



Willie vaulted over the blonde and entered the living room where the cops were at work

THE MOURNING AFTER

By JOE ARCHIBALD

When a gang of crooks tries to put the bite on Willie Klump, they learn just how the Hawkeye Hawkshaw uses his own bean!

WILLIAM J. KLUMP, president of the Hawkeye Detective Agency, had been crouching behind a privet hedge up in Spuyten-Dyvil for three hours. It was an hour before midnight and Willie had seen no sign of a cat poisoner. Two housewives had hired Willie that afternoon and had told him that a particularly fiendish tabby Borgia had

been operating in the neighborhood, and thus far a maltese, a calico, and a manx had succumbed in rapid succession and under suspicious circumstances.

The ground was damp and there was a chill in the air and Willie kissed a ten dollar fee goodbye. He was warming his bones in a tavern two blocks from the 125th Street Station of the New York,

New Haven & Hartford, an hour later when he noticed the two characters sitting at a table in the corner. Their eyes were red and tears trickled down their cheeks.

"They do not look like fellers that cry over nothin'," Willie said to the bartender. "Especially the one in the plaid suit."

"Who knows what troubles guys have?" the purveyor of spirits growled. "Anyways I got me own."

"Well, it wouldn't hurt to see what I could do for 'em," Willie sniffed. "Like cheerin' them up."

"You take my advice, Buster," the barkeep snapped. "An' let 'em alone. Maybe their wives left 'em."

"They wouldn't be that grief-struck," Willie argued, and sauntered over to the lugubrious pair.

The hefty one in the plaid suit spread a handkerchief out to dry and glowered at the private detective. He had a mole over his left eye and the smallest ears Willie had ever seen.

"Maybe I could be of help," Willie said. .

"Sure, Pal. You kin get to blazes out of here!"

"Now wait, Eddie," the other moaner admonished. He was thin and had a little round head and a mouth as big as Charlie McCarthy's. "No cause to jump on the gee. Ah, er, there ain't much you can do. We just lost our dear mothers."

"Oh, they maybe will come back to look for you," Willie said. "Why don't you inquire at a police station?"

"Huh? Why, you don't understand," the plaid suit gulped. "They croaked—we mean, they died sudden. A guy's bes' friend is his ma an'—sniff-sniff!"

"Oh," Willie choked out. "That is too bad. I wisht I could do somethin', but—we got to expect those things sooner or later. Maybe I could buy you a drink."

"Go away," the little character sobbed.

"Yeah. Can't two guys lose their mothers without gittin' pestered by every bar fly comes along?" plaid suit snorted.

"I am sorry," Willie said. He went back to the bar and ordered a second beer. "Their mother died," he whispered.

"Huh?" The barkeep looked over at the pair. "Them two had a mother? They don't look like twins to me anyways."

"They don't have to be, do they?" Willie wanted to know. "Two mothers have been known to die the same day."

The barkeep stared open-mouthed at Willie, then turned his back and began polishing glasses.

"The later at night it gets," he observed, "the screwier the customers get."

AFTER a third beer, Willie went home. At nine o'clock the next morning, Willie purchased a tabloid on the way to his office. After breakfasting on a crumb bun and a pint of milk, he sat back in his chair and read the tabloid. A half-tone on the front page leered at him. It was the likeness of a felon that had just received his just dues and Willie's eyes popped when he read the caption. Big Joe Atombi!

"Why, they got him," Willie gulped. "The clues on him was read over the radio!"

He hurriedly gobbled up the sticks of type under the photo. They said Big Joe Atombi had come a cropper after an intrepid taxpayer had tipped off the cops as to the whereabouts of his hideout, which happened to be just a block from the Grand Concourse. At the risk of life and limb, the story had it, Aloysius Kelly and three brave assistants had moved in on Big Joe, knowing that the criminal character was toting a miniature arsenal.

"The police entered the apartment house shortly before midnight," Willie read aloud. "They broke down the door

of Atombi's apartment and rushed in. Atombi came out of the kitchen holding a machine gun and Kelly and King Kong Kelliher, heavyweight champion boxer of the police department, immediately started firing. The slugs from the escaped bank robber's machine gun spat into the floor inches in front of the detectives. Atombi went down with three bullets in him.

"The criminal's companion slammed the kitchen door shut after firing a bullet through Detective Kelly's hat, and when the police finally broke into the kitchen, they found it empty. The window was open and Kelly believes that Big Joe's companion got away via the fire escape."

