



"Who-oo is it?" Willie Klump croaked. "Answer or I'll shoot!"

## Dying to See Willie

By JOE ARCHIBALD

*The crook climbed right into bed with Detective Klump before kicking the bucket, but he left a valuable clue behind him!*

**G**ERTRUDE MUDGETT walked into the office of the Hawkeye Detective Agency, Inc., just as the president, William J. Klump, was having his lunch.

"Have a jelly doughnut, Gert," Willie greeted her cordially. "The coffee will be cooked any minute now."

"Huh, I must say!" Gertie sniffed. "This is certainly a delusionment, Willie. The private eyes on the radio, like Fats

McGlone, have beautifully furnished pesthouses and a varlet. You are about as glamorous as a tomcat casin' an alley for a fishhead."

"Them fakers!" Willie bridled. "Every place they go even if it is on the steps of a parsonage, they stumble over a corpse. They open their door of a night and there is a stiff wearin' their favorite dressin' gown. Only morons believe that dribble."

"Whicht means I am one, hah?" Gertie

yelped. "It is just perfessional jealousy with you an' you know it, Willie Klump! Look at Aloysius Kelly for instance who is workin' on a big murder and robbery what took place last night! He's what I call a detective, Willie!"

"Huh? Tell me more, Gert!"

"I met him in the subway this mornin'," Gertie said. "He was on his way uptown to investigate a suspect might've known about the crime. Somebody killed the watchman at the Pusey Plastic Novelties Company just acrosst the Harlem River an' they also took forty grand from the safe whicht looked like a punch job to Hardhat Hafey of the Safe an' Loft Squad but maybe wasn't. Kelly says it looked like some gee knew the combo of the crib only it turns out nobody knew it but the vice-president an' the cashier an' who would suspect them? The watchman was slugged by a piece of pipe or somethin' an'—"

Willie held up a hand. "Take time out, Gert," he suggested. "That is the way you git blood pressure. Then go on an' tell me the rest."

"I certainly will not as he give it to me in strict confidence," Gertie said. "If everybody blabs what they hear, how could the crooks git caught?"

"A good question," Willie sniffed. "Satchelfoot Kelly is handicapped enough as it is, not havin' a brain. That shnook couldn't find a moose in the museum of natural history."

"I don't intend to sit here an' have you insult my friends, William Klump!" Gertie snapped. "Go chaste a skip tracer, as that is your speed!"

**W**ILLIE shook the punch off and put half a jelly doughnut back in the bag for future reference. "Say, ain't Hardhat married?"

"He is," Gertie said loftily. "Some men do git married, Willie!"

"An' others join the Marines," Willie said. "I must talk to Hafey. I guess that plastered novelty company would like to git forty grand back."

"Don't make me laugh!" Gertie Mudgett snorted disdainfully and picked up her warbag. "An' wipe the powdered sugar off your face, Willie!"

A few minutes after Gertie had taken her leave the president of the Hawkeye called up a certain number downtown and finally got Hardhat Hafey.

"Hello there," Willie said. "I just called to tell you what a swell wife you got, Hardhat. I saw her for the first time las' Saturday night as you two walked into the Blue Pelican on Fifty-Ninth. Platinum hair, huh? An' what bookie or dope peddler you coverin' for to buy her a fur coat like that?"

"Er look here, Willie!" Hardhat gulped at the other end of the wire. "You know I showed you a pitcher of the babe I married. That was a cousin from out in Kokomo an' I was showin' her the sights."

"Ha-ha!" Willie replied.

"Awright, you blackmailer!" Hardhat yelped. "What's the bite?"

"It is just I might want to know all the angles about the Pusey job," Willie said. "Of courst you marryin' a' girl she should be *broad* minded, Hardhat, an' wouldn't mind you buzzin' with a cousin."

"Willie, I will meet you in Hogan's at five," Hardhat said.

William Klump hung up. Sometimes he wondered if he was as dumb as most people claimed he was.

He was in Hogan's tavern at five sharp and Hardhat Hafey, a six-inch shiv in each eye, was waiting. "Hello, worm," he said.

"Flattery won't get you nowheres," Willie said, and sat down. "All is fair in

love until you marry 'em, Hardhat. What's with Satchelfoot Kelly?"

