



Willie hooked an arm around the man's neck and shut off his oxygen

# AN ACE AND A PEAR

By JOE ARCHIBALD

*When Willie Klump gets mixed up in the murder of a taxidermist  
he has to stuff the solution down Satchelfoot Kelly's throat!*

**W**ILLIAM J. KLUMP, President of the Hawkeye Detective Agency, arrived at his office one morning to find his phone disconnected, mice working on the cinnamon buns he'd saved for his breakfast, and a letter. On the outside of the fat envelope were the words: DURKLE DETECTIVE SCHOOL. Booster Course. Stop. Don't Throw This

in the Waste Basket or You'll Throw Yourself Behind the Times! ! !

"I certainly almost did," Willie said, and ripped open the envelope.

This was what he read:

Dear Mr. Klump: You realize reconversion in this post-war world definitely applies to criminal investigators as well as everybody else? Well, it does! Will crooks work with the old methods when they rob safes in the future? Of course they won't.

Instead of using the nitro soup they'll split part of an atom! They'll open bank vaults by sound waves and electric eyes.

Think of the thousands who have been all over the world in this war and who have found out new ways of poisoning people in New Guinea, Borneo, Burma, and all those other savage places! And have you given a thought to all the new weapons that have come into this country with returning G.I's? You should! Guns like Finnish *Suomis*, Italian *Glisentis* and *Berettas*, Nazi *Walthers* and P-38's, Austrian *Steyrs*, and Jap *Nambus*, among hundreds of others.

Modern detectives must have a list of all the new poisons, must know electronics and Radar, the theory of the atom bomb and jet propulsion, besides Judo and other things too numerous to mention.

Act Now! We'll prepare YOU in all these new developments in TEN easy lessons for ONLY TWENTY-FIVE DOLLARS! Sit Down RIGHT NOW and ENROLL.

Willie groaned.

"If it's goin' to be this complicated, I better quit. I never paid much attention to the old ways. But to be on the safe side, I better sit right down an' write."

William Klump wrote to the Durdle Detective School and made the statement that he was enclosing twenty-five dollars before he realized he did not have that much scratch available. He quickly picked up the phone, waited five minutes before it occurred to him that he had been black-balled by the public utilities.

"This is incrimination!" Willie snorted.

"What chancet has a small business man? I'll go an' picket the telephone exchange! Huh, I can't even do that as private investigators don't have a union."

Willie crossed out a line in his letter, replaced it with one that assured Mr. Durdle he would send the bite for the booster course as soon as his clients paid up their bills. He breakfasted on a piece of peanut bar he found in his pocket and wondered if it would be very difficult to learn how to grow mushrooms in a cellar. An hour later while he was reading some

old comic books, the phone rang and nearly shook him loose from his shorts.

"They connected me up to ast me to pay up, is all," Willie snapped and grabbed the phone. "Yeah, this is the Klump Detective Agency, an' go ahead an' see your alley lawyers! An' what's more, I'll write to my Congressman about your moloponists—why, Gertie!"

"Yeah, I was told you got disconnected," Willie's torch said, "so I went an' paid your bill. I am losin' my patience with you, Willie Klump, and do not intend to marry a man who won't go to work. Wouldn't it sound nice to my frien's if soon I had to sue you for non-support?"

"Don't cross the river before they build a bridge," Willie sniffed. "What's more, you got all my dough an'—"

"So I'm a gol' digger, huh?"

"I didn't say that. I only said—"

"That is gratitude for you, William Klump," Gertie yelled at him. "In my noon hour I am goin' back an' git my money back from the telephone company an' make them disconnect us permanently an' for good. You ingrate!"

"Look!" Willie gulped. "We was to have dinner t'night, Gert. You said it was your treat an'—"

"Ha ha! Think of me t'night while I am eatin' a filly minion with a new boy friend, Willie!"

And Gertie hung up.

**W**ILLIE was definitely down. As far down as all the Number One Nazis. He was as low as the chin on the first man on a totem pole. His pockets assayed seven cents and some lint. At noon he went out and purchased a bag of salted peanuts and drank three glasses of water. During the afternoon he checked over his files and called certain members of the distaff side who had once hired him to check up on playful spouses. All of them

assured Willie that their connubial problems were no longer any affair of his and to be careful in the future regarding his business methods or he would find himself out of employment.

