

PHOTO FINISH for a DAME

By JOE ARCHIBALD

Willie Klump, the daffy snoop, gets himself badly tangled in a contagious blackmail case!

LATE one afternoon when William Klump was considering closing the office of the Hawkeye Detective Agency, Inc., not only for the day but for keeps, a female of quite some magnitude opened his door and walked in. The droopy feather on her hat nearly brushed the ceiling, and the blue suit she wore, Willie was very positive, had enough material in it to clothe all the jack-tars on a flat-top. He judged the caller to be on the risky side of sixty but would not have cared to go even two rounds with the old babe in Stillman's gym.

The visitor surveyed Willie's modest office briefly, then after being sure he was W. J. Klump, turned ponderously and called out, "Come on in here, Bartholomew." Entered forthwith a character of bantamweight proportions wearing a little soft hat he seemed to be balancing atop his little egg-shaped noggin. He had eyes like a penitent bunny rabbit, slightly-bucked teeth, and a twitchy little nose.

"I am Mrs. Herford Fusty," the large female said. "This is my son, Bartholomew, but all aitch only knows why he lives without no backbone, an' how he lived with that wife of his so long



Willie flew out the door

without knowin' she was a two-timin' jazzbelle who can't never pass even a peanut stand if it whistles."

"Now, Ma," Bartholomew protested. "Don't you go talkin' about Electra like that as—"

"Shut up!"

"Yes, Ma."

"Mr. Klump," Mrs. Herford Fusty said, her lower jaw thrust out like an irked umpire's, "I want you should follow Bartholomew's wife, especially on Friday nights. Not more'n a few days ago when me an' the girls of the Greenpernt Women's Political Club had our annual lunch at the Hotel Picadillo I saw that blonde traipsin' out of the cocktail lounge with a character looked like Toots Sher. So I ast Bartholomew where would she git fur coats an' toopaz earrings on what he makes as a mortician's helper. She never got that wine-colored dress she was wearin' out of no casket linin' material."

"She goes around a lot t' quiz programs on the radio," Bartholomew sniffed. "Only couple of weeks ago, Klump, she come home with a deep freeze unit, a new Jap beetle trap, an' three cases of canned pineapple. Maybe she swaps—"

"A likely story!" Mrs. Fusty says down her nose. "I won't have no blonde takin' my only son for a sucker, Klump! I want evidence against that babe that'll stick, see. So's Bartholomew won't even have t' pay alimony. What you charge?"

WILLIE struggled to assume an air of indifference and importance. He riffled papers on his desk, quickly pushed aside an arty magazine and said, "This matter is kind of persons sans gratis an' has some semblance of status crow. My fee on such jobs is fifty down an'—"

"That is okay, Klump," Mrs. Fusty said, and opened a handbag big enough to accommodate three days rations for an

elephant. Bartholomew demurred, however. "Now, ma, it ain't me doin' this. I still says—"

"Sha-a-addup!" Mrs. Fusty yelped. "If you are willin' t' be made a patsy of, I ain't, sonny boy. Now tell Mr. Klump where you live whicht is in a basement apartment on East Eighty-sevent' Street."

"I'll just jot that down, Mrs. Fusty," Willie said after gleefully pocketing the advance. "I'll get everythin' you want on that tomat—er—dame. I'll have two ops besides myself workin' all hours."

"Come on, Bartholomew," Ma Fusty snapped. "An' if you dast interfere on this I will commit what crime it is for a mother who strangles her only son wit' her bare hands."

Willie sighed when the door closed behind the pair. Having seen Bartholomew he felt very important in comparison. "I should hire him t' sit around," Willie told himself. "In no time I would have a superior complex. I—"

The phone rang in such a fashion as to convince Willie that Gertie Mudgett was waiting on the other end of the hookup. "Hello, Gert," he said.

"Look, Willie Klump. About that twenty bucks you won on the Take It or Leave It Alone pogrom," Gertie Mudgett snapped. "My girl frien' says they don't payoff less'n fifty for a correck answer. If you're holdin' out on me, you—!"

