

THRILLING

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In This Issue

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And Others

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Exit THE PROFESSOR

By
HENRY KUTTNER

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The Kentucky Hogbens were hillbillies with a difference, as an investigating scientist certainly comes to know!

We Hogbens are right exclusive. That perfesser feller from the city might have known that, but he come bustin' in without an invite, and I don't figger he had call to complain afterward. In Kaintuck the polite thing is to stick to your own hill of beans and not come nosing round where you're not wanted.

Time we ran off the Haley boys with that shotgun-gadget we rigged up—only we never could make out how it worked, somehow—that time, it all started because Rafe Haley come peeking and prying at the shed winder, trying to get a look at Little Sam. Then Rafe went round sayin' Little Sam had three haids or something.

Can't believe a word them Haley boys say. Three haids! It ain't natcheral, is it? Anyhow, Little Sam's only got two haids, and never had no more since the day he was born.

So Maw and I rigged up that shotgun thing and peppered the Haley boys good. Like I said, we couldn't figger out afterward how it worked. We'd tacked on some dry cells and a lot of coils and wires and stuff and it punched holes in Rafe as neat as anything.

Coroner's verdict was that the Haley boys died real sudden, and Sheriff Abernathy come up and had a drink of corn with us and said for two cents he'd whale the tar outa me. I didn't pay no mind. Only some damyankee reporter musta got wind of it, because a while later a big fat serious-looking man come around and begun to ask questions.

Uncle Les was sittin' on the porch, with his hat over his face. "You better get the heck back to your circus, mister," he just said. "We had offers from old Barnum hisself and turned 'em down. Ain't that right, Saunk?"

"Sure is," I said. "I never trusted Phineas. Called Little Sam a freak, he did."

The big solemn-looking man, whose name was Perfesser Thomas Galbraith, looked at me. "How old are you, son?" he said.

"I ain't your son," I said. "And I don't know, nohow."

"You don't look over eighteen," he said, "big as you are. You couldn't have known Barnum."

"Sure I did. Don't go giving me the lie. I'll wham you."

"I'm not connected with any circus," Galbraith said. "I'm a biogeneticist."

We sure laughed at that. He got kinda mad and wanted to know what the joke was.

"There ain't no such word," Maw said. And at that point Little Sam started yelling, and Galbraith turned white as a goose-wing and shivered all over. He sort of fell down. When we picked him up, he wanted to know what had happened.

"That was Little Sam," I said. "Maw's gone in to comfort him. He's stopped now."

"That was a sub-sonic," the perfesser snapped. "What is Little Sam—a short-wave transmitter?"

“Little Sam’s the baby,” I said, short-like. “Don’t go calling him outa his name, either. Now s’pose you tell us what you want?”

He pulled out a notebook and started looking through it.

“I’m a—a scientist,” he said. “Our foundation is studying eugenics, and we’ve got some reports about you. They sound unbelievable. One of our men has a theory that natural mutations can remain undetected in undeveloped cultural regions, and—” He slowed down and stared at Uncle Les. “Can you really fly?” he asked.

Well, we don’t like to talk about that. The preacher gave us a good dressing-down once. Uncle Les had got likkered up and went sailing over the ridges, scaring a couple of bear-hunters outa their senses. And it ain’t in the Good Book that men should fly, neither. Uncle Les generally does it only on the sly, when nobody’s watching.

So anyhow Uncle Les pulled his hat down further on his face and growled.

“That’s plumb silly. Ain’t no way a man can fly. These here modern contraptions I hear tell about—’tween ourselves, they don’t really fly at all. Just a lot of crazy talk, that’s all.”

Galbraith blinked and studied his notebook again.

“But I’ve got hearsay evidence of a great many unusual things connected with your family. Flying is only one of them. I know it’s theoretically impossible—and I’m not talking about planes—but—”

“Oh, shet your trap.”

“The medieval witches’ salve used aconite to give an illusion of flight, entirely subjective of course.”

“Will you stop pesterin’ me?” Uncle Les said, getting mad, on account of he felt embarrassed, I guess. Then he jumped up, threw his hat down on the porch, and flew away. After a minute he swooped down for his hat and made a face at the perfesser. He flew off down the gulch and we didn’t see him for a while.

I got mad, too.

“You got no call to bother us,” I said. “Next thing Uncle Les will do like Paw, and that’ll be an awful nuisance. We ain’t seen hide nor hair of Paw since that other city feller was around. He was a census-taker, I think.”