Willie sighed. "Huh, the big brave mans! I'll bet Satchelfoot was hiding behind King Kong. Of courst they found Kelly's hat empty. It always is. So he was tipped off. He would have to be as Satchelfoot, even when he is in his right mind, could not find a colonel in the Pentagon Buildin'. An' while all that was goin' on I was huntin' for a cat murderer. Won't I never amount to nothin'? Oh well—"

The door opened and Willie swung his head around. A sprout of not more than fourteen summers stood there with his hat in his hand and one foot stepping on the other.

"I don't need no office boys," Willie said.

"I am not seeking employment," the adolescent said, and swallowed hard. "Are you Private Detective Klump?"

Willie could not see what he could lose by admitting it.

"I am, young man. What can I do for you?"

"I am Cyril Ramikin, program chairman of the civic improvement club of Public School Forty-three, the Bronx," the well scrubbed sprout said in a hurry. "We offer a guest speaker at our monthly

meeting and try to get something different each time. One of my classmates suggested we secure a private detective to address us. You certainly would be different, Mr. Klump."

"How am I to take that, huh?" Willie said, drawing himself up indignantly. "Uh, skip it. You mean a private detective would be—"

"Yes, Mr. Klump. Oh, would you?"

"When will it be, young man? I have a lot of cases that require my attention almost twenty-three hours of the day an' my appointment book is pretty full up. I hope it don't fall on the day of my luncheon appointment with Gert—er—Mr. Hoover."

"It is this coming Thursday at one-thirty P. M." Cyril said, his eyes bugging out.

Willie picked up a comic book, hastily tossed it aside and snatched at a small notebook. He flipped the pages, came to a notation that reminded him of a dark-haired little mouse who had smiled at him in Louie's Lunch on Lexington.

"Why, I think I can make it, young man," he said.

"Wonderful," the sprout said. "When you arrive, ask for me."

"Glad to help in anythin' civil," Willie grinned. "An' it is a good thing to teach school kids crime don't pay before they're old enough to commit one."

Cyril thanked Willie profusely, and hurried out.

"Well, well," Willie mused a few minutes later. "Maybe I'll add a subsidy here. Lecture bureau. Twenty-five dollars fee. I wonder how hard it is to write a speech? I'll see if Gert will help."

AT ELEVEN-thirty, Willie felt pangs of hunger and counted the money in his pockets. One dollar, eighty-nine cents. Willie thought of Satchelfoot and figured

Kelly, after last night's coup, would be in an expansive mood. It would behoove Willie to appear in front of a certain restaurant on Lafayette Street at about eleven-forty-five.

Willie was in front of the feed bin five minutes earlier for good measure, and soon Satchelfoot Kelly appeared, accompanied by one Hard Hat Hafey. Kelly had a big cigar jutting from one corner of his mouth, and he wore his best suit.

"Why, hello, Satchelfoot," Willie said, acting surprised. "How long you been eatin' here?"

"Only about three years, just as if you didn't know, chowderhead," Kelly snapped. "You read the papers this mornin'?"

"I did," Willie said. "It was wonderful police work, Satchelfoot."

"Oh, yeah? Thanks," Kelly said. "Hard Hat, you mind if Willie joins us for lunch?"

"I always can use a laugh," Hafey said. "Say somethin' dumb, Willie."

"Who was it got away, Satchelfoot?" Willie asked when they were comfortably ensconced at a table.

"Huh? We don't know for sure, but we got an idea he was somethin' big. Why, maybe there was more'n one crook with Big Joe. Too bad me an' Hard Hat killed him instantly. We go on the radio next week to tell how we done it." The waiter hovered. Satchelfoot and Hard Hat ordered the pork chops. Willie said he would take chopped sirloin with onions, two vegetables, apple pie a la mode and coffee. He looked at Kelly and the detective did not seem to mind at all.

"You know I think that coulda been Lippy McNitt," Hard Hat said. "Sometimes two big shots in the same racket git an idea maybe they could pull a job twicet as big as usual together. I wisht

we'd got whoever he was, Kelly. If it was McNitt he's wanted in more states than Big Joe was." Hard Hat shuddered.

"You cold?" Willie asked.

"I was thinkin' what might of happened to me an' Satchelfoot if we hadn't tossed them gas bombs."

