



Willie went after the feline, and his head hit a knob on the bedpost.

## Skip Tracer Bullets

By Joe Archibald

*The cops won't listen to reason when Willie Klump, the Hawkeye Hawkshaw, tries committing suicide to save his life!*

WILLIE KLUMP had never felt more lowdown, not even on the day he went down a thousand feet in a coal mine. With Willie, business was not speaking. In three months, the president of the Hawkeye Detective Agency had made twenty-five fish, and that for watching the take at a society wedding.

His room rent was overdue. The public utilities had isolated his two-by-four office from

the outside world. His office at the moment had a notice of eviction under the door.

Willie sat with Gertie Mudgett in a small eatery on Fifty-eighth. Willie was groaning and speaking of diving into the East River.

"Look, I got to have them bonds I bought, Gertie," Willie said. "I will lose a little by cashin' them but—"

"You will not git the bonds," Gertie said flatly. "They are for your future, Willie. Not that

you should live so long. Oh, I been tellin' you a long time to git into an illegitimate business and stop playin' cops and robbers.

"Look at you, Willie. You are crumbier than a breakfast crumb bun. Look at your face. By the stain on your chin I know what you had for breakfast this mornin'."

"What?" Willie asked.

"Eggs."

"Ha, you are so smart. I did not. I had them yesterday mornin'."

"Water is still free," Gertie sniffed. "Keep what chin you got up, Willie. Stop talkin' about endin' it all. Look, I got t' go an' git me a manicure. Call me tomorrer or sometime, Willie. Not t'night. Aloysius Kelly is takin' me to a ball in Brooklyn. The Riveters' Rodeo, it is called."

"What is the use," Willie moaned.

Two hours later, Willie was in his room, and the greasy hamburger he had eaten for supper was doing things to his alimentary canal. It was dark, and Willie did not bother to turn on the light when he lifted the bi-carb out of his medicine cabinet.

Only after Willie drank it did he find out it was not bi-carb, but a concoction labeled Rough on Rodents. Willie called an ambulance, then had a kind of fit. When he could use his noggin again, they were working on him with a stomach pump. Later, Gertie Mudgett and a cop called at his bedside.

"It is a lie," Willie said. "I was not bumpin' myself off. It was an accident. Gertie, don't you look at me like that. You got to lend me twenty-five so I can git out of here."

"Oh, yeah?" a cop said. "Listen, junior. You kin git locked up for committin' suicide."

"That sounds a little silly," Willie replied in a voice as weak as beanery coffee. "Imagine an undertaker havin' to go to a klink to spring a corpse. Anyway, I did not do it on purpose. It was dark an'—"

Gertie dried her eyes.

"Ain't it awful?" she asked the cop.

"I said—" Willie repeated. "I—oh, what is the use?"

Willie, having been given a clean bill of health, along with a warning, entered his office the next morning. He took half a loaf of stale bread out of a desk drawer and sliced it. He took a

little jar of second-hand coffee grounds and dropped them in a small pot.

After breakfast, he tried to get organized. He read the newspaper, saw a few sticks on page three that intrigued him. Willie Klump immediately got to work. He roughed out a stick or two himself to go in the personal column of the *Globe*. It said:

HAWKEYE DETECTIVE AGENCY  
*Skip Tracing a Specialty*  
LET US DIG UP YOUR DEAD BEETS  
WM. KLUMP, Pres.  
Tel.—

Willie took the paid ad to the newspaper, and the bite whittled him down to just three dollars and seven cents. He went back to the office and pressed a pair of blue serge trousers by moistening them a little and then turning the desk upside-down upon them.

Then Willie took an inventory of his office and found the betsy he had purchased a month ago in a second-hand shop on Third Avenue. There was a metal ring in the heel of the handle with which it could be hung up on the wall.

Willie guessed the persuader was not too modern. But it had a cylinder filled with slugs. He had three pads of paper, two pencils he had sharpened with his teeth, an old wire wastebasket and a desk and chair.

"Nobody ever said anythin' truer," Willie sighed. "Crime don't pay."