"If you was listenin' to the program," Willie sniffed, "you would of knowed I only got the constellation prize. I answered it so wrong they thought it was funny an' give me twenty bucks anyway. You can call station WHAM an' prove it!"

"You think I won't, Willie Klump? G'by!"

Yes, Willie had been telling the truth. The quiz master had asked Mr. Klump what a chamois was and Willie right away had said it was an old fashioned shirt worn

by dames around the time Dewey said he'd take Manila. Somethink like a camisole. The studio audience had thrown fits and so Willie had been handed twenty leafs of lettuce.

Now at seven P.M. the next evening, William Klump stood in a doorway across the street from a brownstone on East Eighty-seventh and waited until a doll issued from a certain basement apartment. Even at that distance Willie could see that the dish was easy on the lamps and he judged she was at least a foot taller than Bartholomew. Willie dogged the blonde's steps to a subway kiosk and was about to descend the stairs himself when something told him to look around quick. He did. Right behind him was Gertrude Mudgett and she yelled, "Go ahead, wolf man! Chase the pretty blonde. Don't let me stop you!"

"Now look, Gert—!"

"So you was workin' on a case t'night, was you?" Gertie said and advanced upon Willie. "Well, I says I will tail that lemonhead an' see what a sucker I been. Of courst I ain't got a short leopard's coat on an' can't wear Lily Dashay hats so I ain't good enough for the likes of a bum like you." She hit Willie a beaut with her plastic reticule before he could try and explain.

"It is a client I am doin' it for, for heaven's sake!" Willie gulped. "What you doin' with a bowlin' ball in that pocketbook? That blonde was to take me to a guy a character's mother thinks is two-timin' her boy. Now I've gone an' lost her. An' Mrs. Fusty paid me fifty b—Oh, my big mouth!"

"Fifty?" Gertie gasped. "That would be just the detainin' fee, wouldn't it, Willie? We could go somewheres t'night now—"

"Well, there is one joint maybe I will pick the babe up," Willie sighed. "The Picadillo. Lightnin' maybe does strike twicet durin' the same thunderstorm."

JUST an hour later, Willie, sitting close to Gertrude Mudgett in a corner of the Picadillo cocktail lounge, suddenly got a gander at Electra Fusty who was at a table with a stylish male stout wrapped up in a plaid double-breasted. The doll did not seem too animated, and her escort, Willie thought, looked as if he had just received the news that his X-ray plates showed positively he had advanced leprosy. "There she is," Willie whispered. "The one with the spotted veil."

"Forty if she's a day," Gertie sniffed. "The boy frien' is sumpin' though. I like' guys use cigar or cigarette holders, an' I bet you he has switched t' Calvert's. H-m-m, I wisht he'd make a pass at me."

"You forget you are with somebody?" Willie said indignantly.

"Let me, will you?" Gertie snapped. "I'll have another highball. From here, Willie, looks like the fire was goin' out, as if he is enjoyin' himself with her."

"Everybody in love likes t' fight," Willie said. "It don't prove nothin'. Well, I got the proof she is unfaithful to Bartholomew." He called a little wren in a short skirt over and slipped her five dollars. He pointed out the couple and said to take the picture and to see he got a print. He flashed a badge.

"F. B. I?" the comely chick gasped. "Honest?"

"Yeah," Willie sniffed. "Fusty Bustup Insurance, ha! Look, leave us not attract attention."

The cute trick went over to the table and then there was a bright flash. Then the character in the plaid coat jumped up and chased the frightened little doll all over the place with bouncers breathing on his neck. He finally got hold of the camera and threw it toward the bar where it crocked a character who had just downed one neat.

“Yow!” the customer said. “Put more of the same in the nex’ one, Charlie, m’boy!”

A bouncer made a pass at the recalcitrant and missed. The stylish stout whanged the bouncer right on the button and then went through some swinging doors into the kitchen. Willie Klump saw the blonde jump into a cab outside and then he grabbed Gertie by the arm. “Le’s git out an’ fast as the doll will say I am an F.B.I. an’ you can git twenty years for—”

They managed to slip out of the Picadillo before order was restored and ran all the way to Ninth Avenue and hid in a quick and dirty until they were sure the hounds were back in their kennels. “I got a secret ambition, Willie,” Gertie Mudgett groaned. “That is that some day I will go in some place an’ be there at the finish. I lost a shoe somewheres, Willie. You got to put me in a cab.”

