



STATE PENMANSHIP

By JOE ARCHIBALD

When Willie Klump meets up with a team of check forgers he has to do some fast thinking – or bounce into trouble!

THE phone rang in the office of the Hawkeye Detective Agency early one morning. William J. Klump, President, picked it up and let the slightly gravelly voice of his girl friend, Gertrude Mudgett, trickle into his left ear.

“Willie, what do you think?” Gertie asked.

“I think business is worst than awful,” Willie retorted. “Also I think I will learn me a trade after all the G.I.’s are educated. What’s with you?”

“Oh, I’m so thrilled, Willie,” Gertie yelped. “I opened a checkin’ account an’ writ my firs’ one yesterday.”

“With my dough that I gave you to put away for me?” Willie choked out. “Look, did you think to open one in my name?”

“Don’t be silly,” Gertie sniffed. “Nobody can open no joint account unlest they are married. Of courst if you want to get hitched—”

Willie groaned. There was the old bear trap again. It was as bad as the badger

game. It was worse than blackmail, although legal.

"Uh, er, I got t' have a little more time t' think it over in, Gert," he hedged. "What with all this inflatin' and I don't mean just auto tires. An' where would we get an apartment, huh? I'll call you later."

"Oh, I knew you wouldn't mind, you darlin'," Gertie gushed. "I am goin' shoppin' this very minute." She hung up. Willie did likewise and then mopped his not so classical brow, and wondered if he shouldn't call up the nearest lawyer.

"Huh, that would be all she'd need," he told himself. "I'd be part of a joint account inside of twenty-four hours. Dames! You go with 'em two, three years an' they expect you to marry 'em. I—"

The door opened and Willie turned his head and saw a reasonably prosperous looking citizen close it behind him. The man was on the portly side and was wrapped up in a pin-striped, cocoa-colored suit. Willie was sure he would look quite distinctive if photographed holding up a glass of bourbon, what with his crisply cropped mustache and the sprinkling of snow in his dark locks.

"You mean this is the Hawkeye Detective Agency?" the visitor asked, and reached for the door-knob.

"Don't be hasty," Willie said quickly. "Let me explain. I put on no big front on purpose, as then criminals don't hear too much about me. Do cats put on bells when they go chasin' mice?"

THE man grinned and came over and took a chair near Willie.

"Maybe you got somethin' there, pal," he said. "Guess you're just the guy I want after all. I'm Buford Hake and I am lookin' for a missin' person I would like t' find very much."

Willie reached for paper and pencil. "Leave us have the facts. His name an' inscription, please."

Buford Hake sat down, touched off a cigar the size of a sashweight. "His name is Penrod Snerr and he is about your height an' build, Klump. Wears glasses sometimes, an' has brown hair and a turned-up nose. Has a gold inlay in his lower jaw. Snerr's last address was the Elko Hotel on East Forty-ninth. I went there, but he had checked out. Here's my card so's you will know where to reach me."

"I should know that, shouldn't I?" Willie said. "Now I have t' have a detainin' fee, Mr. Hake. Say about—"

"A hundred smackers now, Klump," the client said. "Another C when you have Snerr. I will write you a check. Of course, I want this very confidential, you understand."

"The Hawkeye sees all an' hears all, my dear sir," Willie said indignantly. "But it tells nothin'! I shall have my crew of ops at work by sundown."

Hake lowered his voice and gripped Willie's lapel. His beefy pan oozed worry dew. "I have reason to know Snerr's life is in grave danger, Klump, and I must locate him before it's too late. Even now they may be closin' in on him."

"Don't say it." Willie gulped. "That could cost me a C note, Mr. Hake."

The client wrote out a check for Willie and then departed. Willie picked up the citizen's business card. Under the man's name was KISMET IMPORTING CO. The detective looked at the check and tried it for a two-way stretch and was quite intrigued with the signature.

"Odd writin'," Willie told himself. "A man of extinction awright. Sure is anxious t' find Snerr."

He looked up at the clock and it told him to get over to the bank and fast if he would eat this night.

Ten minutes later William Klump emerged from the financial institution fondling ten sawbucks and there was a picture of a five dollar steak in his mind.