"You and your big mouth!" Satchelfoot said, and Willie scratched his head.

"What did I say, Kelly?"

"Huh? The paper says we shot it out with Big Joe, an' if people find out the crook was half blind—well, it won't look so big if—oh, shut up, Hard Hat."

They ate with gusto. When the waiter came over and raised his eyebrows, Satchelfoot nodded.

"Separate checks, Gus."

"Huh?" Willie yelped. "Why you ast me to join you an'—"

"If I ast you to join me goin' into a haberdashery I should buy you a suit?" Kelly grinned.

Willie's bite was one dollar and sixty cents.

"You are one louse, Kelly," Willie said, "who won't never spread plague germs as a self-respectin' germ wouldn't be seen with you. An' they took lambs an' goats to experiment with at Bikini while the likes of you should live so long."

"Pay up, moocher, an' shut up!" Kelly snorted.

"Yeah, an' leave a tip as we still got to eat here every day," Hard Hat growled. "Imagine him, Kelly?"

"Don't go out with us, Willie," Satchelfoot said. "Reporters might be waitin' for us an' what would they think? It would be like Joe DiMaggio bein' caught traipsin' around with a stew bum southpaw of the Cross-Eye League."

"I s'pose you was ast to speak in public, huh?" Willie snapped. "I'm particular who I am seen with, too."

Especially when very good pals of Lippy McNitt's are at large an' lookin' for the flatfeet who knocked off Big Joe. I—"

Bang!

Satchelfoot Kelly jumped over the cigar counter and took the blond cashier to the floor with him, high stool and all. Hard Hat dived under a table and spilled a waiter carrying four bowls of soup.

"It was only a truck back-firin'," a client said as he walked in.

"You wouldn't believe they was the two big cops who shot Big Joe Atombi last night, would you?" Willie asked of no one in particular.

He left a five cent tip and hurried out into Lafayette Street.

BACK in his office, Willie Klump called Gertie Mudgett.

"Guess what?" he said to his torch. "I have to make a speech on private investigatin'!"

"Why?"

Willie had no answer for that one. He asked Gertie if she'd scribble down some things that would sound good to say.

"Why not give 'em a load of that juvenile relinquency stuff, Willie? Or maybe give them what happens day by day to a guy like you. No, they wouldn't believe it. I'll think up somethin', Willie. I'll have it when I see you tonight."

"Ah," Willie said when he hung up, "What would I do without her? What couldn't I do? With all that dough of mine she's stashed away for—oh, I better git my mind on somethin' else."

Willie met Gertie near the subway kiosk on Fifty-Ninth Street and Gertie seemed to anticipate the private detective's financial embarrassment.

"Awright, don't say it, Willie. So we go to the automat. Why don't you never have any cabbage?"

"If a guy has a hundred bucks an'

somebody, an' I ain't mentionin' names, makes him hand over ninety of it to put on ice, he has ten left to keep body and soul together until he finds another hundred. I guess I'm just a spendthrift."

"Don't be sarcastic," Gertie sniffed, and handed Willie five nickels.

"Don't you think I'll over-eat?" Willie walked away, and Gertie did not see him for almost fifteen minutes.

Gertie was eating Hungarian goulash with noodles, etc., and William Klump had a thin ham sandwich, a jelly doughnut and a cup of coffee.

"Where you been?" Gertie complained.

"I was curious," Willie said. "I watched a cross-eyed man put a nickel in for a cheese sandwich and he got a rice puddin'. How about that speech, Gertie?"

"It is here and all writ out," Gertie said, and fished into her handbag. "It should knock 'em dead, Willie."

The president of the Hawkeye Detective Agency opened up the folded sheet of paper and scanned it hurriedly. Then he repeated it verbatim.

"As I stand before your sea of smilin' faces I have to think how many of you will become crooks. It is entirely up to you. Will it be from Public School Forty-three to Public Enemy Forty-four? But remember one thing, boys and girls, crime does not pay no matter if you are a detective or a dangerous criminal. I happen to be a very close contemptuary of Detective Aloysius Kelly, who gunned down Big Joe Atombi armed only with a pistol while Big Joe had six machine guns, recently. Detective Kelly is the idle of all law-abiding citizens for his brave and heroick deed. With such men as Kelly about we can sleep in our beds sure that we will wake up alive in the morning. Detective Kelly—"

Willie looked at Gertie. "Remember

me?" he sniffed, then started scratching his head. "I am tryin' to think of somethin' Hard Hat Hafey said that Satchelfoot didn't like. An' then there was somethin' about two fellers havin' the same dear mother die—I just can't think of it now. Huh, this speech, Gert. Is Kelly runnin' for mayor?"