Galbraith didn’t say anything. He was looking kinda funny. I gave him a drink and he asked about Paw.

“Oh, he’s around,” I said. “Only you don’t see him no more. He likes it better that way, he says.”

“Yes,” Galbraith said, taking another drink. “Oh, gosh! How old did you say you were?”

“Didn’t say nothing about it.”

“Well, what’s the earliest thing you can remember?”

“Ain’t no use remembering things. Clutters up your haid too much.”

“It’s fantastic,” Galbraith said. “I hadn’t expected to send a report like that back to the foundation.”

“We don’t want nobody pryin’ around,” I said. “Go ’way and leave us alone.”

“But good heavens!” He looked over the porch rail and got interested in the shotgun-gadget. “What’s that?”

“A thing,” I said.

“What does it do?”

“Things,” I said.

“Oh. May I look at it?”

“Sure,” I said. “I’ll give you the dingus if you’ll go away.”

He went over and looked at it. Paw got up from where he’d been sitting beside me, told me to get rid of the damyankee, and went into the house. The perfesser came back. “Extraordinary!” he said. “I’ve had training in electronics, and it seems to me you’ve got something very odd there. What’s the principle?”

“The what?” I said. “It makes holes in things.”

“It can’t fire shells. You’ve got a couple of lenses where the breech should—how did you say it worked?”

“I dunno.”

“Did you make it?”

“Me and Maw.”

He asked a lot more questions.

“I dunno,” I said. “Trouble with a shotgun is you gotta keep loading it. We sorta thought if we hooked on a few things it wouldn’t need loading no more. It don’t, neither.”

“Were you serious about giving it to me?”

“If you stop bothering us.”

“Listen,” he said, “it’s miraculous that you Hogbens have stayed out of sight so long.”

“We got our ways.”

“The mutation theory must be right. You must be studied. This is one of the most important discoveries since—” He kept on talking like that. He didn’t make much sense.

Finally I decided there was only two ways to handle things, and after what Sheriff Abernathy had said, I didn’t feel right about killing nobody till the sheriff had got over his fit of temper. I don’t want to cause no ruckus.

“S’pose I go to New York with you, like you want?” I said. “Will you leave the family alone?”

He halfway promised, though he didn’t want to. But he knuckled under and crossed his heart, on account of I said I’d wake up Little Sam if he didn’t. He sure wanted to see Little Sam, but I told him that was no good. Little Sam couldn’t go to New York anyhow. He’s got to stay in his tank or he gets awful sick.

Anyway I satisfied the perfesser pretty well and he went off, after I’d promised to meet him in town next morning. I felt sick, though, I can tell you. I ain’t been away from the folks overnight since that ruckus in the old country, when we had to make tracks fast.

Went to Holland, as I remember. Maw always had a soft spot fer the man that helped us get outa London. Named Little Sam after him. I fergit what his name was. Gwynn or Stuart or Pepys—I get mixed up when I think back beyond the War between the States.

That night we chewed the rag. Paw being invisible, Maw kept thinking he was getting more’n his share of the corn, but pretty soon she mellowed and let him have a demijohn. Everybody told me to mind my p’s and q’s.

“This here perfesser’s awful smart,” Maw said. “All perfessers are. Don’t go bothering him any. You be a good boy or you’ll ketch heck from me.”

“I’ll be good, Maw,” I said. Paw whaled me alongside the haid, which wasn’t fair, on account of I couldn’t see him.

“That’s so you won’t fergit,” he said.

“We’re plain folks,” Uncle Les was growling. “No good never came of trying to get above yourself.”

“Honest, I ain’t trying to do that,” I said. “I only figgered—”

“You stay outa trouble!” Maw said, and just then we heard Grandpaw moving in the attic. Sometimes Grandpaw don’t stir for a month at a time, but tonight he seemed right frisky.

So, natcherally, we went upstairs to see what he wanted.

He was talking about the perfesser.

“A stranger, eh?” he said. “Out upon the stinking knave. A set of rare fools I’ve gathered about me for my dotage! Only Saunk shows any shrewdness, and, dang my eyes, he’s the worst fool of all.”

I just shuffled and muttered something, on account of I never like to look at Grandpaw direct. But he wasn’t paying me no mind. He raved on.

“So you’d go to this New York? ’Sblood, and hast thou forgot the way we shunned London and Amsterdam—and Nieuw Amsterdam—for fear of questioning? Wouldst thou be put in a freak show? Nor is that the worst danger.”