"Well, we cased that joint after the holdup, Willie," Hafey divulged, "an' it did look funny. The dial was knocked off like with a mallet or somethin' an' the spindle pushed back only the sockets wa'n't broken like they should of been. We figure the cashier might of worked with crooks an' he told 'em to be sure it would look like a punch job when they was finished. Kelly is still investigatin' the character's background an' livin' habits an' such. I give you my word it is all I know, Willie!"

"Have another beer," Willie said. "Was it an old safe, Hardhat?"

"It sure wasn't, Willie. It was one of them Burpson's. The D.A. says they are tough babies to bust open. Now I hope I can trust you, Willie, not to tell about—"

"Hardhat!" Willie exclaimed, "What kind of a detective you think I am?"

"Do you mind if I don't answer that one?" Hardhat sniffed.

"Not at all," Willie grinned. "Well, I must be goin'."

William J. Klump was ducking into a subway just three minutes later when who should come out of same but Aloysius "Satchelfoot" Kelly, a citizen Willie had always loved the way he did the withholding tax and calves' brains a la mode.

"What are you snoopin' around for, you poor man's Sam Spade?" Satchelfoot snarled.

"I lost a collar button," Willie said. "You have any luck briefin' the cashier?"

"If there ever was a deader end than that one I just hit my dome against, I don't know where it could be unless it was sittin' on your shoulders," Kelly griped. "That character Barnaby an' his wife repair Gideon Bibles in their spare time. The cashier has had two suits the last six years

an' has been to one movie. What would he want with forty grand?"

"Satchelfoot," Willie said. "The one you should suspect the most is the citizen nobody thinks of doin'."

"No, you don't," Kelly suddenly yelled. "I am not goin' to let you worm nothin' more out of me. Git lost!"

WHEN Willie Klump walked into his rooming house that night his landlady was waiting for him in the hall and the look in her eye convinced the president of the Hawkeye there would be no good news tonight.

"Evenin'," Willie forced out. "I know I am back about a week in the rent but you have t' admit that for me that ain't bad."

"Leave us forget that, Mr. Klump," the old doll said. "It is the only reason I don't feel too bad about evictin' you. My daughter out in Jersey has been evicted an' so she an' her husband have to have your room as of tomorrow this time."

Willie was fast becoming a fatalist. He rocked back on his heels for a moment and then stiffened his upper lip.

"Well, it shouldn't be bad in the park these days, Mrs. Klipspringer. Hah, I feel the call of the great outdoors."

"You could git into a hotel until you got another room, Mr. Klump," Mrs. Klipspringer suggested. "I hate to do this."

"Well, blood is thicker than the hot water we never got in this flea-bag," Willie said.

It took Willie about twenty minutes the next afternoon to throw his worldly goods into a straw suitcase. That morning he had noticed a medium class hotel just off Union Square and had been informed that a certain room would be available for at least a week. The bite would be seventeen dollars. It was the Hotel Luxoria.

"Maybe I could make a deal with 'em," Willie sighed. "For the rent I would

give them house dick services. Well, I could try."

Willie was in Room 660 at the Luxoria at three P.M. At three-thirty Gertrude Mudgett called him on the phone. "I phoned your roomin' house, Willie Klump," she said. "So you been holdin' out on me with a big detainin' fee from somewheres, huh? Sincet when could you live in a hotel without washin' dishes? You doublecrosstin' giraffe!"

"Look, I got evicted!" Willie yelled. "Stop jumpin' at inclusions."

"Didn't pay your rent again?" Gertie shot back. "What dizzy dame you been squanderin' your money on? If I ever find out, you sneak!"

"I left the water runnin' in the tub, Gert," Willie said. "Call me back." He hung up and then saw a sign tacked up near the phone that said:

NO COOKING ALLOWED  
IN THIS ROOM

"Is that so?" he sniffed. "Neither did Mrs. Klipspringer. As long as I don't cook cabbage they will know from nothin'."

Willie got to his office at four to look through his mail. A mail-order house claimed they had a shoe for such as he that made less sound than rubber, and they had built-in arches. Another letter screamed at him, Come to Morgridge Manor And See Our Houses! Protect You And Yours From Eviction!

