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ILLUSTRATOR
CHARLES LA SALLE



She looked at Ed and frowned slightly. This is—er—your horse? Mr. Pope said it was.

Ed Gets a Mother Complex

and ponders antiques: “Why don’t folks bust their own clocks and save money?”

BY

WALTER BROOKS

ILLUSTRATED BY CHARLES LA SALLE

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If you didn’t know the inside facts like I do most all you could say about that horse of Mr. Pope’s was that he was a horse. People in Mount Kisco used to laugh like anything when he went clumping by with Mr. Pope sort of crouched on his back and some of them even got mad about it. My goodness they said that Wilbur Pope must make ten thousand a year and he’s got a fine house and a wife that makes most other women look as if they’d just been rescued from drowning and he ought to be ashamed to ride around on that revolting old plug! But Mr. Pope didn’t care. He’d bought this horse so that week-ends he could get out where it was quiet instead of staying home and pouring drinks for Mrs. Pope’s friends. And he’d got pretty fond of him. The horse’s name was Ed.

Well of course plenty of men have horses or dogs they are fond of and even prefer to human society and it’s easy to see why. A horse will never give you an argument and a dog will listen to your troubles without interrupting to squawk about his own sufferings. He’s man’s best friend because he has no comeback. But Ed could talk. And in spite of that Mr. Pope was fond of him. Ed had his opinions and they were good sensible ones though perhaps sometimes his language was a little coarse. But Mr. Pope had been to college so he didn’t mind that.

Of course Ed’s being able to talk was sometimes embarrassing. Like the time Mr. Pope went to that auction up near Mount Kisco. They’d been out riding that Saturday and had stopped in several taverns for beer. They’d had enough for the time being and were sort of ambling up a back road when they came to a white house on a hill and a lot of cars around it and about forty people sitting on the lawn in undertakers’ chairs in front of a man who was standing on a table and yelling. Everything in the house had been brought out and stacked on the porch and I don’t suppose it was any funnier a lot of junk than your or my personal property would be if it was all dragged out into the sunshine. But Ed and Mr. Pope thought it was funny and they went and stood under a tree a little back from the crowd and watched.

Well the first thing they saw sold was a glass dish which the auctioneer said was a hobnail pattern and a genuine antique and the bidding started at a quarter and went right up to four dollars and ten cents. Gosh it must be an antique at that said Ed though what anybody’d want with a dish with warts all over it I dunno. The woman who’d bought it turned around and looked angrily at Mr. Pope and Ed laughed and said something which I can’t repeat because it was slightly off color and the woman didn’t turn around again but sat very straight and her ears got red.

Shut up you fool! whispered Mr. Pope. Everybody thinks I said that and I’m not going to have your smart cracks fathered on me. Smut cracks Wilb—smut cracks said Ed and began to

giggle. Not bad hey? he said. Just one more good or bad and we go home said Mr. Pope crossly so Ed didn't say any more.

The next thing was a parlor organ in good condition except that it wheezed badly when the auctioneer played a few chords on it. The bidding started at a dollar and went rapidly up to a dollar and a half and it was sort of hesitating there when Ed yelled suddenly One seventy-five!

One seventy-five from the gentleman with the horse said the auctioneer and he's a musician himself or I miss my guess for he's got a voice could sing Asleep in the Deep to the queen's taste. Everybody laughed because Ed had yelled his bid in a voice that could have been heard over on the other side of the hill. For heaven's sake Ed! murmured Mr. Pope.

The organ sold finally for six dollars and when attention had turned to a tin footbath filled with old books Mr. Pope said What on earth got into you Ed? I dunno said Ed, I thought it would be kind of nice to have in the stable and you could accompany me and I could sing some of the old songs. It would go with your voice all right said Mr. Pope with that wheeze in it. And how did you suppose we'd get it home? Hadn't thought of that said Ed. Well said Mr. Pope you'd better think of it.

So Ed was quiet for a while but Mr. Pope could see that he was getting auction fever which comes upon even hard-boiled old plugs like Ed and makes them lose all sense of values and bid as long as anybody can be found to bid against them. Come on Ed let's be going said Mr. Pope. But Ed was too intent on the bidding to hear him. And suddenly he shouted Twenty-five!

Well it was a picture Ed was bidding on and it was pretty terrible. It showed a square-headed little girl with curls sitting in a big chair with spectacles on and a smirk and the name of it was I'se Dram'ma. Ed for heaven's sake! said Pope. Cute ain't it? said Ed and as an old gentleman with tobacco-stained whiskers raised the bid to thirty with a truculent look at Mr. Pope the horse called Thirty-five!