THE *Globe* came out at two o'clock. At four-thirty, someone knocked on the door of the Hawkeye Detective Agency.

"Come right in," Willie said. A female character, wearing an ensemble that was considered daring in 1924, flounced into the office. Her eyes were as stormy as a broody hen's, and her three chins were thrust out.

"A fine thing! You put in an ad an' then nobody can git you on the phone!" the caller said.

"I—er—must have been out trailing a felon," Willie said.

"By your looks, you don't look like you could find one if it was on your finger, Buster," the client sniffed. "Maybe I got the wrong place."

If you are a detective, I'm Veronica with one of me eyes covered."

"Sit down," Willie said. "It is the secret of my success. If you set a mouse trap, would you bait it with catnip? When you don't look like what people think you are—let's git down to business."

"The name is Mrs. Clarimonde Fuddy. If you laugh, I'll hand you one. I got a roomin' house on Forty-sixth. Two jerks run out on me. I want 'em skip-traced. You git ten percent of what I git out of 'em if you catch 'em," Mrs. Fuddy said and took a cough drop. She sneezed.

"*Gesundheit*," Willie said.

"Gittin' a cold, it looks like. I'll take me a snifter when I git home," Mrs. Fuddy concluded.

"I'll go with you," Willie said. "We generally find things they left behind that lead us where they went."

"Only one of 'em took his things. The other left mos' of his. Left the rooms in a mess, too," Mrs. Fuddy said. "Well, shake a leg. I got a roast in the oven."

Willie went over to Mrs. Fuddy's rooming house and was shown into a big double room on the first floor back. The mattress was pulled off the bed and had been cut with a knife. A board had been ripped up in the little kitchenette.

"I called this an apartment," Mrs. Fuddy explained. "With a kitchenette. I made them two sign a lease. They jumped it. Their names were Agnew Smew and Newton Huff. Well, start detectin', Klump."

"Wait," Willie said. "Is this a closet here? The door is locked. Why would they leave it locked if they didn't have somethin' in it they wanted to come back for? It is funny."

Mrs. Fuddy thought so too, and she selected a key from a bunch that dangled from her waist. She inserted the key into the lock and opened the door.

Mrs. Fuddy let out a squeal and swooned. Willie looked into the closet. A corpse stared him right in the eye, and Willie's old hat popped off his pate and then settled back in place again. Willie saw that someone had bashed the victim over the noggin with something very much heavier than a box of kleenex.

"A murder!" Willie yelled. "Bein' a skip tracer is payin' off already. I must call the cops." He spun around and tripped over Mrs. Fuddy. The

landlady was straightening her transformation and reached for her uppers.

"It—it was Huff," she gulped out. "S-Smew must of kilt him. It is awful!"

"It isn't no laughin' matter," Willie said and ran out and called the cops.

Satchelfoot Kelly was in charge of the gendarmes that took over Mrs. Fuddy's roost. If there was anything in the world Willie was more allergic to than Kelly, then chemists and doctors had not discovered it. Aloysius Kelly was connected with the D.A.'s office and he had a pair of pedal extremities which when placed both together on a manhole cover hid it from view.

"Awright, Willie," Kelly yowled. "How's it happen you happened to be just where a murder was?"

"Such grammar. *Tsk-tsk*," Willie said. "I happen to be a skip tracer and come here with Mrs. Fuddy's permission to help trace down a couple of lease breakers. One I don't have to chase far, as he is in the closet and not hunting moths.

"It looks like his roommate liquidated him. The culprit we want is named Agnew Sinew. So far I have solved half the case for you, Satchelfoot, and wish you would remember if it gets you a raise."

"Yeah? If you don't mind, will you let me see the corpse, fishhead?"

"He has all the time in the world," Willie said. "In the closet, Kelly. It's amazing to see you at work. As you find the clues, I will write them down for you."

"Willie, some day I will hit you so hard in the nose, you will have to back up ever after t' smell a rose."

"Listen, Buster," Mrs. Fuddy sniffed, "I kin git corn on the radio any hour. Will you start examin'in' the corpse an' then git it out of here? If my roomers see it—"

**S**ATCHELFOOT went to work. Mrs. Fuddy minced out and collided with the appraiser of the defunct, who was on his way in.