“Well, it would of been quite a coop for me if it’d worked, Gert,” Willie sniffed. “I wonder did that wolf git away without cops gettin’ his name?”

“Wa’n’t he the han’somes’ thing, Willie? What has that blonde got I haven’t, huh?”

“A husband named Bartholomew an’ you should be glad you didn’t,” Willie retorted. “When you see him, if ever, you will start callin’ me dream boat. Leave us git a cab.”

Willie called the Fusty apartment a few minutes later. “If a woman answers I’ll hang up,” he snickered. But Bartholomew’s nasal twang beat against Willie’s ears. Willie queried, “This is Klump, so keep your voice down. Your wife home yet?”

“She is,” the little character replied, irked.

“Your ma is right,” Willie reported. “She was with a guy.”

“I wish you would not bother me, Mr. Scrup,” Bartholomew said testily. “You make your reports to who hired you, not

me. G’by.”

“I do not understand his attitude,” Willie sniffed.

THE first thing the power behind the Hawkeye Detective Agency did the next morning was to relate preliminary progress to Mrs. Fusty. Bartholomew’s ma was quite pleased. “Keep it up, Klump, until you got that fluff dead t’ rights. You git a hun’red more when you wind things up.”

Willie was very sure that the blonde would stick close to the home fires for the next day or two, and he closed shop early and went over to Brooklyn to see the Bums play the Cards. He read a tabloid on the way and a gin mill journalist had a stick or two in his stint anent the rhubarb at the Picadillo. He gushed:

Firing broke out along the fleshpot front last nite in the Pomegranate Room at the Picadillo. Seems a large character wearing a blonde on his sleeve (Whose it is hard t’ tell) ran amok when a cute camera Queenie snapped his pan without first asking him to take a gander at the little birdie. The caustic customer caught the chick before she reached cover, copped the Bistro Brownie and bounced it off an innocent imbibing bystander’s noggin, slugged one of the Picadillo’s sentries and then lammed out of the joint via the commissary. The management is holding a feminine clodhopper size six and a half B, and hopes the Cinderella will claim same and also bring along her prince who ran out on a check.

“I wisht I could write like that,” Willie said ruefully. “Cinderella, huh? That pum’kin I sent Gert home in set me back a dollar an’ thirty cents is all I know.”

Quite somewhat more than twenty-four hours later, Willie was in his rooming house listening to a program called “Murder Takes the Air” when he got the buzz from his landlady. He jumped out of his chair and went downstairs to answer the phone. It was Aloysius “Satchelfoot” Kelly of the homicide squad and the flatfoot’s

voice was enough to nauseate Willie Klump.

"Awright, so it is you, saucerhead," Willie sniffed. "Why brag about it?"

"Look, vacuum puss," Kelly countered. "You happen t' know a doll named Electra Fusty?"

"Never heard of the tomat—what was that name ag'in? Satchelfoot, you leave my client be, you hear?"

"The dame has been bumped off, Willie. Rubbed out!" Kelly yelled, and Willie's knees became two strings of damp spaghetti. "She has been murdered, and a little character here says you been shadowin' her. You are mixed up in this, Willie, so you come up here right away—and have an alibi."

Willie Klump left the receiver dangling and ran upstairs to put on his coat and shoes. He had the kicks on the wrong feet when he galloped out of the rooming house.

It was quite a scene in the basement apartment of the Fusty's. The blonde, reclining on the rug, no longer looked fickle to Willie. Bartholomew Fusty, the widower, was bent forward in a big chair and holding his noggin with both hands. The corpse appraiser was closing up his black bag, and Satchelfoot Kelly was probing into the contents of one that only a dame would carry. "You would think babes would hire a detective to find things in these knapsacks, huh? They—so you finally got here, Willie!"

"Maybe you was expectin' the assassin come back to git his knife?" the private detective said impolitely.

