll feel. But if I got to face the firing squad tomorrow morning——”

“For heaven’s sake, shut up!” said Mr. Pope. “Nobody’s going to shoot you. My idea is, you get under cover for a few weeks, and I’ll tell everybody I’ve sold you. Then, after a decent period of mourning. I’ll show up with a new horse. If he looks a good deal like you, nobody’ll think it strange, because, naturally, being so fond of you, I’d have picked another as near like you as possible. That’ll satisfy the Van Tessarts, and if Carlotta gets wise, she won’t dare say anything.”

“Yeah,” said Ed, “and what’s the alternative?”

“I’m very much afraid,” said Mr. Pope, “that it’s the S. P. C. A. wagon.”

Ed moaned. “The S. P. C. A. wagon! Me that’s been what I been and done what I done; me that should have died like my noble forebears on a stricken field, defeated mayhap, but unconquered; me that——Get me my smelling salts, Wilb.”

So Mr. Pope unlocked the harness closet and brought out a bottle of Scotch, and when this restorative had been applied, he said, “I’ve called up Barney, and he’s agreed to take you in. I’ll ride you over there tonight.”

“Couldn’t you make it Joe Canelli’s?” said Ed. “Joe’s still got a couple cases of that imported beer left.”

“And where would you be put up?” said Mr. Pope. “There’s nothing at Joe’s but the barroom and that dance hall.”

“I slept in a barroom before this,” pleaded Ed, but Mr. Pope said, “Barney’s got a good barn. He even keeps a cow.”

“She’ll be company for me, I suppose,” said Ed sarcastically. “Oh, well, this is what I get for rescuing ladies in distress. The knight-errant ends up as companion for a cow.”

For the next two weeks, every evening that Mr. Pope could get away he went over to Barney’s and saddled Ed and took him for a ride. At first Ed seemed resigned to his exile. Barney’s beer was good, and the horse picked up many items of local gossip with which to astound Mr. Pope. But after a while he got homesick.

“There’s no place like home, Wilb,” he said. “I guess I’m just a sentimental old fool, but when those boys in the barroom get to singing all them moldy old carry-me-back songs, it’s all I can do to choke back the sobs.”

“Well, you choke ’em back for a couple more weeks,” said Mr. Pope, “and then I’ll take you home as——Let me see——‘Atwood,’ I think, would be a good name. We’ll have to make you look different somehow——maybe your idea of roaching your mane would be enough. People probably never noticed you much.”

“I suppose that’s meant for an insult,” said Ed, and Mr. Pope said, “Not at all. The true gentleman is always inconspicuous.”

Ed snorted, but after a minute he said, “Well, I got no choice. Atwood it is. The gentlemanly Atwood, hey? That ought to fool ’em. Oh, I can be gentlemanly if I put my mind to it. Look at you, Wilb. You get away with it every day. We all of us got double natures. I read a story about it once.”

“Doctor Jekyll and Mr. Hyde,” said Mr. Pope.

“Sure,” said the horse. “Doctor Atwood and Mr. Ed.” He thought for a minute. “I expect Atwood could learn to like beer, though,” he said. “You could say you were trainin’ him, and I

could splutter a little when I drink it.”

“You do anyway,” said Mr. Pope.

A few days later, when Mr. Pope brought the gentlemanly Atwood home and showed him to his wife, Mrs. Pope seemed to suspect nothing. Least of all, apparently, did she suspect his gentility.

“You do have the damnedest taste in horses, Wilbur,” she said. “If you think I’m going to ride that monster around the country——”

“He’s a darned good horse,” said Mr. Pope. “Not so good as Ed, of course.”

“He certainly isn’t,” said Mrs. Pope. “Though there’s a look of Ed too. Paleozoic. And what happened to his mane? Did the moths get in it?”

Elsewhere, Atwood was accepted without comment. But though Mr. Pope pointed out that this was a distinct triumph for Ed’s histrionic ability, the horse was not happy about it. “This being a gentleman,” he said, “it’s easy as falling off a log. And just about as much point to it. Because who wants to fall off a log, anyway? It used to be, when we rode around the country, folks would wave to me and come up and whack me on the rump, and guys I never saw before would fight for the privilege of buying me a drink. I was to home everywhere. But now all is changed, Wilb. I’m just a stranger in this earthly vale. I’ve become so darn inconspicuous and gentlemanly that nobody pays any attention to me.”