"How many more of you is expected?" Mrs. Fuddy yipped. "Is LaGuardia comin', too?"

Aloysius Kelly found no clues. He did not mind very much, as already the name of the assassin was known. All he had to do was dig up

Agnew Smew. When Mrs. Fuddy came back, he got Agnew's description.

The landlady said Agnew worked in an automat and that Huff had been a faithful employee of Rubb & Shine, jewelers, on lower Broadway.

"Huff," Satchelfoot said and kept scratching his head. "Huff, Huff. It's familiar somehow. I've heard it—"

"You saw Snow White," Willie prompted. "Remember? The wolf says he would puff and he'd huff—"

"Shut that goon up," the medical examiner yelled to Kelly.

"I'll do more than that in a minute, Doc," Satchelfoot griped. "I'll give you two corpses to tidy up and we'll split the extra take. Willie, you sit there and don't move."

"Been dead about seventeen hours," the examiner told Kelly. "Skull bashed in. You can wrap him up."

"Ugh!" Willie shivered. "You'd think you fellers was pekin' at a deceased alley cat."

"Come on, guys, we'll git Smew," Kelly said. "This is about as easy as anythin' we ever tackle."

William Klump tarried after the remains of Huff and the live cops made their exits.

"Did Smew look like a homicided maniac, Mrs. Fuddy?"

"If that is what a drip is, he did," Mrs. Fuddy sniffed. "Tried to pay me one month with a book. Said it was the first one out and was worth a hundred dollars. He collected them."

"Huh," Willie said. "I had an uncle oncet used to collect cigar boxes. Now about an advance before we apprehend Agnew Smew. It is customary—"

"Look, Klump. Do I look like a pushover?" Mrs. Fuddy yipped. "Huff can't ever appear in court. Agnew Smew will, but he won't never use that old easy chair over there in the corner ag'in. He'll use one that has got wires leadin' to it an' b-z-z-z-z-z-z-z, no more Smew. Beat it."

Willie was indignant. He was going to threaten to sue Mrs. Fuddy when a black cat jumped up on the window-sill and spat at him. It had a ragged ear and a little leather collar around its neck.

"Belonged to Huff," Mrs. Fuddy said. "Take it home, an' we'll call it square, Klump."

Willie was a little scratched up by the time he reached his office. He was more discouraged than ever. There was going to be no fee. Satchelfoot Kelly would ferret out Smew and never mention any help the president of the Hawkeye Detective Agency might have given him.

"What's the use?" Willie groaned. "I am a failure. What's the use? I—"

An "el" train rattled by and shook the walls of Willie's office. A nail slipped out of the plaster, and the betsy Willie had hung up dropped down and hit on top of an old file cabinet. The betsy went off, and something grazed Willie's coco and chugged into the opposite wall.

Once again Willie was in a hospital emergency ward. He had a horrible headache, and there was a cop sitting beside his bed. Gertie Mudgett came rushing in.

"It's the same creep again," the cop said. "This time he tried to shoot himself with a pistol that was at Bull Run. We'll lock him up an' let a dome expert examine him for squirrels, sister."

"Willie, why did you do it?" Gertie gulped out. "Why don't you stop tryin' to commit su—"

"Look, I tell you it was an accident. Let me outa here," Willie howled. "I was just standin' there—"

"I know the routine, pal," the cop said. "You was lookin' in the barrel to see if it was loaded. You're goin' upstairs where they fit you with nice indoor sport jackets."

"It'll be the best, Willie," Gertie said. "You been awfully suppressed lately."

William Klump went up in the elevator and was examined for loose ends above his ears. Willie balked at the ignominious proceedings and said he would sue. Six hours later they let Willie go.

"He is only an eccentric," the doctors told Gertie.

"Is that good?" Willie's torch asked.

THE papers divulged startling news anent the slaying of Newton Huff the next A.M. Willie absorbed the latest developments in the case while eating cold toast and washing it down with lemon soda.