"Oh, yeah?" Willie told one of the ladies, his brain getting no chance to first consult matters with his tongue. "Maybe that blonde I saw your bread-winner with a couple of nights ago is teachin' him Spanish lessons. G'bye!"

At five-thirty, Willie's pride had taken a worse beating than Schmeling in his second tiff with Joe Louis. His stomach was protesting worse than the stranded Pacific troops. He wanted pie, no matter how humble and so he hopped a subterranean rattler and went downtown to see Satchelfoot Kelly, a citizen who was, to say the least, under normal conditions, a prize polecat in Willie's book.

Kelly was just leaving his office when Willie arrived at the beehive of Gotham law enforcement.

"Satchelfoot," Willie said, "I am in a spot an' when I git in one I always asks myself what are pals for if not to help, huh?"

"Stop beatin' aroun' the mushberry bush," Kelly said, the tip of his nose curling as it always did when it was in close proximity to Willie. "You want t' make a touch, huh?"

"Somethin' awful happened," Willie said. "My pocket was picked an—"

"Nothin' would bother to try that, Willie, an' you know it, not even a self-respectin' termite," the headquarters detective scoffed. "You have become a bum, so admit it."

"Awright, kick me when I'm down," Willie sighed. "All's I need right now is three bucks, Satchelfoot."

"Yeah? I'll tell you what, Willie," Kelly grinned. "You can't be trusted with that much. I'll take you out to chow with

me an' that's all. Why don't you give up playin' cops an' robbers? You can't be lucky all the time. Well, come on!"

Willie followed Satchelfoot Kelly to a restaurant not far away. Satchelfoot ordered a T-bone steak, French fries, creamed cauliflower, mince pie and coffee, and Willie's teeth near floated loose from their gums.

"I'll take the same," he exclaimed.

"Oh, no you don't!" Satchelfoot yelled. "Bring this bum a bowl of consommé, two crackers an' some weak tea. He has ulsters an' maybe you want him to drop dead here an' give the joint a bad name?"

"Look, Satchelfoot. Even you couldn't be such a rat!" Willie protested. "Waiter, he is kiddin', as I—"

"You heard me," Kelly snapped at the hovering flunkey.

The detective gestured violently with his hand, and something flew out of his sleeve and skidded into Willie's lap. The president of the Hawkeye Detective Agency picked it up and saw immediately that it was an ace of spades.

"Tsk-tsk," Willie said. "Was you playin' poker with the boys this aft, Satchelfoot?"

"Now, Willie. You give me back that! Ha, you can have steak. Ice cream with your pie an'—"

"After I have it in my stomach." Willie grinned. "I never did trust you, Kelly. H-m-m, a pin-up babe on the back of this card, an' why is there a little cross on her right knee? Now, I'll suggest the boys count the cards in a deck. You wouldn't stoop so low as to mark a ace, Satchelfoot? Er—of courst you would. Yes, I believe I will have pie a la mode for dessert. Make that a double order of French fries," he called after the waiter. I got a witness, too."

"Some day, Willie," Satchelfoot

threatened, "the breaks'll all go the other way an' most of 'em will be in your legs an' arms. Lookin' at you, I don't hate murderers like I should."

"I wonder have they mushrooms with the steak," Willie said and grinned all over. "If the T-bone is exter good, I'll have me a second. How much you win from the boys this aft, Satchelfoot?"

When the waiter passed by, Kelly said, "Cancel my steak as I lost my appetite. Just bring me a sharp knife and an old trunk."

"You kill me, Kelly!" Willie laughed.

William Klump ate two T-bone steaks and a double portion of dessert, and the bill came to six-eighty not including tax, and Satchelfoot looked more miserable than the tip he left. On the way out, Kelly asked for the ace.

"I didn't promise when, Satchelfoot!" Willie said.

Kelly's hands were reaching for a piece of throat when an excited contemporary jumped out of a cab and called to him.

"Kelly, we stopped to pick you up. There's a murder way uptown an' they want help. Most of the flatfeet up by Fordham Road have got an epidemic of ptomaine an'—"

"Let's go," Willie said.