Grandpaw’s the oldest one of us all and he gets kinda mixed up in his language sometimes. I guess the lingo you learned when you’re young sorta sticks with you. One thing, he can cuss better than anybody I’ve ever heard.

“Shucks,” I said. “I was only trying to help.”

“Thou puling brat,” Grandpaw said. “ ’Tis thy fault and thy dam’s. For building that device, I mean, that slew the Haley tribe. Hadst thou not, this scientist would never have come here.”

“He’s a perfesser,” I said. “Name of Thomas Galbraith.”

“I know. I read his thoughts through Little Sam’s mind. A dangerous man. I never knew a sage who wasn’t. Except perhaps Roger Bacon, and I had to bribe him to—but Roger was an exceptional man. Hearken.

“None of you may go to this New York. The moment we leave this haven, the moment we are investigated, we are lost. The pack would tear and rend us. Nor could all thy addle-pated flights skyward save thee, Lester—dost thou hear?”

“But what are we to do?” Maw said.

“Aw, heck,” Paw said. “I’ll just fix this perfesser. I’ll drop him down the cistern.”

“An’ spoil the water?” Maw screeched. “You try it!”

“What foul brood is this that has sprung from my seed?” Grandpaw said, real mad. “Have ye not promised the sheriff that there will be no more killings—for a while at least? Is the word of a Hogben naught? Two things have we kept sacred through the centuries—our secret from the world, and the Hogben honor! Kill this man Galbraith and ye’ll answer to me for it!”

We all turned white. Little Sam woke up again and started squealing. “But what’ll we do?” Uncle Les said.

“Our secret must be kept,” Grandpaw said. “Do what ye can, but no killing. I’ll consider the problem.”

He seemed to go to sleep then, though it was hard to tell.

The next day I met Galbraith in town, all right, but first I run into Sheriff Abernathy in the street and he gave me a vicious look.

“You stay outa trouble, Saunk,” he said. “Mind what I tell you, now.” It was right embarrassing.

Anyway, I saw Galbraith and told him Grandpaw wouldn't let me go to New York. He didn't look too happy, but he saw there was nothing that could be done about it.

His hotel room was full of scientific apparatus and kinda frightening. He had the shotgun-gadget set up, but it didn't look like he'd changed it any. He started to argue.

"Ain't no use," I said. "We ain't leavin' the hills. I spoke outa turn yesterday, that's all."

"Listen, Saunk," he said. "I've been inquiring around town about you Hogbens, but I haven't been able to find out much. They're close-mouthed around here. Still, such evidence would be only supporting factors. I know our theories are right. You and your family are mutants and you've got to be studied!"

"We ain't mutants," I said. "Scientists are always calling us outa our names. Roger Bacon called us homunculi, only—"

"*What?*" Galbraith shouted. "Who did you say?"

"Uh—he's a share-cropper over in the next county," I said hasty-like, but I could see the pefesser didn't swaller it. He started to walk around the room.

"It's no use," he said. "If you won't come to New York, I'll have the foundation send a commission here. You've got to be studied, for the glory of science and the advancement of mankind."

"Oh, golly," I said. "I know what that'd be like. Make a freak show outa us. It'd kill Little Sam. No. You gotta go away and leave us alone."

"Leave you alone? When you can create apparatus like this?" He pointed to the shotgun-gadget. "How *does* that work?" he wanted to know, sudden-like.

"I told you, I dunno. We just rigged it up. Listen, pefesser. There'd be trouble if people came and looked at us. Big trouble. Grandpaw says so."

Galbraith pulled at his nose.

"Well, maybe—suppose you answered a few questions for me, Saunk?"

"No commission?"

"We'll see."

"No, sir. I won't—"

Galbraith took a deep breath.

"As long as you tell me what I want to know, I'll keep your whereabouts a secret."

"I thought this foundation thing of yours knows where you are?"

"Ah—yes," Galbraith said. "Naturally they do. But they don't know about *you*."

That gave me an idea. I coulda killed him easy, but if I had, I knew Grandpaw would of ruined me entire and, besides, there was the sheriff to think of. So I said, "Shucks," and nodded.

My, the questions that man asked! It left me dizzy. And all the while he kept getting more and more excited.

"How old is your grandfather?"

"Gosh, I dunno."

"Homunculi—mm-m—you mentioned that he was a miner once?"

