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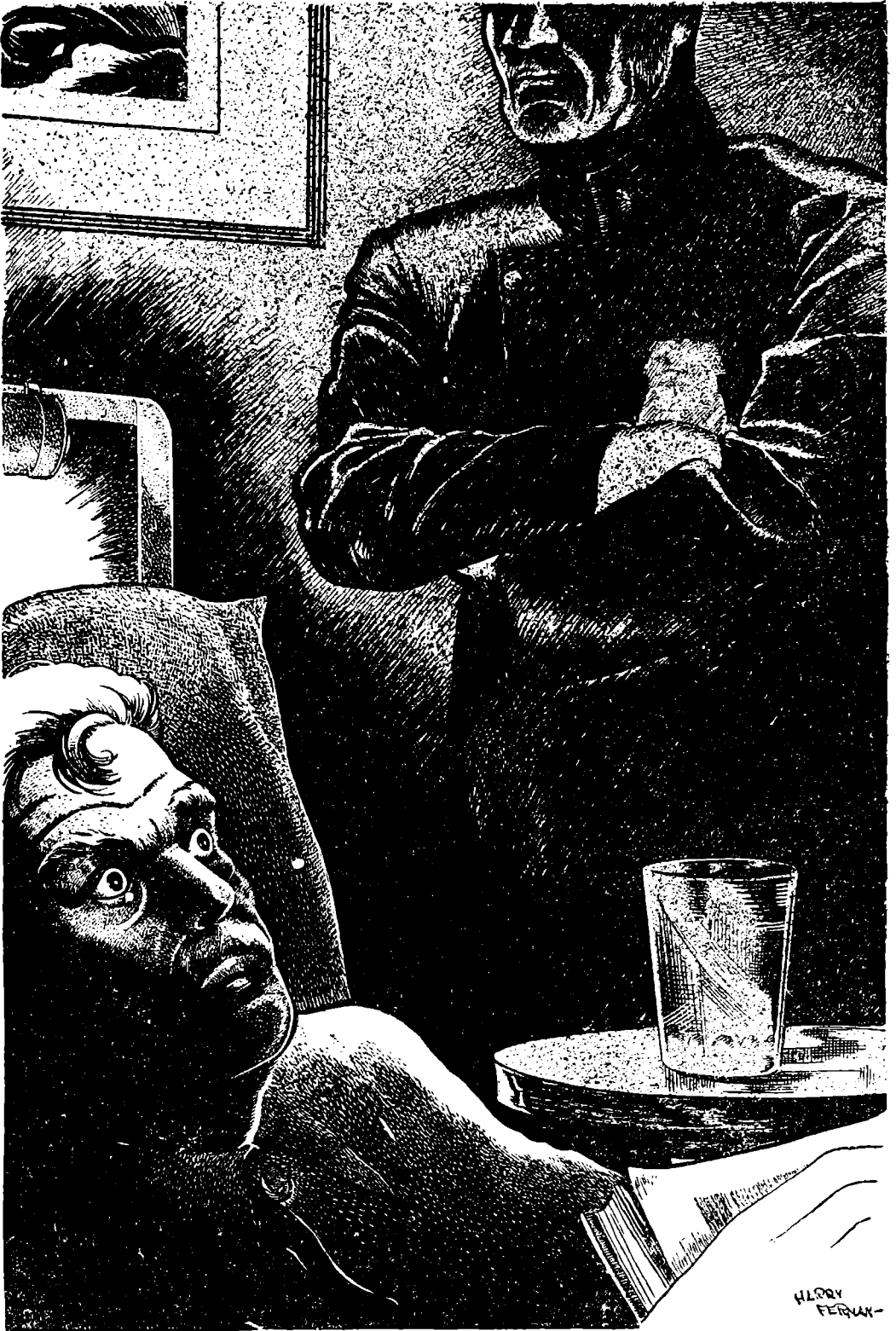
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FARNSWORTH WRIGHT, Editor



**WEIRD TALES ISSUED 1st OF EACH MONTH**



"The dead man's slender fingers rested on the volume he had been perusing."

# The Little Man

By CLIFFORD BALL

*An odd and curious story about three strange murders, and a mild little man who was the author of them*

## 1. The First Impression

“GOOD evening, officer,” said the little man, touching the representative of the law timidly on his elbow to attract attention. “A pleasant evening, isn’t it?”