"Who do you think—"

"You think, Jughead!" Willie said. "What goes with a corpse, huh? A spade, Satchelfoot! Ha-a-a-a!"

A HALF hour later, Willie was in an old gingerbread house on Gunhill Road with the cops and looking at the remains of a citizen who once pursued the profession of taxidermy. In the musty living room there were stuffed owls, ducks, wildcats and other life-like effigies. The deceased always registered at the polls under the name of Omer Plastick.

He was a chunky cadaver, about six by five, and must have reached close to his forty-fifth year before Old Man Bones tapped him on the clavicle. Mrs. Plastick was a lanky doll and was in the midst of hysterics when she answered Kelly's opening questions.

"He never had no enemies," Mrs. Plastick said. "How would I know who shot him, an' if I did would I have to call for so many detectives to tell? All I know is I went visitin' my sister up at Verplanck and when I got home, Omer is on the floor an' won't speak to me. I find out he is dead. Was it suicide?"

"Not unlest your husband went an' hid the gun so's nobody could find it, and then come back an' put it to his head and fired a shot through his back," Willie said.

"This is no place to try and be funny," Satchelfoot admonished Willie. "You get outa the way while we investigate. They ain't even elbow room now an'—"

"A full house," Willie nodded.

"Maybe I'll let you help," Kelly gulped.

The appraiser of the violently removed said that Plastick was rubbed out with a thirty-eight caliber Roscoe and must have been on the other side of the veil for at least eleven hours. Satchelfoot Kelly and one of his associates, Ears Brannigan, began casing the immediate vicinity for clues and Willie Klump leaned against the buffet in the little dining room and admired the fruit in a bowl. Willie was partial to pears and he picked one up and started to take a bite when Mrs. Plastick let out a protesting squeal and told Kelly to keep his men from looting.

"He's a keptomaniac, Mrs. Plastick," Satchelfoot said. "Keeps things he grabs that don't belong to him. You keep your hands off things in this house, Willie Klump!"

"It is a good thing it is only wax fruit,"

the widow sighed.

Willie took a gander at the pear and saw it had teeth marks in it. He turned it so that the marks would not be noticed and came out to see how the cops were doing with the briefing.

Satchelfoot Kelly picked up the card near Omer Plastick's radio. He took a swift gander at it, then asked Mrs. Plastick if she knew a Peruna Wigginbottom of Ninety-Six East Eighty-Sixth Street.

"Her? She was a customer of Omer's," the bereaved doll says. "An excentric with a barrel of dough. She got awful mad at Omer when he stuffed her cat. She claimed he done a bad job an' nearly scratched his eyes out, he tol' me. She says she loved the cat more'n any human bein' in the world an' that Omer ought to be shot for desecratin' its memory. I think she called it Pygmalion."

"Wa-a-it a minute," Kelly says. "A screwball old doll with a pet tabby, huh? Most likely she was as batty as a belfry an' did sneak here an' rub out Omer. Why, it is a crime, I bet that belongs in a serial, Mrs. Plastick."

"You mean somebody put arsenic in the mouser's oatmeal?" Willie asked.

Satchelfoot shut his eyes and counted until his blood pressure came down.

"Boys," he said, "we will go over and quiz this old thrip right away an' not let no grass grow under us. Awright, have the morgue delivery take the remains away."

"I'll ride with you, Kelly," Willie said.

Satchelfoot ground his teeth and stepped hard on Willie's foot as he went out. Willie was right at Kelly's shoulder when the detective and two other cops were admitted into Miss Peruna Wigginbottom's gay nineties apartment on East Eighty-Sixth.

Peruna was a dumpy little doll who could have been anywhere between sixty and a hundred and twenty years old. She

wore a taffeta dress that crackled like a brush fire when she moved, and high buttoned shoes. Peruna's face was as wrinkled as a hobo's cuffs, and it had a pair of eyes that made Willie's spine shiver.

"You know who's dead, Miss Wigginbottom?" Satchelfoot Kelly said first thing.

"Abe Lincoln," Peruna said. "Wa'n't it awful?"

"Look, Omer Plastick was shot dead," Kelly yelled. "He was a taxidermish."

"Omer Pl—? He was? Good!" Peruna exclaimed and clapped her hands. "You hear that, Pygmalion?" she said and trotted over to a marble-topped mantelpiece.