"I wisht a corpse would come in here an' drop dead at my feet," Willie griped. "Fats McGlone, huh! No cow ever carried as much tripe as them radio flatfeet. Even what happens to me at times is like readin' *Black Beauty* compared to it."

The phone rang and Willie eagerly grabbed it off its cradle. "Hawkeye Detective Agency, Incorp. William J.

Klump speaking. Missin' persons found. Skip tracin' an'—"

"Mr. Klump, we are takin' a radio poll," a dulcet feminine voice cooed. "Do you listen to Fats McGlone on station WHAM on Wednesday evenings?"

"This is not the observation tower at Bellevue," Willie snapped. "Do I look that stupid, sister?"

"You sure do," the doll said. "An' drop dead! If I was your sister I would give you rat poison!"

"An' if you was, I'd take it!" Willie countered and slammed the phone down. He decided to give up and go back to the hotel. On the way he purchased an evening paper to see if there were any new leads on the murder and robbery at the Pusey Plastic Products Company. Willie chuckled when he read part of a story on page 5. Headquarters had assured the newspaper citizens that an arrest would be made inside forty-eight hours.

"I wonder when they will stop listenin' to Satchelfoot," Willie observed. "Or at least believin' him. Let's see now. The cashier's name was Barnaby an' might be in the phone book. You stop thinkin' like that, Willie! What chancet have you got anyway?"

**S**UDDENLY Willie felt a tap on the shoulder and turned and looked into the face of a very big cop.

"Yeah?" Willie inquired.

"You're either drunk or crazy," the cop snapped. "Who you been talkin' to the last couple minutes? There ain't nobody with you. Git off my beat 'fore I run you in."

"I will have you know I am a detective," Willie said indignantly, then knew he had made a very grave mistake and started running. It was a hot day and the cop was fat. There were times when Willie had to admit he got the breaks.

At ten o'clock that night he peeled off and tumbled into bed and tried not to think of the seventeen bucks he would have to pay at the end of seven days. And then it occurred to him that it would be easy to lower his straw suitcase to the court in back and so he dropped off to sleep.

It was much later when the president of the Hawkeye suddenly woke and sat straight up in bed. There were sounds in the room that shouldn't have been there and certainly hadn't been made by things the exterminators had missed. And a cockroach could not fall over a chair. Willie tried to scream but his throat was as dry as a camel's foot. Then something heavy fell across the bed and pinned his knees. The cold sweat came out of Willie and trickled down his spine and down his nose.

Finally he croaked, "Who is it? Answer me or I'll sh-shoot!"

All that Willie could hear for the next few seconds were tom-toms and a sound like a kid dragging a stick along the pickets of a fence. Then he gradually realized that his ticker and his teeth were making the racket and he pulled himself together. He reached up and groped for the string to the light that was attached to the wall over his bed. He found it and yanked. Willie's locks shot up as if he also had pulled the string of a fright wig.

A big citizen who was a stranger to Willie had fallen across the bed. His hat had dropped off. In the back of the strange intruder's plaid coat was a hole that had never been chewed out by a moth. In short the citizen looked very, very dead. Willie squirmed and got his legs out from under and swung out of bed.

"I guess you made a mistake," he gulped. "You was maybe lookin' for Fats McGlone on the radio."

Willie picked up a snap brim hat and saw the label inside. A Truly Warmer.

There were initials, M.F.T.

"Huh, this skimmer never cost more than three-sixty-five," Willie said. "But this character's suit never cost less than a hun'ed. Why did he come in here to breathe his last? I better call the night clerk, then the cops."

The night clerk was a citizen well past seventy and he had no more hair on his pate than a pickerel. He nearly lost his store choppers when he took a gander at the corpse.

"Why, he come in just a few minutes ago, Klump," the old geezer said. "I figgered he had one too many an' that was why he staggered."

"One too many is right," Willie said, mopping his brow. "Right between the shoulder-blades, pal. Who is he?"

"Name's J. L. Cusp," the clerk nasaled. "Been here about a week. Has Room Six-Hundred. That's it, Klump. He was all mixed up an' wasn't seein' too good an' sixes an' zeros all looked alike so he stumbled in here—"

Willie suddenly snapped his fingers. "J. T. Cusp? Then why is M.F.T. in his hat huh? Don't answer that. Just leave me git to the phone to call Homicide oncet more. Ha, he died to git to see me, didn't he?"