"No, that was Grandpaw's paw," I said. "Tin mines, they were, in England. Only Grandpaw says it was called Britain then. That was during a sorta magic plague they had then. The people had to get the doctors—droons? Droods?"

"Druids?"

"Uh-huh. The Druids was the doctors then, Grandpaw says. Anyhow, all the miners started dying round Cornwall, so they closed up the mines."

“What sort of plague was it?”

I told him what I remembered from Grandpaw’s talk, and the perfesser got very excited and said something about radioactive emanations, as nearly as I could figger out. It made uncommon bad sense.

“Artificial mutations caused by radioactivity!” he said, getting real pink around the jowls. “Your grandfather was born a mutant! The genes and chromosomes were rearranged into a new pattern—why, you may all be supermen!”

“Nope,” I said. “We’re Hogbens. That’s all.”

“A dominant, obviously a dominant. All your family are—ah—peculiar?”

“Now look!” I said.

“I mean, they could all fly?”

“I don’t know how yet, myself. I guess we’re kinda freakish. Grandpaw was smart. He allus taught us not to show off.”

“Protective camouflage,” Galbraith said. “Submerged in a rigid social culture, variations from the norm are more easily masked. In a modern, civilized culture, you’d stick out like a sore thumb. But here, in the backwoods, you’re practically invisible.”

“Only Paw,” I said.

“Oh, gosh,” he sighed. “Submerging these incredible natural powers of yours— Do you know the things you might have done?” And then all of a sudden he got even more excited, and I didn’t much like the look in his eyes.

“Wonderful things,” he repeated. “It’s like stumbling on Aladdin’s lamp.”

“I wish you’d leave us alone,” I said. “You and your commission!”

“Forget about the commission. I’ve decided to handle this privately for a while. Provided you’ll cooperate. Help me, I mean. Will you do that?”

“Nope,” I said.

“Then I’ll bring the commission down from New York,” he said triumphantly.

I thought that over.

“Well,” I said finally, “what do you want me to do?”

“I don’t know yet,” he said slowly. “My mind hasn’t fully grasped the possibilities.”

But he was getting ready to grab. I could tell. I know that look.

I was standing by the window looking out, and all of a sudden I got an idea. I figgered it wouldn’t be smart to trust the perfesser too much, anyhow. So I sort of ambled over to the shotgun-gadget and made a few little changes on it.

I knew what I wanted to do, all right, but if Galbraith had asked me why I was twisting a wire here and bending a whozis there I couldn’t of told him. I got no eddication. Only now I knew the gadget would do what I wanted it to do.

The perfesser had been writing in his little notebook. He looked up and saw me.

“What are you doing?” he wanted to know.

“This don’t look right to me,” I said. “I think you monkeyed with them batteries. Try it now.”

“In here?” he said, startled. “I don’t want to pay a bill for damages. It must be tested under safety conditions.”

“See that weather-cock out there, on the roof?” I pointed it out to him. “Won’t do no harm to aim at that. You can just stand here by the window and try it out.”

“It—it isn’t dangerous?” He was aching to try the gadget, I could tell. I said it wouldn’t kill nobody, and he took a long breath and went to the window and cuddled the stock of the gun against his cheek.

I stayed back a ways. I didn’t want the sheriff to see me. I’d already spotted him, sitting on a bench outside the feed-and-grain store across the street.

It happened just like I think. Galbraith pulled the trigger, aiming at the weather-cock on the roof, and rings of light started coming out of the muzzle. There was a fearful noise. Galbraith fell flat on his back, and the commotion was something surprising. People began screaming all over town.

I kinda felt it might be handy if I went invisible for a while. So I did.

Galbraith was examining the shotgun-gadget when Sheriff Abernathy busted in. The sheriff’s a hard case. He had his pistol out and handcuffs ready, and he was cussing the perfesser immediate and rapid.

“I seen you,” he yelled. “You city fellers think you can get away with anything down here! Well, you can’t!”

“Saunk!” Galbraith cried, looking around. But of course he couldn’t see me.

Then there was an argument. Sheriff Abernathy had seen Galbraith fire the shotgun-gadget, and he’s no fool. He drug Galbraith down on the street, and I come along, walking soft. People were running around like crazy. Most of them had their hands clapped to their faces.

The perfesser kept wailing that he didn’t understand.

“I seen you!” Abernathy said. “You aimed that dingus of yours out the window and the next thing everybody in town’s got a toothache! Try and tell me you don’t understand!”