Huff had been in the news twice before. Once he had risked his life preventing a hold-up in the jewelry store downtown. A rough person had grabbed some dazzling dornicks and had tried to back out of the establishment with the help of a roscoe. Newton Huff had tackled low.

Then there was the time when Huff had not been such a hero. He had been toting a diamond necklace worth 50 gees to a rich client uptown, but had never reached his destination. Some unlawful citizen had waylaid Huff, according to Huff. The lights had gone out all over the world, and when they came on again, he had had no necklace and almost no brains.

"Huh," Willie said. "What do you know?" He read the rest of it. Insurance detectives had suspected Newton Huff of skullduggery, but the biggies at Rubb & Shine had stood adamant when anyone dared to accuse Huff of faking the hold-up.

Why, they told the cops, Huff had risked his life once before to save the company's doodads. Three years after the slugging of Huff, the cops and insurance dicks considered the case closed. None of the stuff had appeared in the dens of the fences. Huff still lived in a scratch house and had only two suits to his name.

"Yeah," Willie said. "I wonder—and I don't see where Kelly has nabbed Agnew Smew yet. I will do some skip tracing."

Willie put another ad in the paper. It read:

Looking for person who would swap used piccolo or portable radio for first edition of Jane Eyre. Klump 246 ½ W. East Forty-ninth.

The landlady was waiting for Willie when he got to his rooming house.

"Look, you got to tell that Mudgett to lay off, Klump. Every hour she calls up. 'Has he done it yet?' she says. I'll be glad when I throw you out, Klump."

"She thinks I tried to commit suicide twicet, is all," Willie sighed.

The first two citizens to answer Willie's ad were not upset a bit when Willie let the black cat out of the closet. So he gave them the brush-off. The third customer was an odd-looking character wearing funny-looking shoes and heavy-lensed cheaters.

He had a mop of black hair under his silly hat and carried a piccolo. He said his name was Egbert Oakley, and he wanted a look at Jane Eyre. Then Willie let the cat out, and Egbert tried to Rommel faster than Dagwood going for his bus, but Willie nailed him and took off the citizen's wig and cheaters.

"Agnew Smew!" the president of the Hawkeye Detective Agency whooped. "Got Addler Elevation shoes on, I see. Couldn't resist a first edition. Why did you knock off Huff?"

"I didn't, pal. Honest," Sinew gurgled. "When I got in from welding school, there he was, sittin' in the closet. First one they would suspect would be me. Me an' Huff had an awful fight the day before.

"I lammed because I was scairt. I figgered to change my looks, raise some more dough an' leave town. A first edition of Jane Eyre would git me to Alaska. Look, let me go as—"

"No," Willie sniffed. "How would a murderer git in Mrs. Fuddy's without a key? Talk fast."

"Yeah. Couple of nights before I lit out, I stopped in at a gin mill on my way home. A block away from Mrs. Fuddy's. A swell-lookin' number ogled me, an' we sit down an' have some snorts. I must of passed out. The next mornin' I find I have no key ring. I figger I lost it somewheres."

"H-m-m," Willie mused. "The pigeon could have been a stooge for the real culprit, Smew. They cased Mrs. Fuddy's pueblo and found you wouldn't be home the night Huff was erased.

"I got to turn you in, Smew, as you might be in on it, an' it'll put the real culprit off his guard, you bein' in jail an' gittin' groomed for the state roastisserie. I'll call the cops."

"Awright," Agnew Smew sighed. "They'd got me later or sooner, Klump."

It was not long afterward that Satchelfoot Kelly and three husky policemen arrived at Willie's place.

"Somebody has to uphold the law," Willie sniffed at his aversion. "I skip-traced him, Kelly. Don't forget what I done so far."

"Who? Me?" Satchelfoot grinned. "Why, Willie! Perish the thought. Come on, Smew. You found out Huff had that necklace stowed away. Huff maybe talked in his sleep. You bopped him for keeps and most likely you got the hot pebbles

stashed yourself. We'll make you talk, though, you poor man's Peter Lorry."

"I'm innercent," Smew gulped.

"So is Shicklegoober," Satchelfoot scoffed. "Willie, the next time, try gas."