"I guess I ain't got a sense of humor," the old desk tender sniffed.

Willie called Headquarters. "Yeah, that's what I said an' it ain't no gag," he said in part. "He crawled in bed with me an' expired. Huh, don't you ever listen to the radio? Be sure Satchelfoot Kelly comes if he happens to be there. This he's got to see."

The night clerk inched out of the room. Willie looked the deceased over more thoroughly. He had been a nice looking citizen who had found life ended at forty and was not a criminal type any way you looked at him. Willie wished that he was heel enough to case the cadaver

thoroughly before the legitimate cops arrived.

"But it is like I always told Gert," he said aloud. "My conscience ain't much but my sub-conscience is what makes me layoff temptation at times. I could leave a print in the wrong place an' Kelly would do his best to send me to the rotisserie. Lay off, Willie."

**T**WENTY minutes later the appraiser of the violently departed snapped his bag shut and announced that the stiff had been one for at least forty minutes. Satchelfoot Kelly eyed Willie askance after the private eye had told his story.

"It ain't possible," he sniffed. "Truth can't be stranger than Willie Klump. What you doin' livin' in a hotel, Willie? You got mixed up in some racket, I bet."

"Oh, I just peddle a little opium at times," Willie said sourly. "An' don't you think we could git more dope on the corpse if we went to the room he lived in, Satchelfoot? It is six-hundred. Follow me."

There was a nice leather suitcase in the late J. L. Cusp's room. The initials J. L. C. were on it. Inside it were a few articles of clothing that told the gendarmes nothing.

"It looks like he was held up somewheres is all," Satchelfoot opined. "There wa'n't no poke on him as I frisked him. Looks like he never got no mail while he was there. Well, I can't waste too much time on this rubout unlest somebody identifies him in the morgue as some big shot. With that Pusey case still to be solved—"

Willie wondered if he should mention the hat with the initials M.F.T. in it, then told himself the late J. L. Cusp might have grabbed it off a rack in a barber shop by mistake. Anyway, why should he do what the cops were getting paid for? It was silly.

"Awright," Kelly said. "If you boys

have every thin' covered we'll call it a night. An' don't you dast leave town, Willie!"

"You got nothin' on me, flatfoot," Willie replied. "I t'rowed the gat where no radar could find it, ha!"

Willie Klump returned to Room 660 and was quite relieved to discover the cadaver had been removed to the deep freeze. He was wracking his brains for a plausible explanation to all this when his phone rang. He answered it and recognized the voice of the night clerk.

"Mr. Klump, there is a cab driver down here," the old character wheezed. "He has got a pocketbook belongs to J. L. Cusp, I am sure. You'd better come down."

Willie did. The cabby said he found the wallet in his jalopy after coming out of a beanery. "Yeah, I thought I'd clean up the heap a little an' I found this wallet. I was sure it belonged to my last fare whicht was a drunk in a plaid suit. He hails me at the corner of Second Avenya an' Forty-third. I took him to this dump an' he han's me a five he has crumpled in his fist. He says I should keep the change."

"It is easy to figure out why he was easy with his lettuce," Willie sniffed. "The citizen is dead, pal."

"Huh? Look, I don't know from nothin'," the hackie yelped. "You think if I rubbed him out I'd come back with the wallet I stole from him which I did not!"

"You are in the clear, Mac," Willie said. "You are the kind of citizen makes things tough for dishonest persons. Just leave your name an' address in case we need a witness."

"Okay, pal."

A few minutes later William J. Klump, in the privacy of his room, made a startling discovery that put buzzing sounds inside his noggin. There was not a single bit of legal tender left in the late J. L. Cusp's

poke but tucked away in a little cubicle were one or two old business cards. They said: J. Luscomb Crump. Burpson Safe Co., Inc., Grand Rapids, Mich.

Willie went to the washstand and splashed cold water on his face. He pinched himself on a tender part of his anatomy to make sure he was not dreaming that he was listening to a Fats McGlone radio can of corn. But the wallet was still there on the bed. He took an old notebook and a pencil from a dresser drawer and scribbled down the things that came briefly to mind.

"The corpse lost a hat marked with the initials M.F.T. He registered at the Luxoria as J. L. Cusp. Why?"