"An' with mushrooms," Willie said aloud. It was a little above the average eating place where Willie sat an hour later, a great slab of charcoal-broiled steer in front of him. He was half way through the gastronomic binge when he got a whiff of a certain brand of perfume that cut the aroma of the steak to ribbons. He looked up, and there was Gertrude Mudgett, a fire blazing in each of her eyes.

"So!" Gertie yelled. "This is the way you throw your dough away! An' where did you git it, Willie Klump?"

"Now look," Willie choked out. "Is it against the law for me t' eat? I just happened to git a client this aft an' he give me a detainer an'— Why, hello Satchelfoot!" He cast an eye on the big detective from headquarters who was with her, and then glared back at Gertie. "Huh, so you was lettin' me starve t'night while you was playin' around with this schmo, huh, Gert? You are bawlin' me out, ha ha! I guess the shoe is on the other foot, ain't it? Kelly, you would two-time your own gran'ma. I s'pose you heard my dame got a check account with my scratch an' bein' the jigglelow you are, you're gonna sponge on it."

"Look, lemonhead!" Satchelfoot Kelly snapped, "I'm takin' none of that from you."

"William Klump, how much was that fee you got?" Gertie Mudgett demanded to know. "You worm! How do I know you ain't been stashin' dough away for yourself without tellin' me."

"I'm a worm, huh?" Willie sniffed like a bull, the steak having filled him with

moxey. "Well, I'm makin' a U-turn, Gertie. It is about time I tol' you off."

"Leave me room to slap him one, Kelly," Gertie yowled, and over came the headwaiter with another citizen who looked capable of picking up a steam-shovel and tossing it across the Harlem River.

"Here, here, we can't have this," the headwaiter said sternly. "Where do you think you are? There'll be no fighting in here."

"Git lost!" Gertie said.

"Yeah, who ast you?" Satchelfoot contributed.

"They was annoyin' me," Willie said loftily, and then the powder keg exploded.

Gertrude Mudgett hit Willie over the head with her shoulder bag and the trouble-shooting character nudged the headwaiter out of the way and laid hands on Miss Mudgett. Somebody, Willie thought as he ducked out of range, should have warned the character about Gertie before the catsup bottle whanged him right over the left ear. Satchelfoot Kelly took fast evasive action and was out in the street ahead of Willie. Here Kelly reached for Willie's hand and pumped it hard.

"I don't get it," Willie said.

"You never did me a better favor, Willie, ol' friend," the detective said. "I was wonderin' how I'd beat that six buck check in there as I only had four singles in my poke. I may be a wolf, Willie, but she eats like a horse. I ain't forgettin' this and if I ever git a hot tip for you, it is yourn. G'bye now, Willie."

"But Gert—she's in there, Satchelfoot! She's in trouble."

"You got any sens, you start runnin'," Kelly threw back as he hiked for the nearest underground rattler. "In a fight she needs no help."

"Yeah," Willie said to himself as he took Kelly's advice. "Let her settle that

one. I should stay an' git my brains beat out an' then how could I earn the rest of my detainer fee? Git smart, Willie, an' don't spare the horses!"

GERTIE called Willie the next day after he'd been prowling about Manhattan for three hours trying to get a line on Penrod Snerr.

"I s'pose you think you're smart leavin' me holdin' the bag yesterday, William Klump!" she snapped. "Well, listen, I was in night court an' got fined nearly a hun'ed bucks with costs an' where do you think I got the money, huh?"

"I can guess," Willie sighed. "My checkin' account. There should be a law against checkbooks. Well, I'm workin' on a case so I must hang up."

"Use your neck t' do it!" Gertie said tartly, and severed connections.

Willie wrote notes for about an hour and then decided to go downtown and inquire about Penrod Snerr and see if he was really among the missing or if he had been fished out of the briny deep in the meanwhile. He entered the office of the first assistant to the D.A. and nodded politely and then suddenly became aware of a character who was in the midst of a tantrum. He was an opulent looking taxpayer clad in the finest grade wool and Willie judged him to be nearly sixty years of age.

"Look, Mister!" the visitor screeched. "I don't give a blank blank if the experts said that was my signature. It ain't mine; see? Somebody has gone an' forged my name t' the tune of three grand while I was away in Brazil. Awright, so my name is on the check, an' so some crook got hold of one somehow!"

Willie sat down, his hat resting on his knees. "Yeah, like I told my girl, checks should be illegal."