"She was shot," Satchelfoot snapped. "I got a good idea you could say why so leave us have it all, Willie!"

"Oh, this is awful," Bartholomew wailed. "My poor li'l wife. My darlin' Electra! What fiend would do this thing, huh?"

"Was shot about nine-thirty P. M.," the M.D. said. "I'd guess it was by a thirty-eight caliber Betsy. Far as I'm concerned you can move the remains."

"Willie, sit over there by the winder where I can watch you," Satchelfoot ground out, and dumped the contents of the late Mrs. B. Fusty's handbag onto the table. "Everythin' here but a flyin' saucer," he griped. "Willie, what was you chasin' after this blonde for? Don't you try to hold nothin' back neither!"

"I was hired by Bartholomew's ma," Willie said. "She had a hunch the doll was two-timin' her boy. Ain't that so, Mr. F.?"

The widower nodded. "But it wa'n't so. Don't nobody cast no dispersions on my poor darlin'!"

"Then maybe it was Santa Claus cheerin' her up last night at the Picadillo, hah?" Willie countered. "Her escort nearly wrecked that joint when—"

"There is lots of other blondes," the bereft character argued staunchly. "Some look alike."

"Awright, shut up, Willie! Now, Mr. Fusty," Satchelfoot said. "Leave us go back to where this poor man's gumshoe come in. You worked late prettyin' up a no more hope chest an' it was quarter of ten when you found the corpse."

"That is right," Bartholomew gulped painfully. "The monster couldn't have been gone long as my poor darlin' wa'n't hardly cold."

"I could say somethin' but I won't," Willie sniffed.

"That saved you at least a broken arm, flannelmouth!" Kelly roared. A cop came up with something and waved it at Satchelfoot. "Picked it up offen the floor near a chair leg, Kelly. Wow!"

"Now leave us control ourselves," the detective said, and snatched the find from the cop's fingers. Willie came over and took a gander at a snapshot that evidently

had been taken on a bathing beach. "That's the wolf!" Willie yelled. "Tsk-tsk, what an intimate pose! An' that bathin' suit of the blonde's would not make a modest kimoner for a field mouse. Bro-o-ther!"

"It was from that chair I picked up the han'bag," Kelly said. "It was busted open an' so the pitcher must of fell out. Now all we got t' do is find out who the stout boy is an' go git him an' throw him in the cooler! Search the joint high an' low for phone numbers, address books an' billy doos!"

"An' for a cigar butt whicht never was chewed," Willie offered. "Was there moola in the doll's poke, Satchelfoot?"

"Not a sou. Leave me alone, you bother me," Kelly growled.

"Could of been a burglar," Willie said, and looked at Bartholomew. "Didn't you ever hear about mothers knowin' best, Fusty? Look at the pitcher an' then tell us your ex-wife was on an outin' with her dear Uncle Looie. Ha!" Willie removed his brown shoes and put them on the right feet.

One hour later Satchelfoot Kelly's number one helper, Hardhat Hafey, came up with a small memo book in which was an entry that made the bloodhounds bay quite gleefully. In fact, Hardhat plucked it out of the pile of odds and ends from the deceased's pocketbook which Satchelfoot had gone through at least three times.

"If an elephant trumpeted in the next room, you couldn't locate it, Satchelfoot," Willie sniffed.

"Sha-addup!" Kelly said sourly. "Huh, Amberson G. Cronkite the Third. That complicates things awright. I hope the other two ain't in town."

"Oh, don't!" Willie sighed and pawed at his face.

"Hotel Broadway Plaza," Kelly went on. "Quick, Hardhat, call that joint an' ast is the crumb registered there?"

Hafey did. He was told that Amberson G. had checked out half an hour ago.

Satchelfoot Kelly threw the works. "Two of you guys cover the Pennsy, the others the Gran' Central! Hardhat, you an' me will hit it for La Guardia! Willie, you stay here an' watch the—what am I sayin'? You come along where we can hold you under surveyance!"

"Pardon me," Willie said. "You have took Mr. Fusty's hat, Satchelfoot. An' you wa'n't carryin' a dame's han'bag when you come in. Not that you couldn't use a new face, ha! Le's all count to ten before we do nothin' more, don't you think?"