Willie Klump saw the stuffed cat. It was sitting on its haunches and it was cross-eyed. It was a Maltese but it had a tiger cat's tail. There was a saucer of milk in front of the tabby.

"There, don't you feel good now, my pet. So drink your milk like a good girl!"

"Ugh," Willie said. "If she was a hen an' laid a egg, it would be cracked, Satchelfoot."

"Yeah, she did it awright. Search the joint, boys," Kelly said. "Omer did do a messy job on that mouse-chaser, didn't he? Well, we can't convict a lunatic, though. Just my luck. I git a open an' shut case—"

A MAN walked in. He looked very much aghast at the cops. He wore a black overcoat and derby. He had a pale face with very little chin and his nose was long and pointed.

"Policemen?" he said as if the word was rat poison on his tongue and wanted to get rid of it quick. "What is the meaning of this?"

"They come to tell me that Omer Plastick was shot quite dead, Ellsmere. Wa'n't it sweet of them?" Peruna chirps.

"See if you can get Pygmalion to drink her milk, you dear boy."

"Now look," Kelly said to the arrival. "You any relation to this old babe?"

"Have a little more respect, my man," the character said. "I am her nephew. Ellsmere Forditch."

"You know she's got a couple of gaskets an' spark plugs loose, so don't give me no airs," Satchelfoot said. "We think she knocked off Plastick an' are searchin' the joint for the Betsy."

"Why, this is fantastic!" Ellsmere snorted. "You can't do this, you know!"

"We can't?" Kelly grinned. "Just watch, Buster."

Willie could not keep his eyes off Peruna's blood relation. When Ellsmere opened his mouth wide, he showed a big gap between his front teeth. Ellsmere reminded Willie of a pet rabbit he owned once. Suddenly Ears Brannigan came out of Peruna's boudoir, and he had a gun. "Found it in a cedar chest, Kelly. One shot was fired."

"Gimme it," Satchelfoot said, and took out his handkerchief. "Always remember hereafter, Ears, that I do the investigatin' first. Well, ma'am, what you got to say for yourself, huh?"

"A gun?" Peruna says. "Now what would I be doing with one of those awful things?"

"Ask Omer Plastick," Kelly said in cold tones.

"You think she is a medium, too?" Willie asked. "Besides bein' an eggcentric. I never would have believed this, Satchelfoot."

"We got to take your aunt downtown, Forditch," Kelly said to the nephew.

"Maybe," Willie said, looking at the cat. "Pigsmellon got run over an' lost its tail an' Omer had to be like Frankenstein an' take parts from other night howlers—"

"He did not," Peruna objected. "She

died a natural death. She just slept away to—Ellsmere, where did they say I was going?"

"You just go along quietly, Auntie," Forditch said. "The D.A. just wants to ask you a few questions. Oh, I knew she'd do something awful some day. I better call her lawyer."

"She'll need more than one mouthpiece," Kelly said. "Git her wraps, Buster."

Willie noticed that Ellsmere's eyes were not too good. The nephew took a card from his pocket and held it within a sixteenth of an inch of his glasses.

"Somebody has to stay here while I'm gone," Peruna says. "Pygmalion gits her chopped liver every night at eight o'clock."

"I'll see she gets it, Auntie," Ellsmere says. "I'll be down later, Kelly. I'll bring her lawyer."

An hour later, Willie ran headfirst into a break. He was standing outside Satchelfoot's office when he saw a beefy citizen huffing and puffing his way along the corridor, and he immediately recognized him as a barrister who rented from the same building as he did.

"Why, Thornton Updyke!" Willie greeted. "You been chasin' ambulances ag'in!"

"Ver-r-ry funny, Klump. Got to see my client, Miss Wigginbottom. Guess you heard the awful thing she did."

"What a lawyer!" Willie sniffed. "Right away you admit she is guilty. Don't ever expect me to ever give you any business."

"Oh, you shut up!" Updyke said and put on steam again.

Twenty minutes later, Satchelfoot Kelly came out of the D.A.'s office looking as satisfied with himself as a movie queen posing for cheesecake.

"Well, there won't be no trial, Willie.