The sheriff’s smart. He’s known us Hogbens long enough so he ain’t surprised when funny things happen sometimes. Also, he knew Galbraith was a scientist feller. So there was a ruckus and people heard what was going on and the next thing they was trying to lynch Galbraith.

But Abernathy got him away. I wandered around town for a while. The pastor was out looking at his church windows, which seemed to puzzle him. They was stained-glass, and he couldn’t figger out why they was hot. I coulda told him that. There’s gold in stained-glass windows; they use it to get a certain kind of red.

Finally I went down to the jailhouse. I was still invisible. So I eavesdropped on what Galbraith was saying to the sheriff.

“It was Saunk Hogben,” the perfesser kept saying. “I tell you, he fixed that projector—”

“I saw you,” Abernathy said. “You done it. Ow!” He put up his hand to his jaw. “And you better stop it, fast! That crowd outside means business. Half the people in town have got toothaches.”

I guess half the people in town had gold fillings in their teeth.

Then Galbraith said something that didn’t surprise me too much. “I’m having a commission come down from New York—I meant to telephone the foundation tonight. They’ll vouch for me.”

So he was intending to cross us up, all along. I kinda felt that had been in his mind.

“You’ll cure this toothache of mine—and everybody else’s—or I’ll open the doors and let in that lynch mob!” the sheriff howled. Then he went away to put an ice-bag on his cheek.

I snuck back a-ways, got visible again, and made a lot of noise coming along the passage, so Galbraith could hear me. I waited till he got through cussing me out. I just looked stupid.

"I guess I made a mistake," I said. "I can fix it, though."

"You've done enough fixing!" He stopped. "Wait a minute. What did you say? You can cure this—what *is* it?"

"I been looking at that shotgun-gadget," I said. "I think I know what I did wrong. It's sorta tuned in on gold now, and all the gold in town's shooting out rays or heat or something."

"Induced selective radioactivity," Galbraith muttered, which didn't seem to mean much. "Listen. That crowd outside—do they ever have lynchings in this town?"

"Not more'n once or twice a year," I said. "And we already had two this year, so we filled our quota. Wish I could get you up to our place, though. We could hide you easy."

"You'd better do something!" he said. "Or I'll get that commission down from New York. You wouldn't like that, would you."

I never seen such a man fer telling lies and keeping a straight face.

"It's a cinch," I said. "I can rig up the gadget so it'll switch off the rays immediate. Only I don't want people to connect us Highbens with what's going on. We like to live quiet. Look, s'pose I go back to your hotel, change over the gadget, and then all you have to do is get all the people with toothaches together and pull the trigger."

"But—well, but—"

He was afraid of more trouble. I had to talk him into it. The crowd was yelling outside, so it wasn't too hard. Finally I went away, but I came back, invisible-like, and listened when Galbraith talked to the sheriff.

They fixed it all up. Everybody with toothaches was going to the town hall and set. Then Abernathy would bring the pefesser over, with the shotgun-gadget and try it out.

"Will it stop the toothaches?" the sheriff wanted to know. "For sure?"

"I'm—quite certain it will."

Abernathy had caught that hesitation.

"Then you better try it on me first. Just to make sure. I don't trust you."

It seemed like nobody was trusting nobody.

I hiked back to the hotel and made the switch-over in the shotgun-gadget. And then I run into trouble. My invisibility was wearing thin. That's the worst part of being just a kid.

After I'm a few hundred years older I can stay invisible all the time if I want to. But I ain't right mastered it yet. Thing was, I needed help now because there was something I had to do, and I couldn't do it with people watching.

I went up on the roof and called Little Sam. After I'd tuned in on his haid, I had him put the call through to Paw and Uncle Les. After a while Uncle Les come flying down from the sky, riding mighty heavy, on account of he was carrying Paw. Paw was cussing because a hawk had chased them.

"Nobody seen us, though," Uncle Les said. "I *think*."

"People got their own troubles in town today," I said. "I need some help. That pefesser's gonna call down his commission and study us, no matter what he promises."

"Ain't much we can do, then," Paw said. "We cain't kill that feller. Grandpaw said not to."

So I told 'em my idea. Paw being invisible, he could do it easy. Then we made a little place in the roof so we could see through it, and looked down into Galbraith's room.