"Who's excited?" Kelly yelled. "Awright, tell the boys to remove Fusty—"

"An' I'll tell the blonde not t' dare t' leave town," Willie needed. "Satchelfoot, it is sometimes a pleasure t' know you."

AMBERSON G. Cronkite the Third was spotted by William Klump just an hour later walking through the gate at La Guardia and just forty seconds later was in the toils and burning like Rome during Nero's star act. "Unhand me this instant, riff-raff!" the captive vociferated. "I am under arrest for—wha-at?"

"Just murder," Satchelfoot snapped, and jostled the character into a police jalopy and whisked him away. "Where was you between the hours of eight an' nine-thirty, huh?"

"I was seein' a friend," Amberson G. snapped. "That is, she—all right, I called on Mrs. Fusty, but she was alive when I left."

"Ha ha," Kelly laughed. "Leave us hear the one about Hans an' Gretchen. We got the pitcher of you an' the babe in bathin' suits. Don't tell me you are a married man!"

"I am and I will!" Cronkite croaked. "I—er—oh, if this frame ever gits out—!"

"You think the Mrs. will be sore, huh?" Willie asked.

"Look, my wife has a million bucks," A. G. yelled. "She is primmer than a starched bib an' all her ancestors got passage on the Mayflower an' if she ever fin's out I looked too long at a picture of Hayworth, I'm tossed out without a dime. Look, how can we fix this?"

"We'll ast the D. A.," Kelly sniffed. "With all that dough in your wife's name why kid aroun' with dames like Electra? What is she, eighty-two years of age?"

"I didn' want t' mess up with that number," A. G. yipped. "Look I was on the beach up at Playland an' she comes up an' starts a conversation. After awhile she slips an arm aroun' me an' I remonstrates with her—"

"So I see by the pitcher," Willie said. "You better shut up as every thin' you say will be used against you."

"Can't you shut your big mouth, Willie?" Satchelfoot yelled. "He was confessin'!"

"Er, that's right," Cronkite gulped out. "I better send for my lawyers."

"Plural is right," Willie sighed. "With the way you're over a barrel. It was quite a treat you give the customers in the Picadillo couple of nights ago. I got to tasterfy I saw you there with the blonde."

The D. A. really went to work on A. G. He heated up the grill and licked his chops. "So far here is how you stand, Cronkite. You admit bein' friendly with the deceased. You got a wife named Prudence who still levels like the Pilgrim maids. You would of got tossed out by her if she found you was a philanderer, right?"

"You got no dough of your own an' are a salesman, yeah? So you tell the babe your ardor has cooled, an' so she threatens t' contact the Missus an' flash the woo snapshot. You knocked her off an' rifled her handbag to get the evidence. Maybe you got a couple of the prints an' even the negative, but overlooked one. You admit

you sneaked in and out while nobody was lookin'—"

"That ain't so," A. G. choked out. "I got framed by the doll. I don't know who snapped the picture on the beach. I give her five hun'red t'—"

"Oh, blackmail, hah?" Willie cut in.

"Shut up, Klump!" the D.A. rapped.

"Shut up, Willie," Kelly said.

"Okay, dear Miss Echo," the private dick sniffed.

"There wa'n't a dime in her han'bag, D. A.!" Satchelfoot yelled.

"Wha-a-a-a?" Amberson trumpeted. "Then it was a prowler got in. She was killed an' robbed, I told you I gave that trick five hun'red bucks an'—no, I won't say nothin' more except to my lawyers. Let me wire them as they are in Boston, Mr. D. A."

"You should git them from Philadelphia," Willie suggested. "Even they would have t' buy the jury. You look guilty t' me! You got a bad temper, too."

"Can't you shut that comic up, Kelly?" the D.A. asked of Satchelfoot.

"If you'll let me use a fire-axe," Kelly bit out.

"Awright, I'm holdin' you over for the Gran' Jury, Cronkite," the D.A. snapped. "Leave him wire his mouthpieces, boys."