"Shut up, Klump!" Mr. Gerke, the

assistant prosecutor snapped. "Who let you in any way? Go on, Mr. Slapnicka."

"It ain't my signature!" Slapnicka iterated with vehemence. "Wouldn't I know what I wrote out a check for three grand for? You get busy an' grab that no-good forger or I'll sting the pants of the commissioner himself! Is that clear?"

"We'll do our best, Mr. Slapnicka," Mr. Gerke sighed.

The prosperous character stomped out and Mr. Gerke mopped his physiognomy.

"Well, what in the aitch do you want, Klump?"

"I was wonderin' if you got any news about—"

"I haven't got time to beat my gums with the likes of you, Klump!" the assistant prosecutor interrupted. "Of all the messes I ever heard. Two hours ago in comes a couple of jerks who bought an old book with the name of Benjamin Franklin in it. They had experts check on the old boy's signature an' they said it was genuine. Then t' make sure, they had the writin' tested an' the ink couldn't have been made nowhere near Franklin's time. So they got gypped for a grand an' want us t' find the crook even though they can only remember he had a beard an' wore glasses. So when this Slapnicka comes in an' tells us about another forgery—"

"An epidemic, huh?" Willie said. "Mr. Gerke, I am lookin' for a Penrod Snerr."

"I don't care if you're huntin' for Kilroy's cousin!" Mr. Gerke roared, and slammed a big lawbook down on the desk.

A cancelled check jumped off same and skimmed toward Willie and landed at his feet. He bent down and picked it up and was about to hand it back to Mr. Gerke when he saw the slight stain on the back of it.

"Huh, it is not blood," he said. "It is red, but has a purple tinge to it. Mos' likely Slapnicka's stenog was polishin' her

nails or somethin' before makin' out the check."

"But Slapnicka said it was forged, flannelhead," Mr. Gerke yelled. "An' all the writin' on it belongs to Slapnicka, you can see that. But what am I arguin' with you for? Git out of here, Klump!"

"I can't say a citizen gits corporation from the cops," Willie sniffed, and got up. He slapped his old snap-brim hat down over his locks and took his leave. "Don't never ast me for no help in the future!"

Willie felt contrite when he reached his office and so gave Gertie a buzz. He shut his eyes against the first blast from the other end of the wire and yelled loudly:

"Look, le's have a cocktail or two about five, huh? I got fifty for you t' put away for me in the checkin' account."

"What, Willie? Oh, you darlin'," Gertie said. "It is just that I ain't been quite myself lately. Forgot to keep up the vitamin pills an' got awful touchy. About five then, Willie."

"I guess I'm just a patsy," Willie sighed. "I wonder where Snerr is."

IN THE tavern at five Willie handed Gertie Mudgett five crisp sawbucks and Gertie picked them up as one, planted a kiss on the legal tender and then put them in her bag.

"There ain't nothin' in the world prettier than moolah, is there, Willie?" she asked, then brought forth a lipstick to repair any damage had been done.

Willie wondered at the sudden fluttering in his stomach and the brief hum of a little wheel somewhere inside his noggin.

"What we doin' t'night, Sugar?" Gertie asked.

"I have still to earn that scratch I give, you, Gert. I am on the trail of a missin' person an' will have t' work night an'

day." Willie looked at the clock over the cashier's coop, and reached for his hat. "The Hawkeye Agency never really closes, Gert. I better be gittin' on the job."

"The check, Willie. You didn't pay it."

"I give you fifty, remember?"

"Indian giver, huh? Of all the cheap, no-good tricks!"

"Maybe you want blood!" Willie howled. "Le's go to a horspital an' I'll git a transfusion an' you can have some."

"So, I'm a vampire, Willie Klump!" Gertie yelled and picked up her bag.

But the president of the Hawkeye was only a step from the men's washroom. He jumped inside and bolted the door. "Just as if she wouldn't foller me in here!" he gulped, and went out of an open window just big enough for him to squirm through.

William Klump went to the Elko Hotel on East Forty-ninth and inquired about a Penrod Snerr. A fat and oily character assured him that he was interested in the punk's whereabouts himself as Penrod had left owing a week's room rent.