Patrolman James O’Hara started. He had been intently interested in the lights of an apartment across the street. A blonde lived there and she apparently had never learned the use of a window shade. O’Hara had been delighted before the touch on his arm brought him so swiftly back to mundane soil. Once glance at the little man and his apprehensions vanished.

“Very, sir,” he agreed.

He had in that brief look classified the man, deciding he was an example of the type who so often felt the vague thrill unimportant people experience conversing with a man in uniform. O’Hara rocked gently back and forth on the curb, his hands clasped behind him, as he appeared to be surveying the starlit heavens, but was actually cocking an eye for another intimate glimpse at the blonde.

Officer O’Hara waited for the next question, the inevitable inquiry, concealing his annoyance as best as he could manage. Now, he reasoned, the old fellow would ask: “Everything quiet tonight?” And he would reply that it was and consequently could be expected to be treated at length with theories about the habitual traits of criminals which his interviewer had gathered mentally during insomnia-ridden

hours. But when the little man spoke he did not adhere to the routine patter Officer O’Hara had anticipated.

“I should hate to spoil your pleasant evening, Officer,” he said, “but are you accustomed to the shock of discovering a corpse?”

“Ha!” retorted O’Hara, controlling his sense of humor. “Every hour or so!”

“I wouldn’t have thought so after considering the type of residents in this section of the city,” declared the little man without a smile. “But then I suppose these things happen in unexpected places. You wouldn’t mind reporting the one upstairs? Someone else might discover it and be badly frightened, you know.”

It was fully thirty seconds before the remark registered on O’Hara’s mind, so deeply had he been immersed in anatomical studies.

“Look here!” he snapped, his eyes drawn back to the shabby little man. “You say a corpse? What corpse? Have you spotted a stiff around here?”

“I just left one,” said the little man without emotion.

“Don’t kid me!” threatened O’Hara. “A fellow discovering a dead one don’t take it as easy as that! I ought to know—I pounded Tenth Avenue pavements once. Now what’s the gag?”

“If my relaxation had not run to detective novels your language might be confusing,” reprimanded the little man. “But I now have reason to be thankful for what I once considered a guilty pastime.”

O'HARA sighed. This was evidently a psychopathic case for Bellevue. The man's clothing, although neatly pressed, was obviously too worn to belong to an aphasia-stricken millionaire even if the fellow was wandering in this section of the city. O'Hara decided to ignore the corpse entirely, extract what information he could, and call the station for transportation.

"What's your name, Mister?"

The little man sighed apologetically. "That will come later," he said. His voice remained mild, but the reply held a note of finality.

The unknown's threadbare topcoat had been turned up to cover his skinny throat over a neck not more than five feet above street level. The coat hung wide, exposing shiny serge and a thin string which once might have been a first-class necktie but now resembled a twisted rag. His feet were encased in a pair of scuffed tan shoes and his head bore a derby a size and a half too large. He kept his hands concealed in the side pockets of the shabby coat, and O'Hara, taking a second look at the mild features beneath the derby, decided the unseen fingers were not clutching a deadly weapon. Such a chap could hardly be dangerous. There was nothing extraordinary about his features. The little man's face was quite plain; the kind of a face that drifts by you unnoticed and slides from memory like the outlines of a passing stranger in a heavy fog. His profile was that of a thirty-a-week clerk who had been bending over pages of figures for some forty or fifty years; pale, colorless and undistinguished. The horn-rimmed glasses before his light blue eyes emphasized the meekness of his stooped carriage.

Officer O'Hara remembered the sincerity with which disarranged minds could conceive and describe lurid situations and he now definitely filed his estimate of the man in his mind. Smiling tolerantly, he surveyed the empty street. He was pleased

that no pedestrians were within view, for sometimes these quiet fellows screamed their heads off when one requested their company in a firm manner.

"Don't drink, do you?" he inquired affably.

"Why—I like a little bock in the spring, Officer. Just a glass or two to remind me of my student days in Vienna. But if I may ask, just what has that to do with my corpse?"

O'Hara perceived suavity would not erase the memories of whatever hallucinations the man was afflicted with and accordingly grew terse.

"Your corpse, pop? So it's yours now!"

"I suppose you could call it that, Officer. But I really don't know just how to dispose of it, you see; so I'm calling your attention to it. You will find it on a bed in Apartment 3C of the Beekford Arms. Across the street; number 1215. The door is unlocked; you needn't break it down."