But Ed was wrong. A night or two later Mr. Pope came out to the stable and slumped down on the box. “We’re over the dam, Ed,” he said. “Van Tessart has been here. He wanted to see the bill of sale for Atwood.”

“Yeah?” said Ed. “I hope you told him where he got off at.”

“Listen, my poor numskull,” said Mr. Pope. “We are in no position to bandy insults with Van Tessart. Somebody who has seen you in your double role reported to him on the odd similarity between Atwood and Ed, and he got suspicious.”

“I’d hate to have a mean nature like that,” said Ed. “You told him you’d sold me and bought another horse. Ain’t your word good enough for him?”

“I tried to stall him,” said Mr. Pope, “but he says I’ll have to give him proof of the sale or he’ll go ahead with his original action.”

“Aw, heck!” said Ed. “If your word ain’t any good, what’s the use of this gentleman stuff? Well, our little coop de theayter didn’t come off. We’ll have to think of something more suited to our talents.”

“Maybe you can think of something,” said Mr. Pope. “Frankly, I can’t. It’s either selling you, or the S. P. C. A. wag——”

“Don’t *talk* that way!” interrupted Ed. “I hear the rumble of tumbrel wheels.” He shuddered. “Come on, Wilb,” he said. “Pull yourself together. Let’s take a little ride. We can think better on the road. And stick my smelling salts in your pocket. I don’t believe in waiting for inspiration when I got it right handy in a bottle.”

But when, some five miles from home, the empty bottle was tossed into the ditch, no plan had revealed itself to them. Indeed they had begun to feel that no plan was necessary. Something, they assured each other, would turn up.

“Something always does,” said Ed, “even if it’s only your toes. Just sniff this air; it’s like wine.”

“Don’t mix your drinks,” said Mr. Pope. “My gosh, look where we are! That’s the Van Tessart place ahead. How’d we get here?”

“Criminal always returns to the scene of the crime,” said Ed. He began to giggle. “I like to die laughing every time I think of her soarin’ over that eight-foot hedge like a hawk after a rabbit. Only she didn’t get no rabbit; only a couple dents in her fenders.”

“Eight-foot hedge nothing,” said Mr. Pope. “It’s fairly bore—I mean barely four.”

“You would pick on some little unimportant detail,” said Ed disgustedly. “Well, have it your own way. But I stick to it, it’s eight if it’s an inch.”

“I don’t follow you,” said Mr. Pope. “You say, have it my own way, which is four, and then you say it’s eight. We can’t—I mean, it’s——”

“Why is it?” said Ed.

“Why is what?” said Mr. Pope. “Look, Ed; if I had paper and pencil——”

“Oh, let’s go down and measure it,” said Ed. “It’s cool tonight; they’ll all be indoors.”

So they rode down and through the service gate, and then, keeping on the grass, made a detour through a plantation of evergreens to come up to the terrace hedge on the side away from the house. It was dark and there was little chance of discovery if they kept out of the bands of light that streamed from the windows. But it was through one of these bands, as they came opposite the end of the hedge, that they saw a figure move furtively and then disappear.

Mr. Pope leaned forward and whispered in Ed’s ear, “A burglar. We ought to warn them.”

Ed shrugged, but carefully, in order not to dislodge Mr. Pope, who seldom sat firmly in the saddle after the second round. “Let him burgle,” he murmured. “Psst!” he whispered. “Look!” For one of the French windows had opened and Mrs. Van Tessart stepped out.

She walked quickly across the terrace to the hedge. Out of the light, they could only make her out as a darker moving shadow. But presently she was joined by another shadow evidently the presumed burglar, and for a minute or two there was a whispering in the dark.

Then, with a cautious glance at the windows, the burglar stepped out into the light.

Ed turned his head carefully. “My gosh,” he whispered, “it’s that Sam—the old guy that she wrote the letters to!”

The man had a sheaf of bills in his hand and was counting them in the light from the window. He nodded and stuffed them in his pocket, then turned and looked thoughtfully toward where, in the darkness close by, a shaded flashlight glimmered on hands that shuffled a packet of letters.

“It’s the pay-off, Wilb,” Ed whispered. “She’s bought ’em and she’ll burn ’em. It’s our last chance to make a deal. You grab the letters and I’ll give Sam a toss. Then we can—— Oh, Judas!”