They figure to reserve a room in a cuckoo castle for her soon as they can. Wish she hadn't been slap-happy, though, as I'd got more credit for everythin'."

"Water finds its own level," Willie countered. "It takes a thief to catch a thief. An' a half-wit to trip up a lamebrain. It is funny about somethin', though. That old doll was as antique as Priscilla's shift an' if she was goin' to knock off a taxerdermist you would expect her to use a blunderbuss or a bow an' arrer, wouldn't you?"

"Talk sense," Satchelfoot said. "An' gimme back that ace of spades."

"I could use a loan of ten bucks," Willie said. "I would even let you loan it to me, Kelly, to show you my heart is in the same place."

SATCHELFOOT KELLY paid Willie ten dollars and Willie got a fifty-foot start on the headquarters detective before he tossed the playing card into the air. Kelly almost caught Willie before the president of the Hawkeye reached a safety zone where a big cop stood.

"You git away from here, understand, me fine bucko," the gendarme said to Willie. "I was watchin' you two, an' a fine pair of troublemakers you are. Beat it 'fore I wrap me billy-stick about your neck?"

"Pair?" Willie said. "Huh—I just remembered somethin'. Thanks, officer. I just remember I didn't bite into no pear."

Willie managed to escape and reach his rooming house. He got out paper and pencil and began to scribble in a great hurry.

"No, I never bit into that pear. Knowin' that fruit was all wax, none of the Plasticks bit it. That is odd, ain't it?"

"What was I saying? To Kelly back at headquarters. Yeah, about antiques. Would Peruna Wigginbottom have any truck with modern things? She still had an old coal

stove in her parlor, and a old phonograph with a horn. Something is wrong somewhere. I'll talk to Updyke while he is hot."

Willie walked in on Thornton Updyke at ten o'clock the next morning.

"Just wanted to ast a couple questions," Willie said. "Peruna have more relations than Ellsmere Forditch?"

"She has. Another nephew in Pittsburgh. A niece in Shamokin, that's all. What you fishin' for, Klump?"

"Who's gittin' all her lettuce?"

"H-mm," Updyke said. "Now you mention it, I guess her will won't hold, the one she made five years ago. But she was in her right mind then. Know what? She had me draw up a will which left seventy-five percent of her estate to her cat. It's been done before. Figure sometime, when I think of my relatives, I'd rather leave what I got to a cocker spaniel to be sure it has a good home the rest of its life."

"That wouldn't leave too much to her nephews and niece, huh?" Willie asked.

"Only about ten thousand each. Miss Wigginbottom wa'n't as rich as I thought, Klump."

"Then it would be smart to bump the tabby off, wouldn't it? If it was goin' to cost some guy a lot of hay, Updyke," Willie said, surprised at his own deduction.

"Yes, I see your point," Updyke said. "You don't think—"

"Not often," Willie grinned. "Today, though, I'm a surprise to myself. I better go to my office an' put down some notes."

"Case was open an' shut, Klump," Updyke said. "You tryin' to build a snowball into a glacier?"

"I got nothin' elst to do," Willie said. "Thanks for the tips, Updyke."

William Klump reached his desk on the twenty-ninth floor and quickly opened his case book. He filled three pages with

scrawls that looked like a new kind of shorthand, but they were scribbles that preserved Willie's thoughts regarding a certain matter for all time. It occurred to Willie that taxidermists and veterinaries went together as much as physicians and undertakers, and ham and eggs, to say nothing of liver and bacon. It behooved a taxidermist to keep friendly with at least one vet if he wanted some choice subjects to work on in his stuffing studio. So that afternoon Willie went up to Gunhill Road to call on Mrs. Omer Plastick.

"Well, I see they caught the old witch," Mrs. Plastick snapped by way of greeting. "They ought to boil her in oil."

"The poor ol' babe wa'n't responsible," Willie said. "Could I look about in your late husband's, office? There's some things the law has to clear up, Mrs. Plastick."

"I s'pose so. But don't go stealin' nothin'."

"Don't worry," Willie said. "The only stuffed things I like is myself after a good meal. Er—maybe you can save me some time, though. Did Omer have occasion to do business with a vegetarian?"