"Find him, pal, an' I'll give you fifteen per cent!" the clerk snorted. "He left an ol' cheap bag here with a dirty shirt an' a pair of socks in it. Want t' look at it? There was another guy here couple days ago askin' for Snerr an' he looked through the bag. He didn't find nothin' he was lookin' for, though."

Willie prowled around for another three hours and visited a good fifty taverns before he gave up for the night. When he walked into his rooming house, the landlady was answering the phone in the hall.

"Klump?" Willie heard her say. "He just come in this minute."

It was Satchelfoot Kelly calling. "Willie, this is the third time I tried to git you the las' fifteen minutes. I said if I got somethin' hot, I'd tell you. Well, hurry over to Second Avenue an' Twenty-

seventh as we got a corpse. They won't move it for another twenty minutes or so. It is a murder, Willie, and have we got the culprit!"

"I'm on my way," Willie yipped.

Two police cars and the deep freeze jalopy were parked near the entrance to an areaway on Second Avenue when Willie Klump paid his cabby off. Satchelfoot Kelly and three of his henchmen were examining a roscoe when Willie came up and looked at the defunct character.

"Hello, Willie," Kelly said. "This is most peculiar as nobody could ever of fired off this rusty gun. No slugs in it, neither. The deceased was certainly no desperate ginzo an' only carried the gat to scare citizens. He's an autograft hound, too."

"Come again," Willie sniffed.

"His wallet is as clean as an operatin' kit," Satchelfoot said. "No indentification left in it, only these two pieces of paper with two autografts on 'em. Maybe they're famous, but I never heard of 'em. Funny lookin' tomater, ain't he?" Kelly played the flash on the deceased's face and Willie took a close gander and nearly fainted.

"Penrod Snerr!" he yelped. "Look an' see has he a gold inlay in his crockery, Satchelfoot!"

"Huh, how would you know, Willie?" a cop yelped.

"Who, me? Well, I git around. Oh, this means I'm out a hun'ed bucks, Satchelfoot. Of all the breaks I git!" Willie moaned. "Who rubbed him out, huh?" Willie sleeved the moisture of disappointment from his pan and sat down on an old wooden packing box.

"Got a letter from his coat pocket, Willie. From a bookie no doubt," Satchelfoot said. "Says for Snerr to pay up a certain three hun'ed clams or git what he should expect. Signed by Al Babichiski, whoever that punk is. Address

is the Phoenix A. C., on Eleventh Avenue. We will pick up the gorilla soon as we're through here."

WILLIE kept looking at the signatures they had found on the stiff and tried to think, and he wished he had never been stuck with a delayed action brain.

"The guy defunct about three hours when we got here, according to the corpse expert," Kelly told Willie. "Well, take the remains away, boys, an' we'll go after Babichiski. Looks like the bookie better have throwed away a thirty-eight calibre roscoe."

"Well, thanks for lettin' me in on this, Satchelfoot," Willie said.

He wondered how Buford Hake knew Al Babichiski's gorillas had been after Penrod Snerr and why Hake hadn't told him, when he hired him, that it was Al's hoods.

Willie, on his way home, examined the signatures on the two pieces of paper again. He had never heard of the citizens either. Once he got his hands on a phone book, he checked the names and found that both citizens had very deluxe addresses. In his room, far beyond the witching hour, Willie scribbled notes that meant nothing at all when he added them up, but he had a yen to visit the Elko Hotel again. He entered the third rate lodging house at nine o'clock the next morning and asked the obese and lardy clerk to leave him have a gander at the late Penrod Snerr's bag.

"A good detective never leaves nothin' unlooked at," Willie said, as he followed the clerk into a tacky back room where the trunks and bags of delinquents had been stored.

He was handed the cheap bag and he opened it up and took out the dirty shirt and the pair of socks and the old newspaper in the bottom. Then he saw the

bunch of papers covered with writing. One had a certain name scrawled on it at least fifty times and the name screamed at Willie and tore an ejaculation of surprise from his throat. It was T. Furbish Slapnicka! Willie kept looking and he found another paper covered with the signature of Buford Hake! Willie remembered the signature on the character's check—and this was really an exact replica of it!

"I'll leave you t' have fun, pal," the clerk said. "I knew you wouldn't find nothin'."

"Thanks for everythin'," Willie said in a daze.

A few moments later he was looking at other names. Henry Wallace, J. Reginald Astorby, Harry Truman, Howard Hughes, and others too numerous to mention.

