

**L. RON  
HUBBARD**



**THE  
PROFESSOR  
WAS  
A THIEF**

**GALAXY**  
PRESENTS

## PREFACE

IT was about two o'clock in the afternoon and Sergeant Kelly, having imbibed a bit too much corned beef and cabbage at lunch, was dozing comfortably at his desk. He did not immediately hear the stumbling feet of Patrolman O'Rourke, but when he did, he was, in consequence, annoyed.

Sergeant Kelly opened his eyes, grunted, and sat slowly forward, hitching at his pants which he had unbuckled to ease his ballooning stomach.

His eye was offended at first by Patrolman O'Rourke's upset uniform and then, suddenly, interested. And what sergeantly eye would not have been? For Patrolman O'Rourke's mouth was slack and his eyes could have been used as bowling balls. He ran into a spittoon and heeded its thundering protest and departure not at all. Bracing his tottering self against the desk without changing his dazed expression, O'Rourke gulped:

"It's gone."

"Well!" said Sergeant Kelly. "Don't stand there like a jackanapes! Speak up! *What's gone?*"

"The Empire State Building," said Patrolman O'Rourke.

## CHAPTER ONE

NO one knew why he was called Pop unless it was that he had sired the newspaper business. For the first few hundred years, it appeared, he had been a senior reporter, going calmly about his business of reporting wholesale disaster, but during the past month something truly devastating had occurred. Muttering noises sounded in the ranks.

Long overdue for the job of city editor, lately vacated via the undertaker, Pop had been demoted instead of promoted. Ordinarily Pop was not a bitter man. He had seen too many cataclysms fade into the staleness of yesterday's paper. He had obit-ed too large a legion of generals, saints and coal heavers to expect anything from life but its eventual absence. But there were limits.

When Leonard Caulborn, whose diapers Pop had changed, had been elevated to city editor over Pop's decaying head, Pop chose to attempt the dissolution of Gaul in the manufactures of Kentucky. But even the latter has a habit of wearing away and leaving the former friend a mortal enemy. Thus it was, when the copy boy came for him, that Pop swore at the distilleries as he arose and looked about on the floor where he supposed his head must have rolled.

"Mr. Caulborn said he hada seeyuh rightaway," said the copy boy.

Pop limped toward the office, filled with resentment.

Leonard Caulborn was a wise young man. Even though he had no real knowledge of the newspaper business, people *still* insisted he was wise. Hadn't he married the publisher's daughter? And if the paper didn't make as much as it should, didn't the publisher have plenty of stockholders who could take the losses and never feel them—much, anyway.

Young and self-made and officious if not efficient, Caulborn greeted Pop not at all, but let him stand before the desk a few minutes.

Pop finally picked up a basket and dropped it a couple inches, making Caulborn look up.

"You sent for me?" said Pop.

"I sent for you— Oh, yes, I remember now. Pending your retirement you've been put on the copy desk."

"My *what?*" cried Pop.

"Your retirement. We are retiring all employees over fifty. We need new people and new ideas here."

"Retirement?" Pop was still gaping. "When? How?"

"Effective day after tomorrow, Pop, you are no longer with this paper. Our present Social Security policy—"

"Will pay me off about twenty bucks complete," said Pop. "But to hell with that. I brought this paper into the world and it's going to take me out. You can't do this to me!"

"I have orders—"

"You are issuing the orders these days," said Pop. "What are you going to do for copy when you lose all your men that know the ropes?"

“We’ll get along,” said Caulborn. “That will be all.”

“No, it won’t either,” said Pop. “I’m staying as reporter.”

“All right. You’re staying as reporter then. It’s only two days.”

“And you’re going to give me assignments,” said Pop.

Caulborn smiled wearily, evidently thinking it best to cajole the old coot. “All right, here’s an article I clipped a couple months ago. Get a story on it.”

When Caulborn had fished up the magazine out of his rubble-covered desk he tossed it to Pop like a citizen paying a panhandler.

Pop wanted to throw it back, for he saw at a glance that it was merely a stick, a rehash of some speech made a long while ago to some physics society. But he had gained ground so far. He wouldn’t lose it. He backed out.

Muttering to himself he crossed to his own desk, wading through the rush and clamor of the city room. It was plain to him that he had to make the most of what he had. It was unlikely that he’d get another chance.

“I’ll show ’em,” he growled. “Call me a has-been. Well! Think I can’t make a story out of nothing, does he? Why, I’ll get such a story that he’ll *have* to keep me on. And promote me. And raise my pay. Throw me into the gutter, will they?”

He sat down in his chair and scanned the article. It began quite lucidly with the statement that Hannibal Pertwee had made this address before the assembled physicists of the country. Pop, growing cold the while, tried to wade through said address. When he came out at the end with a spinning head he saw that Hannibal Pertwee’s theories were

not supported by anybody but Hannibal Pertwee. All other information, even to Pop, was so much polysyllabic nonsense. Something about transportation of freight. He gathered that much. Some new way to help civilization. But just how, the article did not tell—Pop, at least.

Suddenly Pop felt very old and very tired. At fifty-three he had ten thousand bylines behind him. He had built the *World-Journal* to its present importance. He loved the paper and now it was going to hell in the hands of an incompetent, and they were letting him off at a station halfway between nowhere and anywhere. And the only way he had of stopping them was an impossible article by some crackbrain on the transportation of freight.

He sighed and, between two shaking hands, nursed an aching head.