"It is a lie," Willie yipped. "They was accid—"

Satchelfoot took his prisoner away, and Willie slumped down on his bed and wondered if the pate probers shouldn't have kept him longer in the squirrel pen.

After a while, he took paper and pencil and jotted down notes so that he could think in the morning of what he had thought about the night before.

Willie's memory was as short as the distance between Siamese twins. Willie sneezed. His eyes began to drool. That Mrs. Fuddy—she'd carried more sniffle gems than a flattop carries dive bombers.

No. 1—Could be Huff really had had the hot ice. But did Smew know it? Suppose the swag was still in Mrs. Fuddy's scratch house? Sounds like a B pitcher.

No. 2—Did a babe knock off Huff? Maybe I will go and make a deal with Mrs. Fuddy. I got to move anyway. Looks like Huff did have a confederate, maybe, that time he was boffed. It is a tough case. But Kelly will make Smew confess. What is the use?

Two days later, Satchelfoot was still trying to make Agnew confess. Agnew refused to go sissy under the third degree. Satchelfoot, as desperate as a Nazi in Russia, called Willie downtown to reason with Smew.

Willie arrived with a terrible case of laryngitis, and Kelly had him tossed out. So William Klump went up to see Mrs. Fuddy.

"You owe me somethin' for takin' up my time," he told the landlady. "How's about lettin' me have the late Huff's boudoir for a week to settle everythin'?"

"All right, Klump," Mrs. Fuddy said. "I see I give you my cold. You got a voice like a zombie. How about a snort of fire water?"

"Huh!" Willie said later when he took possession of the room. "Looks like you been huntin' for treasure, too, Mrs. Fuddy."

"You have to clean up after a corpse, don't you?" the old babe alibied. "Anyway, there ain't nothin' hid in here. That why you want the room?"

Less than two hours after Willie unpacked his straw suitcase, Satchelfoot Kelly arrived. "Oh, so you are lookin' for the ice, too, hah?" Kelly snapped. "Rented the room. Well—"

"I got a due bill," Willie sniffed. "I took it for a week to unhaunt it for Mrs. Fuddy. So you flatfeet want to look around, too, huh? It has been explored by everybody so far but Admiral Byrd.

"An' you didn't even mention my name in the papers as havin' been the citizen who really traced Smew. Satchelfoot, you are a bigger doublecrosser than Peer Laval. I demand that you leave my room this instant!"

Mrs. Fuddy yanked at Satchelfoot's sleeve.

"Look, Buster. Do I look like a dope? I been lookin' for two days for the rocks. Now scram!"

"We'll be watchin' you close, Willie Klump," Satchelfoot yelped as he withdrew. "Look out for the zany, Mrs. Fuddy. Maybe he just hired the room to knock hisself off in."

"I am goin' to kill you some day, Kelly," Willie said in a voice that sounded like a swinging gate with rusty hinges.

That afternoon Willie Klump entered Mrs. Fuddy's after having been out buying milk and meat scraps for Huff's cat. He met one of the roomers coming out. She wore a dark tailored suit and flat-heeled shoes, tortoise shell cheaters and no make-up.

"Mr. Klump, I believe?" the plain Jane asked with her nose way up.

"At your service," Willie said.

"If that cat howls out in back again tonight, I will speak to Mrs. Fuddy, you understand? I must have my sleep."

"I'll buy the tabby a muzzle," Willie said. "You could use one too—er—come back sober, huh?"

"*Riffraff!*" the doll flung after him.

William Klump sat down in the room where it had all started and wondered about the late Newton Huff. It looked as if the deceased had made heroics pay dividends. Huff, Willie figured, had known his employers would never suspect an employee of any crime when that employee had

once risked his life in saving the Rubb & Shine merchandise.

Huff had been as patient as a cat outside a rathole, too, had waited until the heat was off. Willie got up and searched the room, too, but found nothing save three mice and a cockroach that showed fight, it was that big.

"We are all stalemates," Willie sighed.