"But the deceased was really named J. Luscomb Crump so why the pseudonim? It was a Burpson safe knocked off at the Pusey Plastered Novelties Company and it looks like this rub out has a string attached to the assassination of that watchman. Willie, you ain't that lucky!"

"An honest gee don't lead no double life. If this J. Luscomb Crump was crooked what kind of underworld characters would he make deals with? Of courst they should be safe crackers. I wonder is there one in the files with the initials M.F.T.?"

**A**BRUPTLY Willie put his pencil down. He had a headache too big even for a horse for he was quite allergic to such large scale thinking. He pocketed the notes and then looked for his bottle of aspirin.

"I don't believe it," he mumbled.

"Maybe I'll be awright in the mornin' an' find it is all a figurement of the imagination. They don't even happen to me." At ten o'clock of the same day Willie walked into an office downtown and conversed earnestly with a citizen in charge of the rogues gallery.

"I hate to bother you," Willie said, "but I have to make a livin' the same as anybody. I have been on the trail of a missin' person for a client an' I got reasons to believe he was either in the can or out of it. I git paid even if I just find out where the missin' person is as his wife says she can git a divorce if she can prove her husband is a ex-convict or one now in good standin'. Of courst us private eyes have to hold our clients in strict confidents. I can only say the initials of the character I am huntin' is M.F.T."

"Klump, you get worse every day," the headquarters specialist sniffed. "Just initials. Git lost."

"My client said he would be in for safe-crackin' if anythin'," Willie coaxed.

"All right, follow me, Klump. We'll have a look in that category."

A few minutes later William J. Klump was getting a gander at the pedigree of an incurable incorrigle named Melvin F. Trumbo. Melvin had worked out a rap back in Joliet and had once gone over the wall out in Kansas. He had a moon face and a pair of eyes Willie thought should be grafted onto a blind buzzard in the event of his demise.

"This guy, Klump? If that's the mug he is now on parole I am quite certain. I can get where he lives an' where he works."

"Do that," Willie said.

The president of the Hawkeye Detective Agency left the bastile a few moments later with the address of Melvin F. Trumbo. The parolee was now employed as a mechanic with the Dairymaid Milk Company on Third Avenue.

"I might be able to milk somethin' out of the gee," he mumbled just as a familiar voice pulled him back on his heels.

"What you doin' here at headquarters, knucklehead?" Satchelfoot Kelly yipped.

"You don't expect a civil answer an' you know it, Satchelfoot," Willie grinned. "You caught that bunch of crooks yet who knocked off the Pusey Nov—"

"You would laugh on the other side of your silly kisser, Willie," Kelly snapped back, "if I should happen to pin it on the vice-president, hah?"

"Truman know about it?"

"I mean the v.p. of the Pusey Pl—aw, shuddup!" Satchelfoot Kelly snarled.

"They indentify who J. L. Cusp is yet?" Willie asked.

"Why should they when they know what his name is, beetlebrain?"

"That is right, Kelly. Silly of me, huh? Well, I can't waste time with the likes of you."

At five-thirty that evening William Klump rapped the wood of a certain door of a room above a pawnshop on Second Avenue near Thirty-Sixth Street. Melvin F. Trumbo admitted him and asked what in the aitch he wanted.

"I am a private eye," Willie said. "Seein' you wish to make up for things you did to society I thought you might give me some info on a character named Boogoo McFoody who is wanted by the cops."

"Never heard of the punk!"

**W**ILLIE was not surprised. Neither had he. It was quite evident that Melvin Trumbo was slicking up for some smooching for the ex-con wore a nice white shirt and slacks no baseball bat ever came with.

"Look, flatfoot, I got a date with a dame an' I ain't got much time. How long do you think I could keep goin' straight unlest it was to the morgue if I sang on everybody I knew, huh? Why don't cops try usin' their own brains?"

"A good question," Willie admitted just as the phone rang out in the hall.

"That's the doll," Trumbo yelled, and hurried out. Willie quickly cased the room and then he saw something on the dresser that made his ears twitch. He tip-toed across the room and picked up the expensive olive-green skimmer. He looked inside and saw that little gilt letters had been torn from the band only Melvin had not been able to get rid of the prints they had left. Willie made out the initials J and C and then dropped the hat as if it had suddenly caught fire. He was sitting in a chair and examining his nails when Trumbo hopped back inside.