"A forger, I bet!" Willie choked out. "Now what would Buford Hake want with Penrod Snerr? Why would Al Babichiski want t' knock Snerr off? The defunct was practisin' writin' signatures an' it was him walked into a bank an' cashed a three grand check on Slapnicka. But how could he? He didn't have no more front than a Chinese laundry. But I know a citizen who has one. It is a mare's nest here I have found. A jackpot. How do these things happen t' me?"

Three hours later when Willie went downtown to check up on the Slapnicka check he learned of a second demise by extreme violence. A character known as Little Eggie Getz had been found quite dead by gunfire in an empty lot up by the Harlem River, the same Eggie Getz who had beaten a homicide rap only six months before. And the cops, playing a big hunch, had compared a slug they had extricated from his torso with the one that had been imbedded close to the late Penrod Snerr's backbone and had found that both had escaped from the same gun.

"It gits worst every minute," Willie told Mr. Gerke. "Did Al Babichiski sing?"

"They're still sweatin' him out, Klump," the assistant prosecutor sighed. "He's got an alibi, but we don't like it too much. Go away, huh?"

Willie asked very humbly if he could have a squint at Mr. Slapnicka's check once more, and to get rid of him Mr. Gerke acquiesced.

"A dame," Willie said, and his words were surprising even to himself, "would like the looks of a three grand check, Mr. Gerke. More than my girl liked fifty measly sawbucks. Maybe a dame—"

"Klump, you want I should throw you out?" Mr. Gerke yelled. "You comic book dicks should not be allowed loose."

"Awright," Willie sniffed. "But the way things are, I would think you'd want help from most anybody."

"You can scrape jus' so far down the bottom of a barrel!" the prosecutor snorted.

Willie went out and called up Buford Hake.

"Well, it looks like the case is closed, huh?" the president of the Hawkeye said to his client. "The gorilla caught up with Snerr 'fore I really got operatin'. Why didn't you tell me it was a bookie after him?"

"I got nothin' more to say to you, Klump," Mr. Hake snapped. "If you had some ethics, you would refund my fifty!"

"Sorry," Willie said. "No refunds. You walked right in an' ast for it—er—I mean, I wisht clients would confide more in detectives."

MR. HAKE hung up very rudely. Willie sat down and pondered for a while and then he took a cab and went downtown on Fifth to see what kind of a layout the Kismet Importing Company was. He was going to have a talk with Mr.

Buford Hake, too! He found himself in a small reception room later and talking to one of the most delectable brunettes he had ever seen. Her hair was dark and she had the sloe-eyes of a doll belonging in a harem. Willie's ears wiggled and there was aspic in his knees.

"Mr. Hake will not see anybody else today, Buster," the girl said. "So you're wastin' your time hangin' around." She fished into a little leather bag and came up with a lipstick and proceeded to straighten her mouth. Willie gaped. The doll paused and looked double-daggers at him. "Well, you never see a girl fix her face before?" she snapped.

"I, that is," Willie choked out, "I have a girl. An' I was wonderin' what kind of lipstick I would like to buy for her birthday."

"It's Black Beauty," the brunette said. "It'll be just right for the horsey type, ha ha!"

Willie laughed quite feebly and went out, after having digested the name on the babe's desk. Miss LaMotte.

"Darkest red I ever saw, an' has got a smitch of purple to it," Willie said, and the little fish swimming up and down his spine had scales as cold as ice. "I think I will go an' look up Slapnicka in the phone book."

There was only one Slapnicka Investment Corporation so Willie guessed it had to be the one. He asked for the personnel manager when he reached the establishment and getting him he flashed his badge quickly.

"I am lookin' up a certain person," he said. "You ever have a dame by the name of LaMotte workin' here?"

The hiring citizen left Willie for about ten minutes. He came back with the record of a certain Lauren LeMotte.

"She was with us but two weeks or so, Klump," the personnel man divulged. "She was Mr. Slapnicka's secretary, in fact. We

soon found she was not adequate. Not the type to succeed in business."

"I thank you," Willie said.