Willie Klump left Mrs. Fuddy's early the next A.M. On his way to a ten-cent breakfast, he spotted a fat wallet on the sidewalk. Willie emulated a P-40 and dived. The wallet jumped like a scared flea, and then a lot of gamins came out of an alley and laughed at Willie.

"April fool!" they harmonized. Willie tried to reprimand the little squirts, but his voice was like an old violin string that had not seen rosin in five years. Willie got up, peeled a little patch of skin off his chin, and forgot breakfast.

"The First of April, huh?" he squeaked. "I better go to my room an' stay there. Anythin' could happen to me an' generally has."

It was an hour after lunchtime, and Willie was in his room striving to reconstruct a crime. Suddenly he saw the late Huff's black liver punisher chewing at one of his slippers. Willie went after the feline and tripped over a tear in the old carpeting on the floor.

His head hit a brass knob on one of the posts of the iron bedstead, and Willie did not remember anything for some time afterward. When he got to his hands and knees and started shaking the butterflies out of his ears, he saw the brass knob on the floor.

Something had rolled out of it, some crumpled-up tissue paper and a bluish-white object that sent off little rays of light. Willie picked it up, and his ticker skipped three beats.

He snatched up the brass knob, poked into it with a long index finger and pulled out more diamonds and more tissue paper. William Klump, president of the Hawkeye Detective Agency, had found the treasure!

**W**ILLIE sat on the floor like a sultan for almost an hour gazing at the glittering gewgaws. So Huff had gone illigit! Smew had been hep and had tried to make Huff cough up part of the booty?

Willie grinned and felt sorry for Satchelfoot Kelly. Willie would take the rocks down to the underwriters and get his reward. Poor Kelly!

"That cat will eat sirloins from now on," Willie said as he put the stones in a handkerchief and placed them in his pocket. "April first, huh? It was not kiddin' me."

Willie locked his door and went out. In the dark hallway something happened. Something pressed against his spine and a feminine voice spoke.

"Just go along, sweetheart, an' do like I say. There is a betsy in this muff I carry. I could knock you off here and get that ice, but I got orders not to leave no more corpses around this joint. It'll tell the cops Smew shouldn't take the rap. Keep walkin'!"

Willie knew he couldn't scream for help if he dared to. He marched out of Mrs. Fuddy's rooming house and across the street to where a taxi stood. He got into the swindle chariot, and the doll stuck close to his side.

It was the flat-heeled number with the tortoise shells. The menace gave the taxi driver an address and then whispered at Willie.

"I had the next room to yours, chump," the pigeon said. "You beat me to that one by an hour. I could see through a keyhole."

"An' you saw me in my long red flannels then," Willie squeaked. "The shame of it. Stop pressin' that cannon so hard against my ribs, huh?"

"Button your lip," the doll said, and by her voice, Willie knew she must have thrown her Mother Goose away at the age of four and asked for "Murders in the Rue Morgue." He could get into the worst messes. Willie had a horrible hunch that the cops would know he had not committed suicide this time.

William Klump was taken up to the top floor of a big apartment building uptown and ushered into a room where a very oily-looking character was reading a racing form.

"I got the stuff, sugar," the babe said. "This goon is packing the ice. Frisk him before I put up the roscow."

"No kiddin', baby?" The dishonest character wearing the plaid double-breasted frisked Willie and took over the kohinoors. He opened up the hanky and feasted his close-set peepers on the

tickets to the gravy train Pullman. Then he grinned.

"Get those rags off, sugar. We're goin' t' celebrate. About this punk though—"

"What you think, Georgie?"

"Yeah. Listen, you Keystone cop," the rough boy said to Willie. "It is a shame, but you got to go."

"We could talk it over," Willie said desperately, his voice carrying only a foot away from his molars.

"Look, baby," the crook said. "I got to go downtown an' git them things out of the shop. You got to buy a few things maybe for the trip we're takin'. Then we come back and knock this punk off. We'll lock him in the next room an' take the key. He can't holler. It's only twenty-one stories straight down. Okay?"

"Yeah, sugar," the dishonest pigeon said.

"Y' see, pal," the crook told Willie. "Huff waited a long time before he started disposin' of the rocks one by one. I'm a fence, pal. Huff only brought one every t'ree months, an' I was a li'l impatient with him.