"Nice room here," Willie said. "Ain't it swell goin' straight, pal?"

"Nothin' like it, copper. Look, some other time, huh?"

"Okay," Willie said. "I hate stool pigeons anyway, Trumbo. I jus' wanted to see if you was one."

Willie felt a little radio-activated when he walked west. After a hamburger he went to a telegraph office and composed a night letter which ran as follows:

BURPSON SAFE COMPANY, GRAND RAPIDS, MICH. HAVE YOU GOT A. J. LUSCOMB CRUMP THERE? IF NOT WHERE IS HE? STOP WANT INFORMATION ON MAN STOP WIRE WILLIAM J. KLUMP ALL INFO IN FULL TO HAWKEYE DETECTIVE AGENCY, INC., ROOM 349, WACKEY BLDG., N.Y.C. STOP.

Willie managed to scrape up the tariff for the service rendered and went to his hotel to pitch and toss all night like a shrimp boat caught in the middle of the Atlantic. At eight A.M. he was sitting in his office biting his nails. At nine a messenger arrived and handed him a yellow envelope marked collect.

Willie surrendered all but thirty-eight cents of his assets and feverishly ripped



open the telegram. The words jumped at him and each one was like a hammer hitting him between the eyes:

WILLIAM J. KLUMP, HAWKEYE  
DETECTIVE AGENCY, N.Y. J. L.  
CRUMP LEFT OUR EMPLOY THREE  
MONTHS AGO STOP WAS EXPERT  
ON COMBINATIONS BURPSON  
SAFES STOP UNABLE TO GIVE YOU  
FURTHER DETAILS STOP W. P.  
GOOGINS, BURPSON SAFES.

William J. Klump grabbed up a notebook and the stub of a pencil, and wrote faster than a post office clerk.

No. 1. It could be. A citizen could make more scratch opening Burpson Safes when they was full of payrolls than he could by just testin' them out at so much per a week.

No.2. A character like J. Luscomb Crump would not be an habituated criminal so would not know how to case joints to first get in where a safe was. Adult relinquents like Melvin Trumbo would and might hire out for a consideration.

No.3. It looks like Crump could of crossed or been crossed on the Pusey Plastered Novelties deal and I wonder how? I can't think of everything all at oncet. I—

The phone rang. Willie picked it up.

"Awright, hurry up as I'm in conference an'—huh? You must have my room as of tomorrow night as a convention is comin' to town? Look, I'll see the OPA. You can't—you can, huh? So I'm evicted ag'in! An' they say lightnin' don't strike twicet in the same pl—that's it! Thanks, pal! You don't know what you did for me!"

"We don't?" the room clerk at the Luxoria gulped in reply. "Odd character," Willie heard the man say just as he hung up.

"Well, I must be a little different than most. Of courst it could strike in the same

place but there is more chancet it would hit some other place than the first time. I must get down to the telegraft office."

VERY soon Willie realized that he was a fiscal fiasco before he got to the message center so he hopped into a drug store and called Gertie Mudgett.

"Look, star of my life," he said when he made connections. "I got to have at least three bucks an' it is life an' death. I am at Lex an' Forty-Eighth, Gert. Don't spare the horses!"

Gertie arrived fifteen minutes later and Willie took her in his arms and kissed her in front of everybody.

"Oh, you precious lump of sugar!" he cooed.

"Oh, Willie!" Gertie sighed. "Is three enough? Take ten, please!"

Willie did.

"I have to rush back, sweetface," Gertie said, her eyes dewy. "Willie, I misjudged you awful, didn't I?"

"Why didn't I think of this technique before?" Willie asked himself as he slammed the door of a cab behind Gertrude Mudgett's derriere. "Well, this is no time for romance."

He went in and sent another wire to the Burpson Safe Company asking for the location and sizes of their brand of cribs in the big town. Then he rushed back to his office to wait.

Willie did not get a telegram back from Grand Rapids. Mr. Googins called him long distance instead.

"Is this Mr. Klump, Hawkeye Detective Agency?" he queried. "Well, we wonder what this is all about and we hesitate to give you the information you want without first consulting New York Police Headquarters. After all, Mr. Klump, we have no way of knowing whether you're responsible or not. You could be a crook."