"You mean a vet," Mrs. Plastick said. "Of course. When people's pet parrots or canaries or dogs or cats died, the vet would call up Omer and Omer would contact the owners of the deceased pets an' ask would they like to have them mounted at a reasonable price. Sometimes he got business that way."

"Any special vet?" Willie asked.

"His closest friend was a vet named Junius Colt," the widow said. "It's in the phone book."

"I will go and see the Doc," Willie said. "Could I have a glass of water?"

"Of course," Mrs. Plastick said. "Then you got to go. I have to go and see poor Omer at the mortician's. And he was just dyin' to see my new fur coat on me for the

first time."

"A bearskin he didn't stuff?" Willie asked politely.

"Don't be silly. It is a shirred beaver," the widow said;

Willie suddenly remembered looking at one of the coats in a window with Gertie Mudgett and Gertie had said they cost anywhere from seven hundred to a thousand clams. When Mrs. Plastick went for the glass of water, Willie hurried into the dining room, and when he came out, a waxed pear was missing from the fruit bowl.

Mrs. Plastick came with the glass of water, and Willie wondered at the defunct taxidermist's apparent splurge into the high brackets just before he was eased into the hereafter. Everything was getting a little mixed up inside Willie's noggin. He almost forgot the veterinary, called at the veterans' bureau by mistake to ask for Junius Colt.

"He is a horse an' cat doctor," Willie said.

"I think we got a psycho here," Willie heard a man say.

**S**UDDENLY he remembered he was off the beam and got out of there before they collared him. He stopped in at a cigar store and looked up vets in the classified and soon had Colt's address. He was over on Upper Broadway at about One Hundred and Sixty-Eighth Street. Willie hurried over there and a blond dish asked if he had an appointment and what did he own that was sick in the way of four-legged or feathered friends.

"It is a personal call," Willie said.

"Sorry, he don't need any."

"I am not sellin'!" Willie flashed his badge. "Take a look at that, Sister!"

"If I was, I would run away from home," the blond said.

Willie was trying to think up a parry

when a little character wearing a white coat and spectacles came into the office.

The blond explained and Junius Colt said he would give Willie five minutes and took him into his inner sanctum.

"It is about Omer Plastick," Willie said. "Did he ever consult you about a cat? One that was owned by a Miss Peruna Wigginbottom? It was mouse-colored an'—"

"You are right about that, Klump," Colt said. "He did bring a cat here. Wanted me to perform an autopsy on it as he thought it was poisoned."

Willie's heart did a half-gainer.

"Was it?"

"It certainly was. Had enough arsenic in it to kill it nine times if it had nine lives like they say," the vet said. "I remember having a few words with Omer as I lost its tail and couldn't seem to find it again."

"Well," Willie said. "Things are sure gettin' crazier all the time, which means I must be on the right track. Good afternoon, Doc. I hope horses an' elephants start gittin' bad tonsils an' you'll git rich."

Willie went back to his office and thought of a shirred beaver coat in a domicile that could not afford anything better than congoium on a dining-room floor. Peruna Wigginbottom certainly had not paid out eight hundred fish to stuff a cat. When Omer Plastick was tucked into a wicker bye-bye bassinet, Willie had noticed the threadbare seat of the citizen's trousers. Willie took the wax pear out of his pocket and studied it carefully, knew without much thought that his dentures could not have made the semi-circular depressions in the phony fruit.

"Well, it looks like I am dealin' with a cold-blooded killer," Willie said. "I got enough on a certain character to play my trump cards."

He picked up the letter that was still on

his desk. He read the closing paragraph of Durkle's circular.

Wake up, you manhunting mossbacks. Crooks are streamlining along with autos, flatirons, and girdles. Modern criminals cannot be stopped by primitive police equipment. For an extra \$2.50, you can get the Durkle catalogue of scientific weapons designed to combat crime . . ."

Willie nodded.

"The reason I didn't think Kelly got the right culprit again is a simple one, Durkle. How many old dogs, male or female, can learn new tricks, or want to? Would an old babe who was satisfied with a stereoptican buy a new Kodak to take pitchers? It don't make sense to me. An' somebody said strike while the iron is hot, so I might as well get it over with."