"Figurin' where he got the stuff in the first place, I knew there was some bigger ones somewheres. There's more profit gittin' things for nothin' an' sellin' 'em. Well, git in that room there, punk!"

Willie got in. A key was turned in a lock and then removed. He sat down in a little room that had one window and tried to stop his knees from knocking. He could hear the dishonest couple out there.

"I ain't packin' this stuff wit' me," he heard Georgie say. "The cops have been' watchin' me. I'll put 'em in the false bottom of your fitted case, baby."

"Yeah."

**F**INALLY the crooks went out. Willie went to the window and looked down. He shivered. He tried to yell, but his voice was practically null and void. The things that happened to him—laryngitis and April Fool's day!

He could throw a message asking for the cops down into the street, but the citizens would be on their guards for gags. Anyway, the S.O.S. might never land where it could be picked up. Willie knew that he was a dead pigeon if he

happened to be there when the rough persons returned.

He knew he was going to be. Georgie could only burn once, no matter how many citizens he expunged. It would not matter much if he burned for the rubout of Newton Huff or of William J. Klump.

"What'll I do?" Willie croaked, and paced the floor. "This time it will be no accident. It won't be—" Willie stopped suddenly and snapped his fingers. He went to the window and looked out again.

Just below the window, there was a ledge about two feet wide. Craning his neck and edging forward over the sill, he saw that the ledge extended to the corners of the building. Willie pulled in his head and shook beads of ice water off his brow.

Always Willie had been a little nervous to when he climbed up on a chair. That ledge was two hundred feet and more above the concrete, and if he took a Brody, they would clean him up with a rake and a mop.

"Willie, you are desperate and you got to do it. You are going to be a corpse anyway if you don't. What can you lose? Go on, you jerk!" he told himself.

"Okay," he replied. He climbed out the window and stood on the ledge, trying not to look down. He inched along the ledge, digging his fingers into the plaster between the bricks.

His legs started to quiver and hum, and his stomach was doing LaConga. Willie's torso above his knees felt as heavy as a concrete mixer. He kept swallowing his cardiac assembly, and he prayed some. Finally he glued himself against the side of the building and shut his eyes.

When it seemed he would have to give up, Willie heard the hue and cry down in the street. Somebody yelled from a window a few feet below.

"Don't jump, you fathead!"

A police car siren screeched. The sounds below stepped up, and Willie knew his act was a honey. He got the courage to twist his noggin and look down. His head swam, and he nearly passed out.

There was a big crowd down there. They were blocking the street. Willie saw flash bulbs go off. He knew those scribblers and news photo



hounds hoped he would take the dive. They were cold-blooded characters.

Somebody yelled at Willie from above. Willie looked up, and a pigeon nearly used him for a landing field.

"Look, you don't want t' jump, pal. I know you can't git steak an' maybe you are One-A, but don't jump. Listen—"

"You ain't kiddin'," Willie squeaked and hung on for another ten years.

Willie Klump heard them breaking down a door not far away and he started inching his way back to the window. A great disappointed roar came up from the street.

"The gools," Willie choked out.

He nearly slipped when he got to the open window. His hat fell off and spiraled down. Willie was glad he was not in it. He wondered if his head was, as there seemed no weight above his collarbones.

He finally fell into the room just as the door was smashed in. Cops came at Willie, but Willie saw a familiar male face in the next room. He saw a swell-looking tomato grabbing a fitted bag. Willie poked a cop in the nose and knocked another kicking as he made for the pair of criminals.

William Klump went in low and got the babe around the ankles just as she was hopping out into the hall. The doll screeched when she flattened out, but quickly tuned over on her angel bones and fired a roscoe.

The slug wiped a mole off Willie's cheek and took a gendarme's cap off. Georgie the Fence snatched up the doll's fitted bag and kicked Willie in the chin.

"Do somethin'," Willie yipped at the cops, but forgot his rusty pipes. Georgie the Fence was hiking to the self-service elevator with the bag holding the ice, shooting at cops as he went.