"Look, I have got a lead on the robbery of one of your safes here," Willie said in a huff. "The one at the Pusey Plastered Novelties Company. Unlest we prove that a Burpson Safe is punchproof, how you goin' to sell many more around here? Of courst I work private but if you feel that way—"

"Klump, you sound like you're on the level," Mr. Googins said. "We have to be careful you know. Now, there are about a dozen of our new safes there but the two biggest ones are owned by the Krippinger Casket Company in the Bronx and the Garfinkle Girdle Company on Tenth Avenue. If you do prove that safe there was not forced open there is a thousand dollars in it for you, Klump. You don't mind if we investigate into your character and integrity in the meantime, do you?"

"Not at all," Willie gulped. When he hung up he wiped his pan. "I am glad no television is attached to these phones. An' I better work fast 'fore they get a report back on me. Huh, I have got to gamble between girdles an' coffins. An' that two heads wore the same size hats."

Willie knew he had to work fast and so he did. He looked at a girlie calendar and saw that it was the thirteenth of the month. He called up the Krippinger Casket Company and asked for the head of the accounting department.

"This is the office of the internal revenue," he said fast. "We are just checkin' up. Do you pay your employees by the week or twicet every month."

"On the fifteenth and thirty-first," the coffin concern's comptroller answered. "Look, you guys should've known that by this—"

"We are awful mixed up here," Willie said, and severed connections without further ado. He fell back in his chair and marveled at his gall. It scared him. For the first time since he had opened the

Hawkeye Detective Agency he admitted that he would need help on this one. He picked up his hat and left the office.

An hour later Willie sat in the D.A.'s office between two big policemen trying to convince the prosecutor he should not be packed off to the nuthatch.

"Look, leave us go over it ag'in," Willie pleaded. "This Crump was a combo expert. He an' some crooks knocked off the safe at the Pusey outfit an' erased the watchman. Crump quit the Burpson Safe Company an' would know how to open all the other Burpson cribs, wouldn't he? Well, he had a fallin' out with the crooks worked with him an' was croaked. The dishonest gees figured they wouldn't need to cut Crump in if they could grab the combos of other safes he might be carryin'. Now this Krippinger Casket Company could be one of the—"

"He's stark an' ravin' mad, D.A.," Satchelfoot Kelly choked out. "A corpse come to bed with him an' it turns out he is an ex-employee of the Burpson Safe Company usin' an alias an'—Fats McGlone on the radio wouldn't swallow that coke-eater's dream. Why don't you just call the wagon?"

THIS seemed like a wonderful suggestion to the man from the Public Prosecutor's office.

"I'm askin' myself why I don't, Kelly," the D.A. yelled. "Give me a chance. You know what this lemonhead has done before when we figured he was crazy, don't you?"

"Why not prove he's insane?" Hardhat Hafey sniffed. "We'll cover that casket outfit the night before they pay off their help."

"It is a fifty-fifty gamble," Willie argued. "You cops ain't been gettin' no place with the Pusey thing. What can we lose?"

"We can't lose a thing, Klump," the D.A. snapped. "But you can get tossed out of that two-bit clothes-closet you call a detective agency and get psychoanalyzed to boot. Somethin' tells me it'll be worth it."

"I'll go along with that," Satchelfoot Kelly said gleefully.

At precisely ten o'clock that night William J. Klump, Hardhat Hafey, and Satchelfoot Kelly were camped in a big storage closet in the offices of the Krippinger Casket Company up in the Bronx. Just outside was one of the most modern and biggest of Burpson Safes loaded with nearly fifty grand.

"This better be good," Kelly griped. "If it happens to be a turkey I am personally strangling you with my bare hands, Willie. There is only about enough air in here for three canaries. The D.A. must be near a breakdown, too, or he'd never listened to you. Huh, a guy on parole cased the Pusey job for the combo expert and kept a hat Crump lost an' now has the combo of the crib out there. Hardhat, I got a good mind to go home."

"You ain't got a good mind to do nothin'," Willie sniffed. "It is the thanks I git for lettin' you cops in on this. We will know for sure in maybe three hours."