The president of the Hawkeye Detective Agency picked up an evening paper two blocks away from his office. The headline on the front page screeched:

## RICH ECCENTRIC SLAYS TAXIDERMIST!

Stuffed Pet Tabby the Motive

"I do not need to read further," Willie sniffed. "The arrest was made by Detective Aloysius Kelly, who swiftly gathered the evidence against the accused—"

William Klump turned into a drugstore, fortified himself with an egg salad sandwich and went into the phone booth. He looked up a name and found that the citizen he was interested in kept his lares and penates in an apartment house on West Seventy-Fifth Street off Broadway. Willie was skipping merrily toward a cross-town bus stop when Gertie Mudgett caught him by the arm.

"Willie, you don't look hungry!" Gertie said.

"Of courst not. I had a ace up my

sleeve—I mean Satchelfoot Kelly’s sleeve. I am sorry my tongue ain’t hangin’ out an’ all my ribs show for your happiness. I don’t see you wearin’ no shirred beavers sincet you changed boy friends.”

“Now look, Willie. I only thought that up to make you jealous,” Gertie yelled.

“Do I look green? Look, leave us stop makin’ a scene here, Gert. I got business on account of a doll worth half a million clams,” Willie said. “As far as I’m concerned, we’re still disconnected.”

Willie got into the kiosk just two jumps ahead of Gertie’s handbag which hit a very dignified-looking gent in the chops and spread him out over a newspaper stand. Willie sighed deeply as he emerged and ran to the cross-town bus. Gertie could leave the scene of the Donnybrook but there was enough evidence in her handbag to convict her of assault and battery in any court.

“Poor Gert, she should not be so repulsive—I mean impulsive,” Willie said as he boarded the big bus.

“Now I better check up quick,” Willie said to himself. “The rubout, the will, the arsenic in the mouser, the vet, the shirred beaver coat, the wax pear—I guess that’s the story. And the Betsy in the cedar chest. Kelly was right as this should be made up in a serial. I wonder did Omer Plastick preserve the tabby’s bread basket in alcohol. I’ll say he did anyways.”

“Are you Peter Lorre?” a scared voice said to Willie.

He swung his head around and saw that half the seat was occupied by a timid little redhead.

“Huh? Me? No,” Willie said. “Was I talkin’ out loud?”

“Yes, you was. An’ stop it, as you scare me.”

**W**ILLIE was glad when he finally arrived at the apartment house. He

went up to the twenty-first floor and pushed a bell near a door marked U3. Ellsmere Forditch opened the door and he seemed aghast at recognizing the president of the Hawkeye. Willie walked in without being invited and there were two other characters in the living room, one a male bearing a very close resemblance to Ellsmere, the other, a sharp-faced doll wrapped up in velvet and a short mink job.

“I imagine these are the other two relatives,” Willie said tartly. “Gettin’ in their say whicht N an’ J chateau they will send your auntie to. I’m wise to you three!”

“Who is that upstart, Ellsmere,” the niece said in a voice as cold as an eel on ice. “And what does he mean, N and J?”

“Napoleon an’ Josephine,” Willie explained. “I am sorry my visit is unpleasant, Ellsmere. Was you ever at Omer Plastick’s house?”

“I—I certainly was not. My aunt insisted on seeing about stuffing her cat herself.”

“Then you must have a set of uppers that walk in their sleep,” Willie said. “I have a wax pear with the imprint of your crockery in it. It come from a fruit bowl in the Plastick household. You are quite near-sighted, I have noted.”

What little chin Ellsmere Forditch had quivered slightly.

“What are you tryin’ to insinuate, Mister?”

“That you knew from Peruna’s lawyer that she was leavin’ most of her clams to her tabby an’ so you three vultures got t’gether an’ schemed to rub the feline out. You won the toss, Ellsmere, an’ loaded the liver punisher with arsenic. Oh, a certain vet can prove it. Omer Plastick had a hunch an’ consulted the vet before he stuffed the tabby. Omer got in touch with you and threatened to tell Peruna and you had to pay him hush money. You knocked

off Omer and then went to your auntie's house an' stashed the Roscoe—"

"You flathead!" the doll yelled. "I knew he'd make a mess of—"

"Keep your face shut," the other nephew barked, and unlimbered a miniature howitzer.