"Wait for me, you doublecrosser!" the dame howled. Willie got into the elevator with one cop just before Georgie could shut the door. In some strange manner, the door clicked shut, and the lift started down. It was a terrible rhubarb all the way to the basement.

When the elevator door opened, Willie and a cop crawled out. Then they got up, after collecting their marbles, and removed Georgie the Fence and another cop.

"This is murder, not a suicide attempt," the gendarme told Willie. "Now tell me—"

GEORGIE THE FENCE was half-nude. He had a lump over each eye and a big one on top of his noggin. He had left three teeth in the elevator.

Willie and a gendarme pulled him off the prone figure of another policeman and then rested. More cops and tenants of the building started to spill into the basement. A fireman wearing a chief's cap and carrying an axe came with them.

"Awright," the cops said to Willie. "What you got to say? Attempted suicide, creatin' a riot. Damage to public property. Assault an'—"

"Break open that fitted bag there." Willie said it three times before they finally understood him. "It is fixed with a false bottom and has stolen diamonds in it. This big crook here gittin' first aid is a fence named Georgie.

"That dame up there was a confederate, an' I bet she's lammed. I only faked I was committin' Harry Kary to stop from bein' murdered. Call Detective Aloysius Kelly, huh?"

"Yeah," a cop said. "Lookit the stones. One of 'em is as big as a tokay grape. Georgie, you say, pal? That must be Georgie Link. We changed his face so much on the way down, it is hard to tell—yeah, I can tell by that ring on his fat finger."

An hour later, Willie Klump was in the D.A.'s office, looking like a third-rate pug who had just pleased a crowd for fifteen rounds. Georgie Link looked even worse. Satchelfoot Kelly had no bruises, but he looked much more in need of vitamin B-1 than Willie.

"That was how it all was," Willie said. "All because I started bein' a skip tracer and was hired by Mrs. Fuddy. Georgie got his tomater to steal Smew's keys. He went in and demanded that Huff fork over the rest of the diamonds, and Huff said no and got caved in an' put in the closet.

"That same pistol-packin' mama fixed herself up an' hired a room at Mrs. Fuddy's. She spotted me holdin' the diamonds I found in the brass knob on the bed. Sounds like a B pitcher, huh?"

"If I caught somebody startin' a fire in the basement of the city hall, it would turn out t' be

the mayor who was experimentin' with a civil defense stirrup pump," Satchelfoot groaned.

"Nobody can figure it all out. He gits a black cat belongin' t' Huff. It trips Smew up. It shows him where the diamonds was? Does that make sense?"

"It is what you git for hoggin' all the credit, Satchelfoot," Willie squeaked. "If you boys downtown would corporate with me—"

"Committin' suicide or tryin' to for the third time," Kelly griped. "To call the cops. I—who has a aspirin and a pint?"

The D.A. shook hands with Willie and told him he would get ten percent of the value of the diamonds from the insurance company. Photographers came in and took Willie's picture. Then Gertrude Mudgett came in, holding Willie's funny-looking felt hat. Willie had his back turned, and Gertie did not notice him there.

"This time he did it!" Gertie yipped. "I been watchin' the morgues an' police stations. He left his roomin' house two days ago. I found this hat

in a presink uptown. It is wet. Oh, he drowned himself. Please drag the river—"

"Why, hello Gertie," Willie said, turning around. "It would have been in the papers in a couple hours about me. How I tried t' commit suicide to save my life. Sounds silly, huh?"

Gertie Mudgett slammed the hat on the floor.

"You big mushhead," she yelped. "Humiliatin' me in front of all these—I am through with you, William Klump. Don't you never—"

"That reward'll come to about thirty-five hundred dollars, Klump," the D.A. said. "All right, lock up Link and let Smew out."

"*Wha-a-a-a?* Why, Willie, you know I was just upset thinkin' you was a corpse an' all," Gertie said and threw her arms around the skip tracer. "Tell me about it."

"You'll have to make an appointment at my office," Willie said. "An' please don't ask for my autograph. What we go through, me an' Sinatra."

The D.A. almost had to lock Gertie up.