"Now look here!" Officer O'Hara could hardly be blamed because his voice rose above normal pitch. "You're donating me a corpse, huh? All laid out on a bed and—and everything! May I ask," he inquired sarcastically, attempting unsuccessfully to imitate the little man's voice, "if you shot, stabbed or simply poisoned this stiff you 'don't know just how to dispose of'?"

"I hate weapons of any kind," declared the shabby one. "Poison is particularly distasteful to me. When I decided to kill him I simply broke his neck with my hands."

"Let's walk down to the corner box," laughed O'Hara, relieved. He was unable to imagine his puny charge breaking even mere jackstraws with those frail hands. "On our way you show me those powerful hands, will you?"

THE little man thrust his wrists deeper into the sagging pockets of his worn coat and squinted up at O'Hara's bulk in a wistful fashion that reminded him of a

famous cartoonist's drawings depicting the Seven Dwarfs.

"You can hardly believe me, I suppose, Officer. Not that I hold your skepticism to fault—*he* was astonished, too, I think. And I admit I was quite amazed myself when I discovered the full possibilities of what yesterday was only a series of logical deductions. But I had to be right; it was——"

"All right, you were *right!* C'mon, pop."

"But, my dear sir, I can't accompany you. I've another appointment."

O'Hara was grinning, thinking of the story he could tell the boys at the station house. "Now you're not on your way to be breaking more necks, are you?"

"I haven't planned very far in advance—not yet. If I decide—no, don't attempt to manhandle me! Please, Officer, I'm sorry!"

The patrolman placed a weighty and commanding arm on the stooped shoulders. The little man twisted slightly, withdrew his hands from his pockets with their palms open and shoved at his opponent's herculean chest. Officer O'Hara's breath left his lungs with an unexpected wheeze as his full two hundred and twenty pounds rose into the air and fell back to the sidewalk five feet from their former position. He shook his head to clear away mingled shock and bewilderment, clawing for his gun, only to see a diminutive figure passing around a block corner before he could level the weapon.

Three minutes later a desk sergeant was announcing to his captain: "Sor, it's sorry I am to say it, but Jimmy O'Hara's as drunk as an owl! He's callin' from a box, and sez will ye send out a call for a little mutt with a darby and horn rims on his specs, weighin' about ninety or a hundred. The shrimp *threw* him—*him*, mind ye, the hunk of bones and beef he is!—up in the air and cracked his pate on the cobbles! And while ye're doin' this he suggests ye

drap into the Beekford Arms and look about fer a corpse! 'Whose corpse?' I asks, and he sez 'Any corpse.' He don't know whose, sez he, but he's double-blasted sure there's wan there!"

The little man had made his first impression.

## 2. *The Second Impression*

IT WAS another twenty minutes before a ring of grim-faced policemen stood in Apartment 3C of the Beekford Arms and looked at the thing on the bed that had been Herman Wexel. The well-known, independently wealthy dean of Botham College had curiously died of a broken neck while reading in bed, the vertebrae of his neck had been snapped as the result of a terrific pressure applied at the nape; or so asserted the medical examiner, tracing with an indifferent forefinger the great livid welt that encircled the corpse's fleshy throat. A dim reading-lamp, suspended by a clamp to the head of the dean's bed, cast a sickly glow over the dead man's slender fingers where they rested on the scientific volume he had been perusing before he had acquired that horrified, empty stare with which he now contemplated infinity.

Standing well back in the shadows, silenced by the stern presence of his superiors, Officer O'Hara fumbled at the collar of his uniform and swallowed as he thought of bony fingers hidden in the pockets of a shabby topcoat.

Some time later, as the remains of Herman Wexel were departing the portals of the Beekford Arms in the customary wicker basket through air foggy with imprecations from the fingerprint staff because those diligent worthies had discovered a total absence of clues on doors and windows, another development occurred. A reporter sprinted into the foyer and frantically signaled to his "pic" man, who was engaged at the moment in recording for

posterity the gruesome parade within his unemotional lens. Immediately kindred hawks of the fourth estate swooped upon the scent of their fortunate brother.

"All right! All right!" surrendered the newspaperman. "Your desks will be calling you in a minute, anyway. Come on. . . . Hazlitt, the scion of the *Daily*, has been found dead just outside the door of his girl friend's apartment. You know Rosy Acre, the Girl Without a Fan! She found him. Says he was visiting her when some queer little duck rang her bell and asked to see the boy-friend. She left them talking in the hallway; later she hears a groan and a thump and goes to investigate. Hazlitt's there still, but the little guy's gone. And Hazlitt, who was once a champion wrestler, is flat with a *broken neck!* How d'ye like it?"