But when the old gentleman went to forty Mr. Pope shook his head violently at the auctioneer. Going at forty cents—last call said the auctioneer. But Mr. Pope was staring menacingly at Ed who didn't dare bid again. Aw what's the matter with you Wilbur? said Ed as the next picture A Yard of Pansies was put up. My gosh forty cents! It isn't the forty cents and you know it said Mr. Pope but I'm not going to ride home like a border reaver with the spoils of war in the shape of I'se Dram'ma at my saddlebow. You might better come home with some nice pictures said Ed than with some other things. I guess your wife would rather see you roll home carrying I'se Dram'ma than carrying the kind of load you did last Sunday. That was a right pretty picture but if you grudge forty cents for me to have something like that hung up over my stall to give me pleasure I got nothing more to say. Fine said Mr. Pope. If you've got nothing more to say we'll stay.

At this point there was some innocent gaiety caused by the tobacco-stained old gentleman who bought what he thought was a bundle of pillowcases which when opened turned out to be six pairs of old-fashioned drawers trimmed with Hamburg lace. I can't never take them things home! he said and began distributing them to the ladies in his vicinity most of whom took the joke in good part. But one large pink woman in a garden hat stared coldly at the ribald old gentleman and said I do not think that is funny. You and her Wilb muttered Ed. My gosh what do folks come to an auction for if it isn't to have some fun? Don't pout said Mr. Pope it isn't becoming. Anyway he said I don't want to spoil your fun. But I know that woman. She's the wife of Lamson who's head of our firm. It won't do to have her reporting to him that I'm eccentric and a lot of things would look eccentric to her that you and I would think were fun.

Like buying I'se Dram'ma. She hasn't much humor in her. Yeah said Ed I know what you're trying to say. You're ashamed of me. You want to get out of here because you're ashamed of being seen by her with an old nag like me.

Mr. Pope turned and looked at the horse. Say what's the matter with you Ed? he said. He hesitated a minute and then took hold of the bridle and led Ed over close to where Mrs. Lamson was sitting. How do you do Mrs. Lamson? he said. Mrs. Lamson turned and smiled graciously. Oh how do you do Mr. Pope? she said. You've been riding? Mr. Pope said yes he rode a good deal week-ends. How nice said Mrs. Lamson and then she looked at Ed and frowned slightly. And this is—er—your horse? Mr. Pope said it was. He wished Ed would stand up straighter and not leer. He was sure that Ed was standing knock-kneed on purpose.

I used to hunt a great deal said Mrs. Lamson. I was practically brought up on horseback. Back home in the Genesee Valley. Then she said I gather you're interested in antiques?

Mr. Pope wasn't sure whether she had changed the subject or not but he said O no he had just been passing by and stopped out of curiosity. Mrs. Lamson said There is nothing of any value here—except possibly that break front. But the rest of this rubbish! She made what in her girlhood she had practiced as a little *moue*. Nowadays it was just a face. Mr. Pope led Ed back to the shade of his tree.

I take it all back said Ed. You wasn't ashamed of me. Just the same you ought to have slapped her down for the looks she gave me. What the hell is a break front Wilb? Search me said Mr. Pope. But see here Ed. If you want to buy something so much I won't stop you. Provided it's something we can carry home.

Well the first thing Ed bid on was a feather bed which he thought would be more comfortable to sleep on than the rather inferior grade of straw which he accused Mr. Pope of providing for him. Or I could wear it over my shoulders winter mornings he said—like a sort of negligee. But the ribald old gentleman bid on it too and Ed had taken a fancy to him after the episode of the drawers so he let him have it.

And then the auctioneer put up a picture of a race horse. This is a hand-painted oil painting ladies and gentlemen he said and I don't know when I've seen a nicer painted one. Almost as clear and sharp as a colored photograph. Who'll say a dollar to start it? A dollar! called Ed.

Why didn't you say a quarter you dope murmured Mr. Pope. No sense throwing my money away. I'd be ashamed to make such a bid said Ed. Well I don't see—Mr. Pope began. It reminds me of my mother said Ed simply. O said Mr. Pope I beg your pardon Ed.

Somebody bid two dollars and Ed promptly bid three. Three from the gentleman over by the tree said the auctioneer and if I may say so sir the horse in this picture kind of favors that horse of yours—she does indeed. Every one turned around and there was some laughter. I expect maybe when you were young said Mr. Pope looking thoughtfully at Ed. What was your mother's name? And when Ed said it was Nellie he called to the auctioneer and asked him if there was any name on the picture. Something here on the back said the man. Here 'tis—Jenny Lind—owned by Colonel E. P. Rockway. Four dollars. Four and a half. Do I hear the five?