"So you don't like it. Maybe you can do better, lemonhead," Gertie exploded. "Why'n't you do it in the first place instead of astin' me? So I can't write a speech. Go on an' say it! You as much as said it! You did say it. Why, you—"

"Everybody's lookin'!" Willie gulped. "Sh-h-h-h!"

"Of courst. Did you think this was a school for the blind? I'll talk as much and as loud as I want. I—"

The manager arrived and shook a warning finger at Gertie, and Willie's girl nearly bit the digit off. Then she pushed the manager into a tray of dirty dishes resting on the next table on which was the remains of a gooey coconut cream pie.

Willie Klump left the automat ahead of Gertrude Mudgett and ducked into an alley. He was shoving a dresser against his door in his rooming house twenty minutes later.

"An' I didn't even have a chancet to finish the jelly doughnut," Willie choked out.

He walked over to the bed, wiped his brow and sat down, wondering what in the name of Harry he was going to say to the P.S. 43 Civic Improvement club. Why, just tell them about your own true experiences, Willie!

A radio across the alley began to blat. A newscaster, statistics crazy, said that next to Lippy McNitt, Big Joe had been the biggest thorn in the side of the insurance companies. A lot of his gorillas were still at large and might join up with another leader like Lippy McNitt.

"Dozens more will die! Property damage will soar!" the mike moaner harangued. "We are still at war—with crime. We—"

Willie shut his window and took a nap.

THE auditorium was crammed with three hundred junior civic leaders when William J. Klump was introduced by Cyril Ramikin. The applause seemed a trifle doubtful and so Willie began:

"Awright, my friends, I don't look like a detective, of courst. Why? Would you set a steel trap for a bear an' leave it lookin' like a bear-trap instead of coverin' it with brush? I guess you get what I mean? Now let me give you a typical pacific case. How I misapprehended a gang of jewel robbers. One day when I was in my office—"

Willie got into high gear. The audience howled with glee. They rolled in their seats. Three teachers made their exits as tactfully as was possible. The principal of P.S. 43 seemed on the verge of blowing a gasket. Once, Willie heard Cyril protest:

"But he really is a private detective!" the boy said.

"He's better than Hope or Durante," a freckled kid in the second row yelped, and wiped the tears out of his eyes.

Willie spoke for half an hour and then thanked them all for their kind attention. Cyril stepped to the rostrum and thanked the guest speaker, then headed for the nearest exit. A flashlight bulb exploded as Willie watched the principal chase Cyril. A citizen jumped up.

"I'm from the *Bronx News*," he said. "Klump, you were a riot! Gimme some of your background!"

Willie mumbled answers to a few questions and then saw that the doors were guarded by certain irate educators. There was a window open and Willie took advantage of it. He sprinted to the nearest

subway and was swallowed up in the maddening crowd.

"I don't understand it," Willie muttered. "I only talked exemptoraneous."

At eight o'clock the next evening, Willie emerged from his rooming house to get himself a doughnut and a cup of coffee, and he was accosted by a pair of characters just as he reached the sidewalk. Something thudded against his sacroiliac and the lantern-jawed gee warned Willie that if he as much as grunted, he would be deader than the dodo. A taxi purred up to the curb and stopped.

There was a blonde in it.

"Okay, Bub, git into the hack!" the rodent-faced rough boy ordered.

Willie got in, trying to figure what was going. He was certain that he was not being honored with a testimonial dinner. When the cab was three blocks away and roaring uptown, the husky gee spoke.

"Don't you remember us, pal?" he said. "Take a good look. Hah, so you're a private dick!"

The president of the Hawkeye took a gander and suddenly his mouth opened. He remembered that mole now, the Charlie McCarthy mouth.

"Yeah, he reckernizes us, Punchy. Just as if he didn't first off, huh?"

"Y-your mothers died," Willie gulped.

"Listen to the punk play dumb, Spade? Just as if he didn't add up the nex' mornin' after Big Joe was rubbed out, an' figured we never lost no mothers, but had that tear gas in our peepers."