"Like the scent of my aunt's deceased cat!" swore Captain Travers. "Another!"

"Front page, if it's true," agreed another reporter without much faith.

THE late Harry Hershfield Hazlitt, born plain Louis Rodetsky, sprawled in the awkward posture commonly assumed in violent or sudden deaths beneath a bed-sheet in a police-guarded hallway. The columnist's neck had been neatly snapped, leaving the pugilistic chin which had graced miles of his syndicated headlines sagging in a fashion that would have been totally unfamiliar to a host of avid readers. Hazlitt wore no coat, but neither shirt-sleeves nor vest had been disarranged by violence, and the perfect folds of his necktie remained anchored behind the buttons of the vest as firmly as an undertaker's assistant could have placed them. From the bulge at the left armpit one of the examiners produced a form-fitting holster containing a fully loaded automatic. Either the victim had had no time to draw his weapon or he had not thought it necessary to resort to a lethal instrument for defense.

Inside the gaudy three-room apartment, Rosalie Acre, born Leah Rosenbloom, the "Girl of Ten Thousand Motions" and featured star at Rocci's Midnight Garden, sobbed hysterically.

"I wouldn't have known her," whispered one irrepressible scribbler, *sotto voce*. "I never guessed she actually wore clothes!"

"Shutup!" commanded a detective, shifting his gun.

"Of course I've told you everything," wept Miss Acre through a spasm of sobs. "I answered the door and the guy asked for Harry. 'Could I see Mr. Hazlitt?' he asked.

"I came back in and told Harry, and he said maybe it was something hot for the column because it would have to be to make anybody follow him here. He looked through the eyehole in the door before he went out, because there's crooks and other people, too, you know, who claim he has printed things about them he shouldn't."

"Not only crooks is right, baby," muttered one detective reminiscently.

"And he said," continued the dancer, "Rosy, this guy's got a brand new joke for me, I betcha. The last one was such a hit I played it up for weeks from all angles and he got a little sore because he takes himself serious. But he's money in the ole pocket! The more I kid him the funnier he gets. He even makes me laugh; he's what you'd call a flooey case.' Those were Harry's exact words and I could tell them on the stand," declared Miss Acre hopefully.

"Then Mr. Hazlitt went outside?" prompted her questioner. "Did he shut the door behind him?"

"He closed it but left it ajar because of the spring lock. His—my keys were inside. I heard them talking very low before I turned on the radio; then I couldn't hear them at all except once when Harry laughed. Oh-h, he *laughed!*"

"And what did they say?" Her inquisitor patiently awaited the passing of the paroxysm. He was merely checking through a ritual which preceded the more lengthy questioning conducted at Headquarters, during which a confused witness frequently prevaricated replies.

"I—don't know. I heard Harry laugh and then there was something like a groan, and afterward a bump on the floor. I got curious and went to the door and—and I saw——"

"Yes, yes. Take it easy now. The little fellow wasn't there?"

"No! I was frightened—terribly! Harry was lying on the floor. I leaned over him and saw how pale his face was. I looked up and down the hall, but there was no one there. I believe I screamed, because the next thing I can remember is a crowd of people asking me what happened and why—of all the crazy things!—why I'd shot him!"

"Well, Miss Acre, you're not accused or even suspected of shooting him. And even if your—um—professional muscles are strong I'd not be in a hurry to report that you broke his neck. But if you will be so kind I'd like you to come down to the station and tell us a little more, because there may be something we've missed."

"There will be those awful photographers!" exclaimed Miss Acre, glowing with pleasure.

"Excuse me, Al," interrupted Captain Travers, "but I got here too late to hear the description. Just what did this caller look like?"

"Just a shrimp, she says. Skinny little fellow in cheap clothes and a derby hat, wearing cheaters. Acted bashful, like he wasn't used to talking with women. He must have used the stairs, I think, because the elevator operator can't remember bringing him up. Think you can place him?"

"No, but I'd like to, Al. Unless coincidence has gone entirely haywire tonight

he's the same guy who murdered Herman Wexel only a half-hour or so ago!"