"Well, what is two murders when one has been committed, hah? You should of brought a company of the 82d Airborne, flatfoot, as that is all can stop me from gittin' my hooks on my share of that lettuce!"

"The joint is surrounded," Willie Klump yipped. "You can't git away with—"

Taking advantage of a moment's hesitation on the part of Ellsmere's brother, Willie managed to grab Ellsmere and use him for a shield. He hooked an arm around the assassin's neck and shut off most of Ellsmere's oxygen.

"Shoot anyway, Humbolt!" the doll shrieked.

Humbolt banged away and a bullet knocked Ellsmere's specks off and singed Willie's locks. The second hit a radiator and ricocheted and turned into a three-cushion billiard shot that finally creased the niece's upsweep hairdo and spun her around in a tight circle.

"Don't shoot!" Ellsmere gulped out.

"No? One more rub out an' we split only two ways, dear brother of mine!" Humbolt snarled, and let go once more.

Willie yanked Ellsmere's and his own head out of the way in the nick of time, and then the niece grabbed Humbolt around the neck.

"I got him now, Humbolt," she yelled. "Finish the dope."

"Leggo!" Humbolt screeched. "It is me!"

"Don't let him fool you!" the niece yipped. "I don't fall for that ol' gag! Why—"

William Klump had not loitered to examine the prints on the walls. Realizing that the babe had temporarily lost her marbles, the president of the Hawkeye threw Ellsmere away from him and charged low. He hit Humbolt in the belt buckle with the top of his noggin and carried the citizen all the way to the wall and pinned him against it.

All of Humbolt's breath whooshed out of his bellows and the Roscoe thumped to the floor. The niece reached for it and Willie's size fourteen shoe stomped down on her lacquered talons and turned loose a blood-curdling scream from her pipes. In the next moment Willie had the firearm and was head man.

Two big cops and a few frightened rent payers crashed in on the party and Willie said, "Cone the phops," and got a little rubbery in the legs. "I am a detective!"

After the culprits were briefed, and one Lucretia Forditch had let her upsweep down to save her own epidermis, the D.A. sat in his chair and just stared at Willie Klump. Every once in awhile he would glance toward the wax pear that was Exhibit A on his desk, and would keep trying to light the end of his Parker 51. He seemed to be trying never to look toward Satchelfoot Kelly who was showing all the symptoms of a citizen ready to jump up screaming.

"Yeah," Willie said. "That pear was bit into by Ellsmere awright, as there is a gap between his front teeth a column of soldiers could walk through. We have two Roscoes now that are almos' twins, an' Lucretia's confession. Peruna Wigginbottom was sure pleased, wa'n't she? Yeah, an ol' die-hard like Peruna, who has pitchers of General Grant an' Lincoln on her wall wouldn't hide one of MacArthur or Halsey in her cedar chest, D.A."

"Stop, Klump," the D.A. said. "If

there's more to it, I do not wish to hear it for awhile. Yeah, the old babe asked for your address."

"They poisoned the pear," Satchelfoot Kelly muttered, counting his fingers at the same time. "Forditch had his teeth-marks in the cat. Mrs. Plastick wondered how a vet could afford a shirred beaver coat—"

"You'd better leave, Klump," the D.A. said. "I'll try and do as much for him as I can."

William Klump, just twenty-four hours later received a visitor. It was a messenger boy with an envelope. Willie tipped the carrier a nickel and ripped open the envelope. There was a check enclosed for five hundred clams and the letter accompanying it said Peruna Wigginbottom was just that grateful. With no more relatives left in circulation, she assured Willie that he might expect a little

more lettuce just after the law of averages caught up with her. Willie was feasting his eyes on the check when the phone rang.

"This is Gertie, Willie. Oh, I'm so proud of you—"

"Er—just one moment, Ma'am," Willie said, taking his mouth away from the gadget. "Miss Brocall, have I many apperntments t'day? I have? Cocktails with you at four? Hello, Miss Mudgett. Sorry I can't see you this week. G'bye."

The phone rang for another five minutes, and Willie grinned at it.

"I'll nearly git murdered for this, but right now I can enjoy it. Well, she ast for it. I never ast her t' pay my phone bill!"

And Willie picked up the letter from the Durkle Detective School.

He would send them a check the first thing in the morning.