"They are Bradford, Bradford, Standish, Alden an' Alden," Amberson G. told the D.A. "They'll git me out of this."

"Not unless they've hired another partner named Houdini," Willie observed just before he was evicted rather roughly.

"An' stay out!" the D. A. cried as William J. Klump picked himself up out in the corridor:

"I'll sue!" Willie said.

"You're lucky, my friend," the suspect told Willie in passing. "I wish they would throw me out."

WILLIE called up Mrs. Fusty the next A. M. Bartholomew's ma said that

Electra got just what she had been sticking her neck out for. "Well, it looks like there's no more use followin' her, Klump," she said. "Unlest you are a member of the Pallbearers' Local. I'll see you get paid your balance just the same."

"That is nice," Willie replied. "How is Bartholomew takin' it, huh?"

"The poor guy, Klump. You would think he lost his last dime. Good riddance, I say," Mrs. Fusty said. "Well, goodby."

The evening journals made it quite plain to all that Amberson G. Cronkite of Boston, Mass., was beyond a doubt a most fiendish murderer, and that the trial would be a matter of dull routine. The facts were in the D. A.'s pocket. He would fire off the gun, and A. G. would start out on the last mile, at the end of which he would be wired for everything but sound.

"For once I got to admit Satchelfoot can't trip 'up," Willie griped. "Huh, only one thing, though. Where is the Roscoe knocked off the tomatater? I have not heard anybody found it yet. Not that it will help the codfisher as who would expect him t' keep it in his bag for a souvenir. I wish I knew what A. G. told his lawyers which he didn't give to the D. A."

The phone rang. Willie snatched it up. "Hawkeye Detective Agency, Inc. W.J. Kl—huh? Oh, hello, Gert. Huh?"

"Ain't it excitin', Willie, the victim bein' the blonde we saw an' the one you was shadowin'?" Miss Mudgett trilled.

"It is wonderful," Willie sniffed. "Like as if a organ grinder lost a talkin' monkey who was his chief means of keepin' him out of the poorhouse. That job would of netted me five C's, Gertie Mudgett!"

"Oh, you will git a break yet, Willie," Gertie commiserated.

"In a arm or leg," Willie said. "That Kelly. He wouldn't of got nowheres if somebody hadn't give him a pitcher of the whole thing. An' the more I think of it if a

character like this Cronkite was so desperate about gettin' what a doll had on him, he would of been more careful. Well, I got a client comin' in any minute an'—"

"You lie by the clock, Willie," Gertie said. "But I got t' run along myself as I am thinkin' of puttin' down a payment on a television set. G'by."

Now late the next afternoon, Willie Klump received a visitor. It was Bartholomew Fusty. He was clad in a new suit and appeared very distinguished. "When anybody wants t' forget, Klump," the little character said, "they dress up as it helps their morale. This has been a very trying time for me."

"It was not good," Willie agreed, and envied the sparkler on Bartholomew's left pinky.

"Now I am here to pay my just debts, Klump. My ma was right as usual. Who would think my wife would lead a double life?"

"I won't answer that one, Fusty."

"Well, anyway, here is a hundred dollars, Mr. Klump. I hope that is satisfactory and clears up every thin'. I want t' start out fresh an'—"

"If you stick to that you will grab another dame very soon, Fusty," Willie grinned. "Thanks."

Fusty had only been gone a few moments and Willie was sitting back in his chair feasting his eyes on the century note when the door opened. "Oh, Willie, is this a coincidents? Oh, no you don't! Leave me have that dough, as yesterday I find out I need more'n fifty t' git the raddio set."

Willie contemplated resistance, visualized the consequences which smelled of iodine and sulphur drugs, then handed Gertie the Fusty fee. "Take it," he gulped. "I am in no mood for judo this aft, an' it is better to be busted financial than physical."

"It'll be yours as much as mine, Willie," Gertie sniffed, "as you can also use it when we git married."

"Oh, now I feel much better about it all," Willie sighed, and when his nemesis had departed he wondered if private detecting payed in and around New Zealand. "I think I will go an' see a movie which will leave me seventy-six cents for the automat."