"I did?" Willie choked out, and then wondered why he hadn't. "I did not, but there was somethin' I kept tryin' to think of and couldn't. H-how did you know I am a detective?"

"Your pitcher, dope!" the blonde said in a voice that was as musical as a saw being sharpened. "Show it to him, Spade. It's on the front page of the *Bronx News*."

"I—I'll take your word for it," Willie choked out. "Honest, I wa'n't lookin' for none of you. Look, if you'll let me out at the next corner—"

The blonde snickered. "Imagine such a dumb cluck! With that job comin' off on Forty-ninth, he thinks we'll let him lead the cops right to Lip—"

"Keep your trap shut, Flo!" Punchy roared, and Willie's knees started knocking together and the cab pulled up to the curb and stopped.

"What's the idea?" Spade snapped at the driver.

"I got an awful knock in the engine, Spade. I—"

"It's this punk's knees, Stupid. Keep rollin'!"

"Look, you got me wrong," Willie argued. "I don't know nothin'. I never heard the babe say a thing. I—"

"Shah-h-h-hd up!"

"We'll teach 'em t' knock off Big Joe. We figger to shoot at least three flatfeet to even t'ings up for Joe!" Punchy snapped. "After we grab off— Turn right at the nex' block, Digger!"

WILLIE shivered. *Spade! Digger!* They were titles suggestive of a road of no return. There was a smell of lilies in the taxicab, even though the little vase held artificial carnations.

"You sent the kid away, Flo?" Punchy asked.

"Yeah. He'll be at the farm fer another week," the blonde said. "I can't understand what's got into that Butch. He lies an' even does things dishonest. It must be his environment. The neighborhood sure is run down."

The cab swung into a narrow side street and stopped.

"Come on, Klump," Punchy said. "An' don't fergit to be a clam if you don't want to be a stiff."

Willie was too petrified to articulate. They took him into the tenement the back way, and up four flights of stairs and into a small flat. There was an awesome looking individual occupying the best easy chair. Something seemed to have happened to his nose since his last photos had been displayed in the galleries. But Lippy McNitt's eyes hadn't been made over. They were as kind as a python's and set too close together. Lippy had the shoulders of a pro wrestler and the hips of a Billy Conn. His hair was cut close, and dyed.

"So that's it," Lippy sneered. "They must of scraped the bottom of the barrel to git suckers fer them correspondent school detective courses. Well, toss him into the nex' room. A good thing you nabbed him or I'd had to rub you two out instead. Nothin' can go wrong on this job. It hadn't better! You dumb gees, goin' to a tavern after that tear gas—"

"We was blinded, Lippy. We didn't hardly know where we was goin'."

They threw Willie into a little room that was only about seven by seven. It had a small cot in it, and there were pictures of airplanes all over the walls. Comic magazines were piled up in one corner.

It was a sprout's room.

"You make just one yelp out of you and you are dead!" Punchy said.

"I wouldn't like that," Willie sighed.

Punchy went out and turned a key in a lock.

William Klump had had plenty of experience with Lippy's kind, and he knew his chances of casting a vote in the next election were not very good. He moved over to the door quietly and listened. Lippy's voice was low but it had a resonance like Big Ben.

"You an' Flo have him here when we git back, see? Of courst we got to rub him out. You think I was goin' t' turn him over to a foundlin' home? Yeah, same ol'

routine, Spade. That furnace in the old brewery."

Willie shuddered and the sweat popped off his face. If he ever got out of this, and he saw no reason why he should, he would never ask anybody what was cooking again.

"Yeah," Flo said *sotto voce*. "I got it cased right. Had 'em look at my sparkler, Lippy. They put about a hundred grand worth of dazzle dornicks in that can over night. The big geezer, Morganwitz, went for me in a big way an' I got him braggin' what a big shot he was. He—"

"You talk too much, Babe," Lippy said. "I ought to pull out your tongue. Well, Spade, we got to git movin' in about an hour. Better go have a look at the flatfoot."

Willie ducked away from the door. Punchy opened the door and looked in. He held a big Betsy in his fist. Willie swallowed hard and made a sound like a safe-tumbler dropping. "Le's make a deal," Willie said. "I—"

"Read yourself a book, pal," Punchy sneered. "Butch has some pips there. Be seein' you."

Willie Klump nodded. He picked up a paper-covered tome entitled: *The Skull in the Ashes*. By Merwin Strong. Willie's teeth chattered, and the book dropped from his fingers. He wondered if Butch collected black widow spiders.