Not your mother after all said Mr. Pope. Yeah? said Ed. Well I guess I ought to know my own mother. Far as I know she never stood for her portrait. Too busy on the milk route. But folks always said she was pretty as a picture and this must be the picture she was as pretty as. Had four white stockings just like the picture too. Well you were going to collect stockings said Mr. Pope so here's your chance. But I guess somebody else has got the same idea. For the

bids had now reached six dollars. Half! called Ed. Well some one bid seven and Ed went the half and they bid eight and Ed went the half again and Mr. Pope said Gosh Ed! and then he shrugged his shoulders and said O well I can take it. And then all at once he saw that the person who was bidding against Ed was Mrs. Lamson.

Well I don't know that the whole of Mr. Pope's life passed before his eyes in that instant but an interview he had had with Mr. Lamson passed before them all right. For there had recently been a shake-up in the firm and it was Mr. Lamson who had been doing the shaking and although Mr. Pope had not like two of his friends been shaken right out of his job he had been made to feel pretty insecure. Mr. Lamson had seriously criticized his handling of two of his best accounts. They can't show a profit and neither can we if you allow them continually to reduce their appropriations said Mr. Lamson. You have got to use more business sense Wilbur and more firmness. And so if you are to continue with us—as I hope you are—

Well Mr. Pope was thinking about this interview and did not realize for a minute that Mrs. Lamson had turned around and was beckoning to him. So just as Ed bid twelve dollars he walked over to her. I just realized she said that it is you who are bidding against me. Have you a particular reason for wanting to own this picture Mr. Pope? Why it's on account of Ed said Mr. Pope and then as she looked puzzled he said That is Ed is my horse you know and as the picture looked rather like him—I can't see that it looks particularly like him interrupted Mrs. Lamson and so as it seems to be merely a whim of yours to bid it up I will tell you that I want to bid it in for my collection. You collect horse pictures? said Mr. Pope. Record holders said Mrs. Lamson. You see when harness racing was so popular most of the old-time trotters had their portraits painted and I've been able to find a great many of them.

I had twelve madam said the auctioneer catching her eye. Will you bid thirteen? Just a moment said Mrs. Lamson and turned back to Mr. Pope. I found a portrait of Maud S. last week she said. She held the record in 1885—two minutes eight and three quarters seconds. I'm extremely anxious to get Jenny Lind. She held the record only part of one season and so not being a famous horse like Goldsmith Maid for instance it seemed unlikely that there would be a portrait. Well in that case said Mr. Pope. Thank you said Mrs. Lamson I felt sure you'd be reasonable about it. Thirteen! she called.

But as Mr. Pope walked back to where he had left Ed standing under a tree the horse bid fifteen.

Mrs. Lamson turned in angry amazement. Sixteen! she said. Stop it you fool! muttered Mr. Pope. Twenty! shouted Ed. Twenty-one! said Mrs. Lamson. Twenty-five and I've only begun to bid! yelled Ed.

Mrs. Lamson got up and turned around and walked slowly over to Mr. Pope. You can have it Mr. Pope she said furiously. But I think you will regret it. And she walked off to her car.

Mr. Pope didn't say anything to Ed until they were a mile or two along the road home. He had looped his arm through the wire on the back of the picture which he was carrying like a shield. Well he said finally you fixed me all right. O shucks Wilb don't be such a sourpuss said Ed. What's twenty-five bucks to a man in your position? I haven't got any position said Mr. Pope—not after she tells Lamson that I said I'd let her have the picture and then went on bidding. You saved him twenty dollars said Ed. He's an advertising man said Mr. Pope. He believes you should encourage people to spend—not save. Why couldn't you have kept your mouth shut? I dunno said the horse I guess it was when she said you were just bidding it in for a whim and you let her get away with it. It ain't any whim wanting my own mother's picture. Sounds like a whim to me said Mr. Pope. All right said Ed all right—call it a whim then. But

if it had been me in your place and your mother's picture I'd promised to buy for you believe me I'd have bought it.

They got the picture into the stable without Mrs. Pope seeing it and hung it over Ed's manger. And that evening Mrs. Pope looked out the window and said Wilbur you left the light on in the stable. So I did said Mr. Pope because he didn't want to tell her that Ed had probably turned the light on so he could see his new family portrait. Well go turn it out said Mrs. Pope. O let it burn said Mr. Pope. What's two cents' worth of electricity? But Mrs. Pope gave a sniff and before he could stop her went out to the stable. And in a minute she called Wilbur! Wilbur!