For Sam, with a sudden pounce, had grabbed the letters, the flashlight went out, and then heavy feet came pounding toward them.

Just what it was that impelled him to interfere, Mr. Pope was never afterward able to explain. Ed said it was automatic gentlemanliness, and added that it was a prime example of the utter stupidity of the whole gentleman tradition. But whatever it was, it brought Mr. Pope into the path of the fleeing Sam.

“Stop!” commanded Mr. Pope sternly, and the next thing he knew he was sitting on the grass holding his nose, while Sam, seizing his chance and Ed’s bridle, scrambled aboard the startled horse and was off through the evergreens in a shower of divots.

Mr. Pope continued to hold his nose. He held it because it was completely numb, and he could not otherwise be sure that it still formed part of his face. It also felt at least ten times its normal size, but he knew that this could not be so or he would not have been able to see Mrs. Van Tessart, who now came toward him.

“Mr. Pope!” she exclaimed. “What are you doing here? Was that your horse?”

“Bust have butted be betweend the eyes,” said Mr. Pope. Then he staggered to his feet and withdrew his hand from his nose. In this crisis it would have to look after itself. Which the return of his normal voice, when he spoke, assured him it could do. “Yes,” he said, “the fellow took my horse. But don’t worry, he won’t get far—not on Ed.”

“I am not worrying, Mr. Pope,” she said coldly, though he thought her voice trembled. “I came out a moment ago for a breath of air and heard the sound of a struggle, and saw some man jump on a horse and ride off. And then I find you here. I am curious to know what is going on.”

“I was curious myself,” said Mr. Pope. “That’s why I’m here. I was riding by, and saw a man sneak through the gate and up toward the house. I followed and tried to capture him, but he knocked me down and took my horse and got away. Shouldn’t you call the police?”

“Hardly necessary now,” said Mrs. Van Tessart. “He’s taken nothing. And the police couldn’t find him now. Unless you wish to call them to recover your horse. Which, by the way, I think you just referred to as Ed.”

“At,” said Mr. Pope. “Short for Atwood. But what’s the difference?” he added bitterly. “In coming here, I was merely trying to protect your property. And that, in spite of the fact that you and your husband are doing your best to deprive me of some of my property—namely, my horse. Whose only fault is an excess of fidelity.”

“I haven’t time to discuss that with you now,” said Mrs. Van Tessart. “Perhaps your explanation of your presence here is true, but it doesn’t entirely satisfy me. I am sure it will not satisfy Mr. Van Tessart. You threatened him this evening.”

Evidently, thought Mr. Pope, she felt sure that he hadn’t seen anything. And she was trying to distract and get rid of him by bringing up the horse issue, which she could hardly at the moment be very much concerned about.

Well, he only had to tell her what he’d seen. Maybe it was blackmail, but if blackmail was the only thing that would save Ed——

“I told your husband that I’d punch his head if he didn’t lay off Ed,” he said. “But I hardly think that will be necessary, however pleasant it would be. For——”

The thud of rapidly approaching hoofbeats interrupted him. Mrs. Van Tessart blanched. She blanched from her iron pompadour to her shoes. And over the hedge sailed Ed. She caught up her skirts and started to run. But Mr. Pope put a hand on her arm.

“Please,” he said. “He’s quite harmless. And he seems to have something for you,” he added, pointing.

She turned, then stared fascinated at the packet of letters which Ed held in his mouth.

“Give them to Mrs. Van Tessart, Ed,” said Mr. Pope.

The horse looked at Mr. Pope’s nose and gave a loud and vulgar giggle. Mrs. Van Tessart started away in alarm, but Mr. Pope said, “That’s nothing. Just his way of showing affection. He always does that when he sees me.” At which Ed giggled again.

And at that moment the French window flew open and Mr. Van Tessart came out. He was a small man with rather more dignity than he had been constructed to carry.