He went to the window and looked out. It faced the street. There was no fire escape outside, and one sidewalk is always as hard as the next. He could scream for help but he would be ready for the corpse groomer three or four seconds later.

Willie Klump dropped his head in his hands and it occurred to him that this was really it. He wondered if Charon charged much of a bite on the Styx flatboat. He could see Gertie in black and standing beside a bier.

He could see Gertie three months after that lifting a beer with the character who would help spend the lettuce he had garnered at the risk of life and limb. It was too much. Willie closed his eyes.

TIME galloped. Soon he heard Lippy McNitt and Spade give last instructions to Flo and Punchy. They should be back at eleven if all was well. It was now nine P. M. Punchy came in and cased Willie, leered, and went out again.

Willie fumbled at the stack of comics Butch had discarded. He uncovered something that startled him. It was a slingshot. Willie Klump felt like David on a certain memorable day. Punchy out there was Goliath.

"Huh?" Willie muttered deep in his rain barrel. "Well, even a rat puts up a fight. I wonder if there is ammunition about?"

He began a careful, systematic search and was rewarded. There was a little sack of marbles in the drawer of the absentee's dresser. Willie went to the window after pocketing the taws and migs and looked out. There was a cop standing across the street talking with a fruit stand proprietor.

"H-m-m-m," Willie murmured.

Another bluecoat sauntered up, opened a box on a telephone pole, reported in, then joined the other policeman.

Willie grinned wolfishly. He listened to the sounds out in the next room. Flo giggled. There was a gurgling sound and the clink of glasses. The president of the Hawkeye Detective Agency went to the window. He inserted a marble in its proper place and drew back on the elastic. He took aim and fired.

Klack! The fattest of the two cops let out a howl and spun around like Leon Errol, executed some Ray Bolger steps and fell over a basket of peaches. William Klump chose another marble and let go

again. The second policeman was bending over the first policeman and the missile splattered against his nether regions and sent him hopping like a scared bullfrog over the prostrate form of his brother in blue.

The owner of the fruit stall pointed suddenly. The rotund policeman picked up his own marbles and stared over the Greek's shoulder, slid his irate glance along the designating digit. Willie fired again and the Greek folded like a campstool and yelled, "Aw-w-w-w~wk!"

Now both policemen were staring up at William Klump. A crowd started gathering. Willie stuck out his tongue at the law and put his thumbs on either side of his head and wagged his fingers.

"Why, you—" the corpulent cop yelped, and started running. The other gendarme was on his heels.

Willie bounced another marble off the pavement close to the bluecoats and then withdrew and waited developments.

In the other room, Punchy was telling the blonde about the plans he had for her if anything should happen to Lippy.

"Oh, yeah?" Flo fenced, and laughed. "Go take a look at the punk in there, Punchy. Then we'll have another li'l drink."

Punchy unlocked the door and looked at William Klump. The private detective was sitting on the cot, looking over a comic book.

"That's a nice guy!" Punchy said, and shut the door again.

"You got to take Butch along with me, Punchy, if you got ideas," Flo said. "Wa'n't his fault his old man got shot gettin' over the wall. Have another li'l drink!"

Willie listened intently and then the first sounds of the onrush of the law became manifest on the floor below. A pounding soon shook the door of the room

outside, and a glass broke up on the floor.

"Flo!" Punchy choked out. "It couldn't of gone wrong this quick? They didn't have time to—"

"Look, silly, cops don't come runnin' at the likes of us yellin' like Indians. Open up an' make out you know from nothin'. Go ahead, Punchy. Say, you don't think that flatfoot could have signaled them? I'll get that dirty double-crosser! You answer the door."

Everything happened at once. Just as the blonde looked in on him, Willie let go with a marble. It hit the blonde right under an ear-ring, and she got rubber gams very quickly, reeled like a drunk and caved in. The cops were roughing up Punchy when Willie vaulted over the blonde and entered the living room.

"Where is that wise guy, hah? Pull a Roscoe on us, will you? Hit him again, Mike! Look, there's that sniper! Get him!"

Willie held up his hand. "They are part of Lippy McNitt's gang!" he roared. "I would of got shot if I'd yelled at you, so I got you here more diplomatic, yeah. Lippy McNitt, I said. His gang. They kidnaped me. I am William J. Klump. Lippy and the other crooks are goin' to do a job in just fifteen minutes. We got to hurry!"