So Mr. Pope went after her. What's this picture over Ed's manger? said Mrs. Pope. O said Mr. Pope I bought that for Ed. I thought it would sort of—you know—dress up the place for him. Dress it up for him! exclaimed Mrs. Pope. A horse! Wilbur have you gone stark staring — But she didn't get any further because just then Carrie came out to tell them that they had callers.

Well Mr. Pope was glad of the interruption but he wasn't so glad when they went into the house and found Mr. and Mrs. Lamson there. Good evening Mr. Pope said Mrs. Lamson. We've come over to see if we can't come to some agreement about that picture. I've talked it over with Mr. Lamson and we both feel that we want to be fair and that perhaps you didn't understand— What is all this Wilbur? said Mrs. Pope. So Mrs. Lamson explained. Well goodness Wilbur said Mrs. Pope if you told Mrs. Lamson you weren't going to bid against her and then went right ahead with your bidding the only decent thing to do is give the picture to her. Mr. Lamson didn't say anything but just looked as he did when there was trouble in the office.

Well Mr. Pope was in a quandary not to say a dilemma but he saw all at once that there was one thing he could not do—he could not let Ed down. For Ed was his friend but Mr. Lamson was just his boss. So he said I'm sorry but I'm afraid I can't give the picture to you Mrs. Lamson because it doesn't belong to me now. I bought it to give to a friend and I've already given it to him. Why Wilbur Mrs. Pope began but Mr. Pope said Please Carlotta! and so she didn't say any more—then.

So then Mr. Lamson spoke for the first time. Perhaps if your friend knows the circumstances he said—if he knows how important it is for Mrs. Lamson and—he added after a slight pause—for you to have the matter settled in a friendly way—perhaps he'd be willing to give it up. Mr. Pope said doubtfully that if they'd wait a few minutes he'd go ask him. And he went down to the stable.

But Ed had no intention of giving the picture up. Go ahead he said angrily. Go ahead! Give the old fool the picture. Don't let *my* feelings stand in your way. Don't bother about me. I'm only a horse. I'm only the one you gave the picture to. O gosh Ed said Mr. Pope be reasonable will you? I'll get you another horse picture—I'll get you half a dozen. I don't want any others said Ed. Would you trade your own mother's picture in for that of some other old plug? Don't be rude said Mr. Pope and anyway she isn't your mother. Jenny Lind ran in the seventies and your mother couldn't have been alive then. Well so it's my grandmother then said Ed. What's the difference? I'se Dram'ma murmured Mr. Pope. But Ed looked up at the picture and said in a husky voice I never knew my mother Wilb. I missed all that—the tender care a mother lavishes on her little son. And this—this lifeless picture—it cannot speak to me—tell me all

the loving things that she must have murmured to me when I was too young to understand. Yet it is all I have of her Wilbur. Would you take even that away from me?

O gosh Ed said Mr. Pope exasperatedly you know perfectly well she's not your mother. I can't be mistaken said Ed shaking his head. Instinctively one recognizes his own. Rats! said Mr. Pope. Rats for you no doubt said Ed. Horses for me. No no Wilbur he went on. This surge of filial emotion I feel when I gaze upon that picture—

He rolled his eyes sentimentally then choked up and a large tear slid down his long nose. And just as Mr. Pope started to reply Mr. Lamson's voice behind him said Ah there you are Wilbur. We had to be getting along and Mrs. Pope said she thought we'd find you here. Has your horse got a cold? he asked as Ed gave a loud sniff. I'm sorry to be so long Mr. Pope began but Mrs. Lamson rushed forward. Why there's Jenny Lind! she exclaimed. O then you have her back! No said Mr. Pope unfortunately I haven't. My friend refuses to give it up. May we ask your friend's name? said Mr. Lamson but Mr. Pope said No it wouldn't be any use.

See here Wilbur said Mr. Lamson you must realize that this all has a rather unpleasant look to us. You say the picture has been given away yet we find it in your possession. You refuse to give the name of the owner. You don't explain why you continued to bid after promising that you wouldn't. I don't like that Wilbur. Perhaps you remember a little talk we had a day or so ago? Mr. Pope said he did. Well said Mr. Lamson I have been hoping that it might bear some fruit in the shape of a more vigorous attitude toward your work. But your obstinacy in defending an indefensible position is not very encouraging. Nevertheless I am prepared to overlook it and to offer you exactly twice what you paid for the picture—fifty dollars. Is it a deal? Mr. Pope looked Mr. Lamson straight in the eye and said No!