We was just in time. The sheriff was standing there, with his pistol out, just waiting, and the perfesser, pale around the chops, was pointing the shotgun-gadget at Abernathy. It went along without a hitch. Galbraith pulled the trigger, a purple ring of light popped out, and that was all. Except that the sheriff opened his mouth and gulped.

“You wasn’t faking! My toothache’s gone!”

Galbraith was sweating, but he put up a good front. “Sure it works,” he said. “Naturally. I told you—”

“C’mon down to the town hall. Everybody’s waiting. You better cure us all, or it’ll be just too bad for you.”

They went out. Paw snuck down after them, and Uncle Les picked me up and flew on their trail, keeping low to the roofs where we wouldn’t be spotted. After a while we was fixed outside one of the town hall’s windows, watching.

I ain’t heard so much misery since the great plague of London. The hall was jam-full, and everybody had a toothache and was moaning and yelling. Abernathy come in with the perfesser, who was carrying the shotgun-gadget, and a scream went up.

Galbraith set the gadget on the stage, pointing down at the audience, while the sheriff pulled out his pistol again and made a speech, telling everybody to shet up and they’d get rid of their toothaches.

I couldn’t see Paw, natcherally, but I knew he was up on the platform. Something funny was happening to the shotgun-gadget. Nobody noticed, except me, and I was watching for it. Paw, invisible of course, was making a few changes. I’d told him how, but he knew what to do as well as I did. So pretty soon the shotgun was rigged the way we wanted it.

What happened after that was shocking. Galbraith aimed the gadget and pulled the trigger, and rings of light jumped out, yaller this time. I’d told Paw to fix the range so nobody outside the town hall would be bothered. But inside the hall—

Well, it sure fixed them toothaches. Nobody’s gold filling can ache if he ain’t got a gold filling.

The gadget was fixed now so it worked on everything that wasn’t growin’. Paw had got the range just right. The seats was gone all of a sudden, and so was part of the chandelier. The audience, being bunched together, got it good. Pegleg Jaffe’s glass eye was gone, too. Them that had false teeth lost ’em. Everybody sorta got a once-over-lightly haircut.

Also, the whole audience lost their clothes. Shoes ain’t growin’ things, and no more are pants or shirts or dresses. In a trice everybody in the hall was naked as needles. But, shucks, they’d got rid of their toothaches, hadn’t they?

We was back to home an hour later, all but Uncle Les, when the door busted open and in come Uncle Les, with the perfesser staggering after him. Galbraith was a mess. He sank down and wheezed, looking back at the door in a worried way.

“Funny thing happened,” Uncle Les said. “I was flying along outside town and there was the perfesser running away from a big crowd of people with sheets wrapped around ’em—some of ’em. So I picked him up. I brung him here, like he wanted.” Uncle Les winked at me.

“Ooooh!” Galbraith said. “*Aaaah!* Are they coming?”

Maw went to the door.

“They’s a lot of torches moving up the mountain,” she said. “It looks right bad.”

The perfesser glared at me.

“You said you could hide me! Well, you’d better! This is your fault!”

“Shucks,” I said.

“You’ll hide me or else!” Galbraith squalled. “I—I’ll bring that commission down.”

“Look,” I said, “if we hide you safe, will you promise to ferget all about that commission and leave us alone?”

The perfesser promised. “Hold on a minute,” I said and went up to the attic to see Grandpaw.

He was awake.

“How about it, Grandpaw?” I asked.

He listened to Little Sam for a second.

“The knave is lying,” he told me pretty soon. “He means to bring his commission of stinkards here anyway, recking naught of his promise.”

“Should we hide him, then?”

“Aye,” Grandpaw said. “The Hogbens have given their word—there must be no more killing. And to hide a fugitive from his pursuers would not be an ill deed, surely.”

Maybe he winked. It’s hard to tell with Grandpaw. So I went down the ladder. Galbraith was at the door, watching the torches come up the mountain.

He grabbed me.

“Saunk! If you don’t hide me—”

“We’ll hide you,” I said. “C’mon.”

So we took him down to the cellar. . . .

When the mob got here, with Sheriff Abernathy in the lead, we played dumb. We let ’em search the house. Little Sam and Grandpaw turned invisible for a bit, so nobody noticed them. And naturally the crowd couldn’t find hide nor hair of Galbraith. We’d hid him good, like we promised.

That was a few years ago. The perfesser’s thriving. He ain’t studying us, though. Sometimes we take out the bottle we keep him in and study him.

Dang small bottle, too!

[The end of *Exit the Professor* by Henry Kuttner]