The papers that night told Willie that the cops had to turn Al Babichiski loose as two characters proved him to be where he couldn't have rubbed out Penrod Snerr at a certain time. The police admitted they'd have to start from scratch looking for the real culprit. There was also a few sticks of news on page seven of Willie's favorite journal intimating that a very clever forger was operating in and around the big town. Some citizen had been stuck with a note supposed to have been written and signed by George Washington and this citizen was yelling for justice.

"Yeah," Willie wrote down in his room. "Penrod Snerr would look as out of place in a snazzy bank as an elephant would at a flower show. I remember oncet I made snowballs behind a fence for two other kids t' throw at leadin' citizens. It looks like you are on the right track, Willie, as there is only one track in your mind anyways. What can I lose?"

Willie put his notes where he could pick them up in the morning to remind him what he had thought of tonight, for brain children, as far as Willie was concerned, never stayed inside his thinkhouse very long.

Satchelfoot Kelly called at Willie's office the next morning while Willie was reviewing his memos.

"I don't get it nohow," he said, and refused a jelly doughnut offered him. "A harmless lookin' guy like Penrod Snerr gettin' knocked off. Then the same gun blastin' Eggie Getz."

"A gunman asts for it," Willie quipped. "He generally gets it. Ha! Eggie gets it. Git it?"

"I am in no mood for corn," Kelly sniffed.

"And Penrod, Satchelfoot," Willie

said. "I just thought of it. A character with that name would like to write things maybe. How much have they got on the case downtown, Satchelfoot?"

"About as much on as a sprout in a bathtub, Willie," Kelly sighed. "How much have you?"

"I will tell you only this," Willie said. "A citizen hired me a couple of days ago to find a missin' person who was Penrod Snerr. It don't matter to you who hired me, as he couldn't have knocked Snerr off if he wanted him found, huh?"

"That's logic," Kelly admitted. "Even from you."

Willie felt sorry for Satchelfoot. "Maybe I'm a sucker," he said. "But I am goin' to let you in on bustin' this case within twenty-four hours, I hope."

"Look, in the first place I think you are not quite bright, Willie," Kelly snorted. "In the second place you wouldn't throw me nothin' but a dried herrin' if I was dyin' of thirst."

"Just the same I will let you go with me in about an hour, Satchelfoot," Willie said. "For oncet I am goin' to take some protection this time. Of courst if you want to pass up some limelight—"

"The way things have been goin' with me I'd fall down an airshaft t' git a break, Willie," Kelly said in a very tired voice. "If I won't git nothin' elst, I might git a yak yak out of it."

"Leave us finish these jelly doughnuts an' coffee an' we'll set forth," Willie grinned. "Forgers ought t' stay in blacksmith shops, Satchelfoot. I wish Penrod had stayed around longer, as if I could of got hold of one of Gertie's checks, maybe he could of worked on it."

"Penrod Snerr—a forger?" Kelly yelped.

"Don't never judge no book from undercover, Satchelfoot," Willie warned. "Poison berries from the outside do not

look as if they carry mickeys inside, do they?" He put the coffee pot in the washstand and reached for his hat. "You got your gun, Satchelfoot?"

THEY went out. Half an hour later they left the elevator at 87 ½ Fifth Avenue and entered the Kismet Importing Company.

"Kismet means your fate," Willie quickly explained. "I hope ours ain't bad."

The brunette looked up and frowned at Willie. "Now, what do you want?"

"Maybe seein' about importin' the likes of you from somewheres," Willie replied. "I am Detective William Klump and would like to see a former client of mine, Buford Hake. Satchelfoot, you stay outside."

"You ain't kiddin'," Kelly said, and ogled the doll.

"She's comin' in with me," Willie said, just as Buford Hake opened a door and thrust his noggin out.

Hake said, "I have some letters t' dictate, Baby—er—why, hello, Klump!"

"Very familiar with the stenog, huh?" Willie said, all business. "I would like to see you an' your secketary to clear me up on some things."

"I can't imagine what they'd be," Hake said in a huff. "Awright, come into my office."

Willie stepped aside and let the brunette in ahead of him. He selected a nice leather chair and sat down. Miss LaMotte leaned against the door and Willie looked up quickly when he heard a sort of a snapping sound.

"Don't mind me, Klump," Hake grinned. "I always snap my knuckles."

Willie breathed easier and the doll moved away from the door and picked herself a chair.

"All right, hurry it up, Klump," Hake said.