Well Mr. Lamson looked at Mrs. Lamson and they both began to swell up as if they were going to explode but before they could Carrie came out and said Mr. Pope was wanted on the phone. So he went in and it was a Mr. Sproul who said he'd learned that Mr. Pope had bought a picture of Jenny Lind. Mr. Pope said Yes he had and Mr. Sproul said Well I intended to go to the auction and bid on that picture but I was detained but I think I can make you an attractive offer for it. And when Mr. Pope said it wasn't for sale Mr. Sproul said Well he could go to \$250.

Well when Mr. Pope heard that he swallowed and said it did indeed sound attractive and he might consider it only would Mr. Sproul mind telling him just why he wanted it. Mr. Sproul said not at all for he was a dealer and he had several clients who were collecting portraits of early trotters and this was the only known portrait of Jenny Lind. So Mr. Pope said he'd call him in the morning and went back to the barn.

Well Wilbur said Mr. Lamson is your answer final? Mr. Pope glanced at Ed who was looking kind of worried and the horse shook his head at him but Mr. Pope said Absolutely final. Very good said Mr. Lamson and I think you know what to expect. I suppose you mean my job said Mr. Pope who was now good and mad. Well that's all right with me for I don't particularly care to work with a man who would try to pull a fast one on one of his employees. I don't understand you said Mr. Lamson. Perhaps it will clear it up for you if you tell me why Mrs. Lamson didn't raise my last bid said Mr. Pope. Why what perfect nonsense! said Mrs. Lamson. Is it? said Mr. Pope turning to her. I suggest he said that you thought I did not know the real value of this picture and that you stopped bidding because you thought Mr. Lamson could buy it from me at a fraction of its worth. Why I never heard anything so ridiculous! said Mrs. Lamson. What do you think it is worth? Well said Mr. Pope I would consider an offer of

three hundred dollars. Well everybody gasped including Ed but Mr. Lamson who had been looking more and more worried put his arm on Mr. Pope's shoulder and gave a laugh that would have been jovial if it hadn't cracked badly in the middle and said By George Wilbur you caught us out nicely and I must say you have passed our little test with flying colors. What little test? said Mr. Pope and Mr. Lamson said Why you remember in the little talk we had I said I felt that your lack of firmness in business dealings with your clients was a handicap? So I arranged this little test with Mrs. Lamson. I made it obvious that we were trying to force a bad bargain on you but you saw through it and then turned the tables neatly. I congratulate you my boy. And we are offering three hundred dollars for that picture.

Mr. Pope thought a minute and then he said H'm yes—I see. But my business sense still tells me that it would be a mistake to close tonight. Suppose I give you my answer tomorrow? So Mr. Lamson said that would be fine and Mrs. Lamson looked sort of bewildered but she said good night politely when Mr. Lamson nudged her and they went.

Why Wilbur! said Mrs. Pope I thought you were—Why you were wonderful! I was indeed said Mr. Pope. But right now I need a drink so let's go in. Ed coughed meaningly but Mr. Pope went on out of the barn. But a little later he came back with a bottle and gave Ed a generous slug of whisky. Boy that's the stuff! said Ed. Got a wallop to it like having a tree fall on you. Where'd you get it? It's Old Stormy said Mr. Pope. Fifteen years old and I can get it for three fifty a bottle. If I hadn't spent so much for that picture of your mother today I could get us a few bottles tomorrow. Yeah said Ed but the picture's mine now. All yours agreed Mr. Pope. But of course if you took Lamson's offer—let's see—after paying me back you'd have two hundred and seventy-five dollars. That would be—hell I'm no business man—around eighty bottles.

Eighty bottles said Ed dreamily. You know Wilb I've been thinking—this talk about a mother's influence and as the twig is bent and so on—well it's a lot of baloney. I ain't saying anything against mothers. They're all right in their place and I suppose you have to have 'em. But this is a man's world. So I've heard said Mr. Pope. Yeah said Ed and too much mother's influence turns out sissies. All this crying into your beer because you never had a mother's care.... Well look at me—I turned out all right without it didn't I? I guess you wouldn't have been any different said Mr. Pope.

Ed looked at him suspiciously for a minute then turned and looked up at the portrait. I dunno Wilb he said. Something seems to have gone out of that picture for me. Now if it was really my mother's picture— Instinctively one recognizes one's own murmured Mr. Pope. Well a guy can be mistaken can't he? said Ed. O.K. said Mr. Pope. Let's take it down and I'll accept Lamson's offer for you. Maybe it would be better said Ed. Keep it here and it would only soften me up all the time. And we can't afford to be soft life being what it is. When can you get delivery on that liquor Wilb?

THE END

[The end of *Ed Gets a Mother Complex* by Walter Rollin Brooks]