An hour slipped by. Two hours. Satchelfoot Kelly, nearly a psycho, was panting like a big bloodhound on a hot August afternoon. Hardhat Hafey was mumbling like a sheepherder and Willie Klump was beginning to wonder if he had not laid a very bag egg this time.

"I count to a hun'red," Kelly suddenly gasped. "Then I punch you right on the nose, Willie, an' go on home."

"You couldn't count as far as fifty, Satchelfoot," Willie sniffed and mopped more brine from his physiognomy. "You—sh-h-h!"

"Huh?"

"Sh-h-h," Willie admonished again. "Listen to that noise! If it is a mouse, then it is jimmyin' a winder open."

"Yeah," Hardhat whispered. "An' there it goes. Willie, you could of been right."

Came next some low voices from what had to be very low characters. There were soft footfalls out in the office. Then a familiar voice seeped into Willie's big ears.

"This is sure a lead-pipe cinch, Arky," it said. "An' we won't need to leave it lookin' like a punch job now Crump is in the city Kelvinator. Awright, I'll read off the combo—"

"What are we waitin' for?" Kelly whispered.

"Give'em a chancet to git caught right in the act," Willie whispered back. And then Satchelfoot Kelly sneezed louder than a human ever should.

"Oh, cripes!" Willie gulped. "Now we got to bust out of here, Hardhat!"

A Roscoe roared just as Willie shoved the door open and he felt a bullet burn along his scalp inside his hat. Hardhat Hafey quickly liquidated one of the rough characters but Satchelfoot fell over a wire wastebasket.

"Melvin Trumbo!" Willie yelped at a hood trying for the open window. Melvin whirled and fired a shot that zipped close to Willie's left ear and the slug disintegrated a two quart bottle of red ink that stood atop the Burpson safe.

"Where is everybody?" Willie howled. "Hardhat, go ahead an' shoot for Heaven's sake!"

THEN he saw Hardhat and a criminal person locked in deadly combat and Melvin Trumbo was half out of the window. Willie rushed forward and got one of Melvin's feet in his hand and the other one right in the teeth. Honeybees

swarming in his noggin, Willie hung on for dear life and dragged his quarry off the window sill. Melvin's chin made a very sickening thump as it made contact with the hard floor.

"I'm dyin', Willie," Satchelfoot Kelly yelped as he stumbled away from the safe. "I'm covered with blood."

"It is only that you are in the red, lemonhead," Willie gasped as he banged Trumbo's head against the floor. "Where are you, Hardhat?"

"I'm awright," Hardhat called out. "This gee wouldn't leave me git my fist out of his mouth fer awhile. Looks like we hit the jackpot, Willie, an' leave me congratulate you."

Melvin Trumbo sang even before he reached the bastille. It was just the way Willie Klump had figured it was. This guy from the Burpson Safe outfit had made a deal with him and two other pals. After the Pusey Plastic Novelties rubout and robbery, they went into a huddle and asked each other why did they need J. Luscomb Crump any longer.

"Yeah, we jumped him an' he put up a battle," the ex-con divulged. "Arky had to let him have it. We walked him out of the joint an' by mistake one of us put my hat on his dome. We took ten grand off him an' a notebook with safe combos in it. We leave the shnook to croak out on the street

somewheres but what does he do but cross us up!"

"There never was honor among thieves," Willie sniffed. "Yeah, he had enough moxie left to git a taxi to his hotel where he come into my room by mistake an' died in bed with me. I wonder how many people will believe this one?"

"Take me out of here," Melvin sighed.

Willie Klump and Gertie Mudgett were sitting in a tavern a couple of days later listening to Fats McGlone, Private Eye. It was about a hospital blood bank being held up by a grim character all dressed in black and flying a black autogyro. Fats McGlone finally trailed the guilty party to his lair which was an old cellar in a haunted house. It was Dracula back again and in modern dress.

"Willie, you was right," Gertie sniffed. "I never heard nothin' so farfetched."

"It is too tame," Willie commented dryly. "Why don't they get some oomph in that program?"

"Supposin' the crooks had gone to rob the girdle factory instead, Willie?" Gertie wanted to know.

"Huh? Maybe because I figured they figured if they got caught there they'd git a two-way stretch, ha!" Willie said.

"I shouldn't of ast," Gertie sighed. "Let's have another beer."