### 3. *The Third Impression*

THE abrupt demise of two such prominent characters as Wexel and Hazlitt, however widely separated they may have been in their individual pursuits of happiness, was nevertheless sufficient cause for disturbing the nocturnal slumbers of the City Commissioner. Incidentally the events closely preceded the eve of election, and on such dates headlines determine salaries. Murder! While newsboys screamed the titles that never fail to thrill the staid, home-loving citizen, the head of the city police force hastened toward a conference with his chiefs of staff, also routed from their respective beds. They converged in a private sanctuary even the most daring reporter hesitated to assault.

"Let us forget our natural curiosity, gentlemen, in penetrating the mysterious methods with which these twin murders were performed," requested the Commissioner of Police. "Obviously we must seek for a dual motive. It must be the easy way, or so I believe, in locating our little man; that is, if this man really exists."

"Two persons saw him," interjected the chief of detectives.

"Ah, yes! Two! But Miss Acre is in a semi-hysterical state, refuses even to look through the criminal photographs; and Officer—ah——"

"O'Hara, sir!" interposed Captain Travers, who was secretly delighted with the opportunity of mingling with the cream of officialdom and meant to make his presence realized by all.

"Thank you, Captain. Officer O'Hara tells a rather bewildering story about this unknown suspect hurling him into the air with the strength of—ah——"

"Tarzan," supplied Travers, innocently modernizing the Commissioner's metaphor

which had been meant to include Hercules. "But I know O'Hara as a sober, reliable man, sir—as are all the men of my precinct."

The Commissioner smiled. "You are to be congratulated, Captain. I respect the trustworthy members of your force, including yourself, but—ah—wouldn't you, now, in my place——"

"If Officer O'Hara says a pint-sized midget bounced him on the sidewalk, then it happened, sir!" The captain's face was white, but the thrust of his jaw was not weakened.

The Commissioner's face grew pink and his attendant staff shifted their weights un-<sup>der</sup> easily. The muffled peal of a telephone intervened.

"Speaking," said the head of police. "Yes, that's all right. I left instructions that I should be called regarding any identification . . . what? . . . blue? . . . very well, Sergeant . . . yes, call me if there is any more."

He replaced the receiver and turned to the hushed circle. "The woman Rosalie Acre was evidently frightened into a pronounced mental state," he announced. "That was one of the men from her bedside in the hospital ward, saying she is talking wildly about the man who rang her doorbell and asked for Hazlitt having a blue face. Blue skin, she repeats. Probably a reflection of dim hall lights. Did O'Hara mention any discoloration, Captain?"

"Only that the man appeared to be very pale."

"Well then, to return to the motive. What could Herman Wexel, a college dean of undisputed refinement, have in common with such a filth-scavenger as Hazlitt to antagonize anybody? Perhaps the two murders were not related at all."

"I've been thinking, sir," announced a detective unexpectedly.

"Why, thanks." The Commissioner's

tones were humorous, sarcastic. "I was about to ask some of you to do so."

"I didn't want to say anything until I'd gotten it all together," said the perspiring officer, conscious of the eyes upon him. "It was the third man, you see. I couldn't think of his name, at first. He's—maybe—the next to go!"

"The next!"

Nerves were almost audibly strained throughout the narrow confines of the room.

"**Y**ES, sir. Two months ago this Professor Wexel loudly condemned the researches of another college, and you know how the Sunday sheets love to get hold of those scientific controversies when things are dull. I've been thinking, and I remember now how Hazlitt jumped into the argument and built up jokes about it in his column for a week or more before the subject naturally wore itself out. There might be some connection."

"Jokes!" exclaimed Captain Travers. "Rosy Acre said Hazlitt referred to a joke!"

"But it was nothing in my line," continued the man. "No threats or so forth. But I read in the *Daily* how this chap with the ideas got pretty sore at Wexel for lambasting his pet theories. Later he busted out at Hazlitt for ridiculing him, threatened to sue in fact; claimed the columnist had ruined his chances with the publishers. One publisher, Philip Amherst, refused to print a book written by this professor explaining the principles of the theory, on the grounds that something so freely given to the public and so easily ridiculed by the newspapers must not be worth the paper a printer would use to reproduce it. Amherst had considered printing it; it was at the last minute that he turned it down. So the professor blew up again."

"What was the name of this pseudo-scientist?"



"I forget, sir. You see the whole thing dried up and blew away weeks ago. I'd never even have read about it if my kids hadn't torn up the funnies one Sunday, and I wouldn't have remembered it again if these murders hadn't happened."