"I won't shilly-dally," Willie said. "Your stenog here used t' work for a Mr. Slapnicka, huh?"

"So what if I did?" the brunette asked William Klump.

"An' jus' before that, you quit Mr. Hake here," Willie went on. "I looked at the record. He give you a referendum an' it was a nice sendoff."

"Take an A for your report card, flatfoot," Miss LaMotte snapped.

"Get to the point!" Buford Hake ground out.

"You'll be sorry," Willie said. "It looks like Miss LaMotte took a check from Slapnicka's book when she left and had plans for same. Three grand worth, huh? When a certain citizen signed Mr. Slapnicka's name to it, after writin' in the amount, an' give it to you an' the doll here, Mr. Hake, your stenog maybe planted a light kiss on it. I've seen dames git that fond of clams." He glanced at the brunette and grinned. "Tsk, tsk, you jus' bit off a fingernail, hah?"

Mr. Buford Hake began to display ants in his slacks, but he said: "So far this is a swell radio program, Klump. Are you absolutely nuts?"

"That is a matter of opinion," Willie sniffed. "I looked over the stuff Penrod left in his bag after he'd scrambled from the Elko. And why did he? Because you was out to fix his wagon with Eggie Getz packin' the rod. You hired Eggie to knock off Penrod because Penrod forged a check on you, ha! Because on the papers I found in his bag was one covered with your name, Hake. He had to practice up on it like all the others. You maybe didn't give him enough of the three grand you got on Slapnicka's check, an' you couldn't report the forgery he pulled on your name because then Penrod would tell the cops on you about the Slapnicka check. How right am I so far?"

"Look, Boo," the girl said, "this guy knows too much."

"Shah-h-h-hd up!" Buford Hake said to the brunette, and Willie had to snicker.

"Boo is a cute name, ha!" Willie Klump said.

"Go on, Klump," Buford Hake said, and tried the drawer of a desk and found it came out nice and easy. Willie Klump knew why, but wasn't Satchelfoot out there with a big gun of his own?

"Then after you stopped blowin' your top, Hake," Willie said, "you realized that if you knocked off Penrod you would be rubbing out the goose who laid the gold eggs as there was no end to the dough you could make with the forger. But for some reason you couldn't call Eggie off, after you'd sent him out on the kill, and so you sent for a private dick to hunt Penrod down but fast. Then when Eggie finally reported for his dough you got so mad you knocked him off with the gun he give back to you."

"How such a dopey Dilldock could dope out all that," the brunette secretary began.

"Baby, shut up!" Buford Hake growled. "Awright, Klump, go an' prove it all. Ha-a-a-a-ah!"

"Well, first," Willie said. "We got a check downtown with stain of lipstick on it. A doll can also leave fingerprints. I can hear her now when Penrod showed you two that check for three grand. 'Come to Mama,' she mos' likely said an' kissed it on its way to the till. Not many dames use that lipstick, huh? If that ain't enough, there is a gun in that drawer of your desk that has already erased two citizens. Figurin' nobody could possibly suspect you of anythin', you didn't get rid of the cannon as they're hard to get these days without signin' your name. Did I forget to say your prints will be on that check, too? How about the check the late Penrod Snerr

forged on you, Hake? How much was it for? I bet it's in your pocket right now. But all we need is the gun. You out there, Satchelfoot?"

The doll laughed. Willie heard Kelly trying the door.

"It's locked, Willie!" Kelly yelled.

Then Mr. Buford Hake came out of his chair holding the gun and he complimented Miss LaMotte. "Nice goin', baby. Crackin' my knuckles, ha! He didn't tumble that the noise was you lockin' the door. We're gettin' out by the fire escape. I thought that escape would come in handy when I rented this office."

SATCHELFOOT KELLY began to hammer at the door and Willie wished he hadn't been such a good guesser and had brought Kelly in with him.

"Hurry up an' let him have it!" the doll said without batting a dark eye. "I'll be in the car, Boo darling!"

"Lemme in!" Satchelfoot yowled. "Willie, open up!"

"Shoot through the door, Kelly! The dame is right in front of it!"