It was close to six-thirty when William Klump emerged from the flicker house and nearly seven when he got to his rooming house. Mrs. Flickerhopper, his present landlady, met him at the door and then clamped a hand over his mouth and dragged him back into her kitchen. "I got some san'wiches made for you, Klump," she finally whispered. "You can git out of town 'fore they catch you maybe. I don't know why I am doin' this for a fiendish criminal but I had a cocker spaniel onct with eyes reminded me of yours an'—"

"Look, what goes?" Willie gulped.

"For heaven's sake, where you been?" Mrs. Flickerhopper yelled hoarsely. "Gertie Mudgett called you over two hours ago from the precinct station as she was arrested an' locked up as an excessory in the murder of that blonde named Fusty. Finally she got hold of Detective Kelly who made her tell where she got the marked hun'ed dollar bill which Amberson Cronkite said he had marked before he paid—didn' you read the even in' papers, Klump?"

"Sometimes I don't," Willie forced out of a throat as dry as corn husks in November.

"They are sittin' in your room waitin' for you," the landlady squeaked. "Kelly an'—they want you for murderin' the blonde. Look, take these san'wiches an' git goin', Klump. Good luck—er—you got your rent 'fore you go? Well, never mind—"

"Why, the little wampus!" Willie

roared, and bolted out of the kitchen. He was near the front door of the Flickerhopper establishment when Satchelfoot Kelly yelled at him from the head of the first flight of stairs. "Don't move, Willie, or I'll shoot!"

"Me, too," Hardhat Hafey yelled through his nose.

WILLIE opened the door and flew out. Bullets from police Betsies whanged past his ears and ricocheted off the sidewalk. Willie turned to the right and ran toward Lexington Avenue, oblivious to the fact that he had become the world's fastest human when he reached it, and jumped into a cab. "Quick—Three hun'ed an' forty-one East Eighty-seventh! I got a gat an' will blow out your brains if you stop at no traffic lights!"

"Don't, pal. I got a wife an' six kids. I'll git you there. Was that a police sirene I jus' heard?"

"It wa'n't Margeret O'Brien whistlin' t' Lassie!" Willie yipped, and knew now how citizens like Dillinger, Baby-faced Nelson, etcetra, had felt at odd times. "I git the hun'ed from Bartholomew—Gertie grabs it from me—a radio outfit spots the marked century—where did Bartholomew—? Of courst, the dirty li'l sheep in a wolf's sport coat! Is this as fast as you can go, Buster?"

"I got my foot through the boards an' up close t' the cylinder head, you bum!" the taximan flung back, and then jammed on the brakes. "Here you are, an' no Constellation could of made it faster!"

"Wait for me," Willie said. He ran down a little flight of steps and banged on Bartholomew Fusty's door. The little citizen opened up, tried to shut the door again, but Willie got his foot in it and also some fingers around Mr. Fusty's throat. He shoved the little citizen inside picked him up and threw him into a big chair where Bartholomew bounced around like a rubber

ball.

"Well, for oncet I meet a dishonest person I can handle, huh?" he yelped. "You framed that wolf from Boston, you pint-sized assassin! You come in after he went out awright. Then you bumped off your wife an' cleaned her han'bag of the five C's. Them leafs of lettuce was marked by Amberson G. Cronkite but you didn't know that, hah?"

Bartholomew Fusty sat up straight in the chair. His little face wore a very mean grin, and he was clutching a Roscoe in his right hand. "Cops wouldn't never figure t' look under a cushion of a chair for a gun, huh, Klump? What dumb cluck would ditch one there? Ha ha!"

"Don't you dast shoot that thing off!" Willie howled. "The joint is surrounded—an' this time I ain't kiddin'!"

"I listen t' the radio," the little character sniffed. "What an ol gag! Goo'by, Klump!"

Bang! Willie ducked quick when the window pane was busted in. Satchelfoot's bullet knocked Bartholomew right back on the seat of his pants and the little man fired at Hardhat from that position and a hole appeared near the top of the flatfoot's derby. Willie Klump dove at Bartholomew and covered him like a tiger rug. "You must of got—tire—trouble," he gulped at Satchelfoot. "What held you back, huh?"