"Do you recall just what this scientist was attempting to explain or what unknown and fantastic solution he had arrived at?"

"No, sir, except it was something about concentrating power into molecules or compressing atoms. He claimed an ant should be able to place enough power into its jaws to crush an elephant if it could only open its mouth far enough. The Sunday supplements ran wild. Crackpots thrived on it. This guy claimed he could startle the world, and when Amherst declared he was not impressed the professor got indignant and swore he would impress him if it was the last thing he ever did."

"Give me the home address of Philip Amherst of Amherst and Dion, publishers!" the Commissioner was ordering Information. "Quickly!"

He held the receiver to his ear and nodded toward Captain Travers.

"Strange, isn't it?" he inquired, and the officer knew he was not expected to frame an answer. "Men lack faith in a thing simply because they are not able to understand it. Still you will swear an undersized man was able to beat up one of your largest members of the force on that member's word, although trained minds such as Wexel's disregarded the possibility—Hello! Hello! I wish to speak to Mr. Philip Amherst. Immediately. Police Commissioner calling . . . ah . . . speaking? Yes, Mr. Amherst. Sorry to disturb you at this unearthly hour."

**T**HOSE close to the desk, holding even the sound of expelled breath, could hear the vibrations of the answer. Captain Travers leaned forward to eavesdrop.

"But what efficiency, my dear Commissioner!" grated the voice at the other end of the wire. "Here I am about to call for the aid of your superlative minions and out of nowhere comes to you the knowledge that I am in need of a uniformed protector! It's marvelous! Uncanny!"

"Mr. Amherst!" The Commissioner's tones reminded some of those present of orders given once upon a time when French soil ran red. "Do you—are you alone?"

"Not exactly. But practically. There is a little fellow who has just dropped in with the information that he is about to kill me. Hence I was just dialing the nearest station when you rang. Pray do not be alarmed. I am phoning from one side of my studio desk and he is seated on the other; between us I am holding a very reliable and fully loaded thirty-eight. Not that I really need it. I've seen his kind before and I always have been able to point out to them that I am not the man for cranks to arouse foolishly during such early hours to listen to brainless schemes, regardless of how clever these prodigies are in eluding the barriers of burglar alarms and servants I have installed. He apparently realizes it now, because he's sitting here with the most idiotic grin on his Puckish face. He seems to be enjoying my description of him!"

"Mr. Amherst! Who is the man on the other side of your desk?"

"You sound excited, Commissioner. I meant to ask why you called; hope I haven't been robbed or blackmailed through my family? This fellow? Oh, he's a harmless old professor of philosophy who used to be on the staff at Hartmoor College. Taught metaphysics, you see, and it went to his head. Expounding the science of the abstract, supernatural muscular expression, and so forth. It went to his head and he came out with a book so insane that the youngest proofreader of my staff would

have instantly rejected it. I read a little of it because I never liked that old fire-eater of a Wexel who was spilling condemnation over every little thing he didn't happen to agree with at the moment. I might even have published it, had the costs been taken care of, purely for the sake of arousing interest in my companies. Critics represent a lot of free advertising. But some columnist manufactured such a set of standard quips out of the theories and conclusions of the book that I dropped the idea entirely. So here he is threatening me with violent death and there's nary a weapon in his hands! Would you be kind enough to send a wagon for the gentleman? I'm so sleepy I'm beginning to see blue!"

"Blue? Where do you see blue?"

"What the devil—excuse me, Commissioner, but is the whole town wacky tonight? It's a silly question, but I actually do see blue. I guess it must be the light, or else those recently submitted illustrations I was studying before I went to bed. It's the professor's face that looks blue there beyond my desk-lamp; maybe he's anemic. He's a queer little chap and I'm still wondering how he got in. Hasn't said a word since he told me he killed Wexel tonight. It's certainly strange how illusion will make a perfect fool of a man, isn't——"

"Amherst!" shouted the Commissioner, shutting off the voluble outpour. "He did kill Wexel! *Now who is he?*"

There was a moment's pause before the eminent publisher spoke again in altered tones.

"I can't believe it! Wexel dead . . . this shrinking violet a murderer? No! Why, Professor Lucian Peters might get angry, but I'll bet you he would never intentionally harm even a butterfly. He's never harmed anybody. All his life, so he once told me, has been spent working on experiments to prove that the higher types of mentality are able to subordinate mus-

cular reflexes; some anomalous theory about the ant and the elephant, the meek and the strong or the superiority of brains over brawn; some of that old rehash that manufactured fairy-tales a thousand years ago. And if you think little Lucian resembles a Greek wrestler, I'm sorry, Commissioner, because I'm positive he will never find a place on your monster criminal record . . . sorry for your ambitions, too, Lucian! But you'll never be more than a number in the asylum."