Buford Hake spun around and threw lead at the door just as the brunette leaped out of the way of Satchelfoot's shots. Willie Klump uncoiled and then leaped at Hake and knocked him for a row of cancelled checks. The gun flew out of his hand and skidded across the linoleum toward the brunette who bent down to retrieve it, but William Klump had stayed on his feet and now he came in low and hit the brunette right in the midriff with his noggin and she turned a back somersault and hit the dust with her new look up over her head.

"Willie, open up!" Satchelfoot screeched.

"Wait'll I can, will ya?" Willie gasped out. He staggered over to the door and unlocked it and Kelly burst in. "That was

the dumbest thing you ever done, Willie!"

"Huh? How did I know he didn't really crack his knuckles?" Willie protested. "Didn't you hear the lock snap?"

"I was eatin' peanut brittle," Satchelfoot said, and nudged Buford Hake with one of his number fourteen shoes. "Tsk, tsk, Willie, make the dame respectable as where are your manners?"

"My head is sure splittin', Satchelfoot. She must wear a steel foundation," Willie sighed. "Well, let's call some more cops."

Satchelfoot did. Then he looked askance at Willie. "I couldn't never git away with it. Fingerprints, says you. They probably wouldn't show up enough on a check to mean anything."

"Citizens who are cornered believe criminal science can do anythin', Kelly," Willie said. "All I banked on was that it was the doll's lipstick on the check an' that Hake wouldn't throwaway the gun. I am dumb, I admit, but I got imagination it looks like."

"I been tryin' to find out what it was," Detective Kelly said, and helped the brunette to her feet.

They were down at headquarters not long after that and Buford Hake had to sing, what with Miss LaMotte being so anxious to sound off to save her own epidermis.

"Yeah, I met Penrod Snerr about three months ago. I used to know him back in Kansas City. He did a stretch once for signin' a name to a check and while in the can he got mad at himself and practiced writin' signatures so's he wouldn't get caught again. He showed me samples, even of the warden's handwritin', and they were perfect."

Buford Hake took time out to sneer at his doll and wipe his pan. "Bein' a confidence man, an' Penrod knowin' I was, I made a deal with him. I had a front like a man of distinction and he didn't, so

he sat back out of sight an' did the forgeries. I only cut him in for five C's on the Slapnicka deal, an' so he goes an' forges one of my checks for a grand an' takes a powder. I lose my head, boys, and hire Eggie Getz to look for him an' bring him back alive. Then I remember Eggie sometimes takes happy dust and I get panicky an' hire Klump here to look for Penrod Snerr, too, hoping he will catch up with Snerr before Eggie does. Seein' as how cops kept a close watch on Eggie most of the time I told the torpedo not t' communicate with me in no way until he had found Penrod. Well, he did, and he said Penrod pulled a heater on him and so he blasted the ginzo."

"HOW about lettin' me talk, hah?" the brunette piped up truculently.

"You done enough already with that kisser of yours!" Hake yelled. "That blamed lipstick tied up a dame to Slapnicka's check an' got even a gland case thinkin'."

"I'll ignore that," Willie sniffed.

"They ain't puttin' me in no hot sofa!" the doll snapped. "I wa'n't even an accessory. Eggie came back an' told this lug what he'd done to Penrod. Hake thought of a million bucks on the wing an' he ordered Eggie to hand over his gun in case the cops frisked him. Then he shot Eggie and took him out and dumped him

in a vacant lot. Sure, Hake planted me in Slapnicka's office so's I could swipe one of the guy's personal checks."

"I guess we got everythin'," the D.A. said. "But I don't guess the public will believe how." He looked at Willie Klump and sighed deeply. "Only the ones, maybe, that believe the crime programs on the radio. Well, take the prisoners away, boys."

"An' I even paid Klump fifty bucks to put me in this pan of smelts," Buford Hake gulped.

"Git me a mouthpiece," the brunette yipped.

"I'll take some phenobarbital," Satchelfoot Kelly groaned.

Gertie called Willie up the next morning and congratulated him and then told him about the beef she had with a bank.

"They said I didn't have no more dough in the joint, Willie," she griped. "An' me with at least a dozen checks left in my book."

"Wha-a-a-a?" Willie yelped. "We'll see about that, Gertie. Maybe crime don't pay, but they will. Meet me at Lex an' Forty-fifth in ten minutes." He reached for his hat. "It looks like nothin' is honest. No wonder the U.N. feels like givin' up sometimes." And Willie headed out the door.