"We got here two or three seconds right after you, Willie," Hardhat said. "We was listenin' outside t' see if you was a confederate t' somebody."

"It looks like you'll never arrest the right citizen, Satchelfoot," Willie said. "Why did A. G. mark the bills?"

Kelly sat down and shook his head hopelessly. "He told us late this A.M. he was goin' to pay no more through the nose an' would risk his wife dumpin' him, by provin' blackmail on the doll. But when he left her joint that night he lost his nerve oncet more. But he'd marked the hun'reds

awright.

"So we send out the alarm by the newspapers to look over hun'red dollar bills. The warnin' was in the noon editions of the evenin' rags. Looks like some people read it an' some didn't, includin' you, Gertie, an' that pocketsize murderer, huh? Well, the radio out-fit over by Times Square called us they had picked up a dame holdin' one of the hot C's. Imagine how I feel when I see Gertie Mudgett in the klink!"

"Oh, brother," Willie sighed.

"Awright, you poor man's Pete Lorry," Kelly yipped at Bartholomew.

"Talk 'fore we run our fists down your t'roat as far as your stummick. It is only your shoulder I hit an' you will live."

"But jus' so long, don't forget," Willie said.

"Okay," Bartholomew said sadly. "Me an' Electra planned it all ourselves. We find out who A. G. Cronkite is at the beach, so she frames him. I'm standin' behind one of them big beach umbrellas an' snap the pitcher when she makes the lovin' pass at him. From that time on I bet she got ten grand out of that sucker. That is why I never wanted nobody buttin' in, Klump, like my mother hirin' you t' shadow Electra, see? You sure nearly loused it all up in the Picadillo."

"Why did you kill the lady goose come up with the gold eggs, Shorty?"

"Because she never give me none of it," Bartholomew griped. "She had two grand stashed away in her vanity table an' I knew she got five C's that night. After I knocked her off, I dropped that pitcher on the floor as I knew you'd recognize it, Klump, an' would tip the real cops off."

"Real cops?" Willie flared. "Satchelfoot, leave me punch him, huh?"

"Leave me have a good laugh, Willie," Kelly snorted. "How in the heck do you git mixed up in things like this?"

"This Roscoe of Bartholomew's is a thirty-eight, Kelly," Hardhat Hafey pointed out.

"Oh, it is the one snuffed out that dame," Fusty sighed. "I got three of the marked hun'ed buck bills left here in my pocket. I never thought that sucker would ever do nothin' like that. With a wife ownin' a million bucks an' all—well, it is what I git for not doin' like ma used t' say. Go t' Sunday School reg'lar."

"They got a high-chair up at Sing Sing, Satchelfoot?" Willie wanted to know. "To toast this little criminal would only take a couple dry cells, maybe. The State saves dough."

Gertrude Mudgett was sitting in the back room of the precinct house when they arrived with Bartholomew to put him up for the night. Gertie had a billy club, Willie observed, as he stepped into the room. "Don't go blamin' me this time," he said fast. "You grabbed that fee money I didn't know was hot. After you hear how a blonde got paid off for hoggin' all the take it should be a lesson to you, Gert. Anyways

you gettin' tossed in the hoosegow helped solve the Fusty killin'. You'll get your pitcher in the papers."

"They already took 'em!" Gertie howled. "An' here I been sittin' waitin' for my excessory whicht they said was you to git brought in on a shutter. In case you was still alive I borrowed a club! Willie, what was that you said about the Fusty—?"

"The Boston citizen is innocent," Willie said. "It was Mrs. Fusty's husband knocked her off. You an' me broke the case, Gert!"

The photographers hopped in from out of nowhere. "Hold it, you two!" a fat boy said, and then there was a flash. "Again, please, huh? You had your hand over your face, Klump."

"Yeah, I am rememberin' how a doll framed Amberson G. Cronkite," Willie sniffed, and ducked out a back door.

It required the combined efforts of two cops, Satchelfoot Kelly, and two photogs to take the billy clubs away from Gertie Mudgett. Satchelfoot did not try too hard.