"Amherst!" roared the Commissioner into the mouthpiece. "Keep your gun on him! Keep the desk between the two of you until we get there!"

"Why, there's no danger . . . sit down, Professor! I said *sit down*. You *drafted* fool, do I have to shoot you?"

Three sharp punctuations echoed across the wires to the Commissioner's ears before he heard a muffled click. Somewhere at the other end of the connection a voice said "Ah-ah-h-h!" The policemen in the room stared at the dripping perspiration on their superior's forehead.

"Amherst! Mr. Amherst!"

"That was the last, sir," said a new, strangely serene voice in the other ear-piece. "That will be all, thank you. Good-bye."

"Amherst!" the Commissioner screamed. With a wild light in his eyes he cried: "Peters! Are you there?"

At the other end of the line a hand silently replaced the receiver.

#### 4. *The Inevitable Last*

DAWN flooded the city's turrets before the sleepy-eyed and baffled detectives had completed their useless search of the dwelling in which Philip Amherst lay dead with a broken neck and a twisted, horror-stricken face. The Commissioner's face might have been carved from marble. The murderer had not aroused any of the pub-

lisher's many servants, nor had he forced a single door or window to accomplish his sinister purpose, an interview with a widely known publisher which had terminated with the breaking of that publisher's neck.

"Find the home of Professor Lucian Peters and surround it," ordered the Commissioner. "But don't break in! If *he* should come out—if anyone should come out—follow, but do not attempt an arrest. Too many necks! . . ."

An amber sun rose in its glory above a half-awakened city as the Commissioner, with two accompanying cars and a bevy of motorcycles, sped over the macadam toward the two-story cottage which Information had told him was the residence of Professor Peters. The site of the dwelling was a full two miles outside of the city's limits.

"We've no authority here," protested Captain Travers, disregarding the set faces of his companions.

"My friend, we have authority to strive for human welfare—as far as mankind's authority extends!" announced the Commissioner.

The cottage of Professor Peters was a ramshackle affair of plaster and shingles. Its windows were without shades and the condition of its entranceway emphasized either poverty or extreme neglect. Flanked by puzzled men who fingered automatics and machine-guns, the Commissioner's party ascended the broken steps of a dilapidated porch and entered a very bare and unkempt kitchen. Beyond it the living-room and bedroom were equally disordered, littered with ponderous volumes of scientific literature. The heavy books sprawled everywhere over tables, mantel-pieces and underfoot. The fireplace was choked with innumerable crushed sheets on which hand-printed and unfinished algebraical equations were transcribed in a wavering hand. Obviously some scholar had spent considerable time there, ignor-

ing such trifles as neatness and cleanliness, or even meals, for there were crunched biscuit fragments mingled with a saucer of muddy liquid which once might have been coffee.

Someone said: "Upstairs. To the Commissioner's credit, he preceded his men.

And there they discovered Professor Lucian Peters hanging from a fixture, very blue in the face and quite ignorant of their arrival.

"Could O'Hara be reached at this hour?" inquired the Commissioner. "I'd like positive identification. It's hardly possible to believe that this is the man responsible for this series of murders!"

"Amherst named him!" insisted Captain Travers. "And O'Hara's outside. You couldn't send that stubborn Irishman home today if you docked his pay!"

"Bring him in!"

**H**AD it been an inspection, Patrolman James O'Hara might have trembled in his socks, but at the moment he was not awed before the city's dignitaries. His eyes went straight to the dangling thing hanging from the ceiling's chandelier and his nostrils quivered similar to a hound's closing in on the last yards of the trail.

"So this is the end," he said as if speaking to himself alone. "Suicide. I wonder why he quit."

"O'Hara!" snapped the Commissioner. "Can you identify this—this man?"

"Why, it's *him*, of course. It's the little fellow who tossed me around like a feather last night."

There was a short silence in the room through which the rasping tones of the medical examiner broke like an unexpected tidal wave rushing over a calm lagoon.

"I insist, Commissioner," declared the world-weary follower of Hippocrates, "that this man Lucian Peters hung himself more than forty-eight hours ago!"