“What’s going on here?” he demanded. He didn’t at first see Mr. Pope and Ed, who were outside the band of illumination. “Oh, it’s you, May.” He looked down at the grass. “I wish you wouldn’t make practice mashie shots on this lawn, May. There’s a place provided——”

“I’m afraid my horse did that,” said Mr. Pope, stepping forward. “You see——”

Mr. Van Tessart retreated hastily to the doorway. "By heaven, Pope," he said, "I'm going to settle this once for all. Evidently you're not content with that murderous attack on my wife; you dare to bring that vicious brute here——"

"Be quiet, Mervin," said Mrs. Van Tessart. "Mr. Pope has done us a service. He—or rather his horse—has driven off a gang of thieves who were trying to break into the house. After what I have seen, I am convinced that the attack on me was, however mistaken, an act of remarkable intelligence. Under the circumstances, we have no choice but to overlook it and drop the whole thing."

"You're making a mistake, May," said Mr. Van Tessart.

"I do not make mistakes," she replied firmly.

The reference to that disastrous vote for Harding crumpled Mr. Van Tessart. He turned without a word and went in.

"Now, Mr. Pope," she said. And he nodded to Ed, and the horse dropped the letters into her outstretched hand. She looked at Mr. Pope sharply. "I think——" she began.

"The matter is closed," he said, swinging into the saddle. "Good night, Mrs. Van Tessart."

"Well," he said as they went back through the evergreens, "that's the last of Atwood. And I must say, he went out in a blaze of gentility. That was the gentlemanly gesture—handing over those letters."

"Uh-huh," said Ed. "Well, I could have knocked Sam over when he hit you, but I needed time to think things over, so I took him on a tour of the flower beds." He grinned. "I've always wanted to have a little roll among the petunias. And I did; boy, I did! So did Sam. Only his roll ended in a barberry hedge. His language kind of shocked the Atwood in me."

"There's some stuff hanging on your bit," said Mr. Pope. "Looks like gents' suiting."

"Pants," said Ed. "Had to rip 'em a bit to get the——Oh, that reminds me. Let's go this way." And he turned right through the trees into another part of the grounds. "Must be about here." He ducked his head under a bush and drew out the sheaf of bills, which he passed back to Mr. Pope. "Little something for our piggy bank."

"Good Lord, Ed!" said Mr. Pope. "We can't keep this!"

Ed groaned. "Don't explain," he said: "I can't bear it. All right, send it back to her. Probably you'll add interest for the time I had it in my possession. Just one more gentlemanly word and I'll go over to the boneyard and give myself up."

"By the way," said Mr. Pope, "that hedge was four feet."

"Yeah?" said Ed. "Well, what's the matter with you, Wilb? When you're right you usually crow your head off. Sick or something?"

"Yes," said Mr. Pope. "I still have to explain to Carlotta. Can you see me issuing a reasonable explanation from behind this nose?"

"If it swells any more," said Ed, looking around, "she won't be able to see you. Maybe," he said brightly, "she won't even know it's you."

But Mrs. Pope was more concerned with the nose than with the explanation.

"Oh, Wilbur!" she said. "Oh, you poor darling! We must get a dressing on it right away. Look, dear; can you wiggle it? I mean with your fingers. That'll tell if it's broken."

Mr. Pope said firmly that to wiggle it would certainly send him into pronounced shock, so Mrs. Pope kissed the nose lightly and then brought her first-aid kit and put on a bandage which left nothing of Mr. Pope visible but his right eye and half his chin. Under the

circumstances he thought it best not to complain, and it was from within these stifling folds that he mumbled his explanation.

“My poor Wilbur,” said Mrs. Pope, “you fooled nobody. We all knew it was Ed. It’s been one of the chief items of speculation—whether you’d get away with it. I wish I knew who told!” she said viciously. “But it’s all right now,” she said. “Shall I get you a cup of tea, darling?”

“Tea!” Mr. Pope nearly blew the bandage off.

“It’s the only stimulant you can have,” she said. “The Red Cross says alcohol is not a stimulant.”

Mr. Pope said that he must go and fix Ed up first, and retreated to the stable.

“Wow!” said the horse, staring. Then he came closer. “Symbolic,” he mused aloud. “The worm at last weaves him a cocoon, to emerge—My Lord, Wilb, I wonder what will hatch out of there! It makes me feel kind of weak.”

“Me too,” said Mr. Pope. “How about a nice cup of tea?” And as Ed stared he went over to the harness closet. “The Red Cross says alcohol isn’t stimulating, Ed. You suppose we have been on the wrong track all these years?”

“We better do a little research on it ourselves,” said the horse. “Make mine a double, Wilb.”

[The end of *Dr. Atwood and Mr. Ed* by Walter Rollin Brooks]