The fat policeman pulled back his billy club just in time.

"Yeah, Phil, this is Klump. I saw his pitcher in the Bronx paper. Sure, somethin' is funny here. Tell us again, Klump!"

"Lippy McNitt is about to lift a hundred grand worth of sparkling stones from a joint on Forty-ninth named Morganwitzes or some such name. We must hurry. Get a load of policemen! Get on that phone. Oh-h-h-h!"

The fat cop went to the telephone. Willie yelled, "Look out!" and made a dive for Punchy who was lifting a Betsy off the floor. Willie silenced Punchy when

he landed against the side of the dishonest gee's head, feet first.

The cop named Mike threw a shot close to the blonde, just in case. The tenement was in an uproar. A fat lady came in with a fire-ax. A little urchin was holding her skirts with one hand and had a super-atomic disintegrator pistol in the other.

"Everybody be calm," Willie said, putting a lamp shade over his head, and brushing off a pot of geraniums. "Nothin' to be alarmed over. What am I sayin'?" Willie passed out cold.

WHEN he came to, the place was full of cops. Punchy and the blonde, Mike said, were already on the way to the bastille. There were two squad cars waiting outside and did Willie care to go along for the ride?

"For heaven's sake, let's go!" Willie yelled. "You want they should finish the job 'fore we get there?"

The scene quickly shifted. Three very startled criminal characters rushed out of a doorway on Forty-Ninth Street fifteen minutes later and started shooting. Willie Klump crouched behind a police jalopy and watched Lippy McNitt absorb his lumps.

Lippy was indeed a rough character, and he kept coming on.

"No bulls can git me!" he was yelling.

"He is quite an optimist, isn't he?" Willie asked a bluecoat not far away. "He would stare a tiger in the eye an' say no tabby cat could fool him. Oh, I can't look!"

The morgue limousine had to pick up Lippy and Spade. The third recalcitrant, Willie soon learned, would be quite a problem for a trio of M.D.'s. The cops took the sack of warm ice off Lippy before they put him in the bye-bye basket.

"Lippy McNitt! What a haul!" a cop

with a gold badge yelped. "Where is that Klump?"

"Here," Willie said, looked at Lippy, then swooned again.

Willie was in the Forty-seventh Street Precinct Station when Satchelfoot Kelly and Hard Hat Hafey rushed in. The police matron was holding smelling salts under Willie's nose.

"It ain't so, is it?" Kelly asked of a police lieutenant. "How could he?"

"Brother," a cop said. "You get him to tell you sometime. Lippy's pals snatched him because he saw them cryin' over a mother that died in a tavern one night. I mean she died in—I mean—well, it was tear gas they'd got somewhere. Then they found out Willie was a detective because his picture got in a paper because he made a speech—"

"That's enough," Satchelfoot groaned. "It don't make a bit of sense so I know he did it. Lippy McNitt, Spade Grogan, Punchy Pelky, Flo Slobodka—all in one night. Who lent him the bazookas?"

"He only had a sling-shot," a policeman said.

"Yeah," Willie said. "An' Butch's marbles. I wisht I could get all mine back. How much was Lippy worth, an' not in the black market?"

"Two grand, Klump!" a gendarme said.

"It was not just hay he mowed tonight," an assistant D.A. observed. "Klump, you have the thanks of everybody in New York."

"And I still got the horrors," Willie gulped. "You know what? They was goin' to put me in a furnace."

"An' you would have walked away from the ash pit carryin' a dish of chocolate ice cream," Kelly snapped.

"That's absurd!" Willie sniffed. "Anyways none of this would have happened if you an' Hard Hat hadn't let them pals of Big Joe's excape. Don't you never do nothin' right?"

"Here's where we come in, Kelly," Hard Hat gulped. "We'd better go an' let people forget, huh?"

When most of the cops had gone, Willie' plucked the assistant D.A.'s sleeve.

"About that two grand. Could it git paid to me without nobody knowin', especially my financee? It is like this—"

"No chance, Klump. Everybody knows there was a reward out for Lippy McNitt."

"Awright," Willie sighed. "Tell 'em to make the check out to Miss Gertrude Mudgett. Her address is—" He gave it. "Well, I guess I will have to marry the dame unlest I die of malnutrition. Goodnight."