



Gertie pulled Carmen out of the chair by her ears

## MURDER IN THE WORST DEGREE

By JOE ARCHIBALD

*It wasn't love that made Satchelfoot Kelly pin a rose on Willie Klump's lapel—but he sure did his rival a favor!*

**W**ILLIAM J. KLUMP, president of The Hawkeye Detective Agency, sat at his desk in his abbreviated office and busied himself with some plain and fancy doodling. Crime that required the services of a private gumshoe was not exactly rampant and had not been for several weeks and Willie was as far down in the mouth as was Jonah that time in relation to the whale.

Willie was not the detective the scenario writers dote on portraying. His feet were large enough, but not flat, and one side of his mouth was not pulled out of shape by talking out of it exclusively or stuffing it continually with fat stogies. Willie's face was such as to spur criminal characters to lift bigger things.

There was a sound at the door and Willie was about to rush for the closet and hide in same, having been threatened by bill

collectors for three days, when he noticed that two letters had been slid under his door.

"It is maybe clients at last," Willie exclaimed and snatched at the mail eagerly. He made himself comfortable and tore open the first epistle. It said:

ARE YOU A DOODLER?

Have You Run Out of Ideas? 50 New Curly cues and Designs for \$1.00. Send For Them Immediately. Our Supply is Limited.

Willie sighed and opened his other letter. It was another circular asking him if he wanted to be a detective. Humiliated, disgusted and indignant, Willie balled the sheet of paper up and threw it in the waste basket. The telephone rang and he snatched it.

"Hello, hello. Just a minute, as I have three clients on the tel—huh, stop kiddin' as it is you, Gert?"

"Maybe you was expectin' a call from Grable? Look, it is about time you took me out to dinner, Willie Klump, as I am not goin' to sit and twiddle my thumbs waitin' for the likes of you, not when I could have the pick of a dozen guys if I was so inclined. Shut up! You will meet me in front of Svensen's Hungarian Restaurant at seven sharp, you know that?"

"Awright," Willie sighed. "But look, business has been awful so you'd better bring some scratch as if you don't want dishpan hands—what do I do with my money? It is not Morgenthau who meets me out in front here every time I get a fee, is it?"

"He quit awhile ago, Willie. You should know that. Oh, incineratin' I put the slug on you, huh? I'm a chis'ler, am I? A golddigger. Well, let me tell you—"

"Look, gimme a chancet, Gertie. I only said—"

"We'll talk that over when we eat, Willie Klump!" Gertrude Mudgett said and banged

up the receiver and nearly broke Willie's eardrum.

"For two bucks I would stand that dame up," Willie snapped, "if it didn't mean it would cost me five to get my right arm set. Oh, well, there is nothin' I can do but be there."

Willie met Gertie on time and escorted her into the restaurant and Gertie grabbed one of Willie's hands and took a swift and critical gander at it.

"William Klump, that paw is a disgrace. When did you last git a manicure?"

"Me? I ain't no sissy," Willie said, amazed.

"You got a nerve appearin' with me in public with such mitts," Gertie said loud enough for the kitchen crew to hear. "You must of been minin' for coal somewheres with your bare hands. You could open a can of salmon with each of them thumbnails."

"I hate salmon," Willie sniffed: "Anyway, you know I never liked fancy trimmin's."

"Oh, no?" Gertie rejoindered. "I have heard they never could make no silk purse out of a souse's ear, but I will do it if it kills me."

"I think it is worth tryin', then," Willie said and quickly wished he hadn't. Gertie Mudgett dropped a forkful of mashed and peas back into her plate. "I did not like that crack, William Klump! So you would as soon I would kick off, hah?"

"Let me tell you somethin', you fugitive from a psycopatrick ward. As far as I am concerned, you can—er—what you shakin' a finger at me for?" Gertie howled at the waiter standing near the cashier's desk. "I'll come over there and bite it offen you an' hand it to you on a plate!"

"Here we go ag'in," Willie said. "Look, if I promise to go to a barber shop tomorrer an' git my nails filed, will you leave us finish our chow, Gert?"

“Okay, Willie,” Gertie said. “You never saw me when I wouldn’t listen t’ reason. It is a deal.”

GERTRUDE MUDGETT even paid the check and Willie was sure an era of good feeling was sweeping over the world. So the next forenoon Willie hied himself to a barber shop and sat down in the chair at the little table behind which was one of the cutest cupcakes he had ever see.

Her coiffure was as black as Goering’s future and her eyes made little gremlins do folk dances inside Willie’s stomach. Willie planked both hands down on the table and the manicurist picked one up.

“Didn’t you want a blacksmith shop, Bub?” she asked. “Not that I know of one in New York. Since they built subways an’ had autos—”

“I did not come here to git insulted,” Willie sniffed. “I will take my business elsewhere—” He got up to go but the gorgeous one still held to one of his big lunchhooks. “Oh, I was only kiddin’, big boy. Park the physique and let me start paring the pinky first.”

Willie grinned. His pulse went crazy and a barber paused at his task and asked a customer who was beating the bass drum somewhere nearby. Fifteen minutes later, William Klump left the tonsorial parlors with sore fingers and a date the next night with Carmen Viranda.

He was in a sort of trance when he crossed Madison Avenue near Forty-ninth and so did not entirely miss contact with a very fast moving sedan. He was picked up fifteen feet away, along with a headlight.

“Better get him to the hospital,” a strange voice said and then a much more familiar one yelped, “Don’t waste your time, Mike. Who is it but Willie Klump! An’ he lit on his head. Leave him be here as he will walk away in a minute.”

“Oh, an’ become a hit and run driver,

huh, Satchelfoot?” Willie yipped. “I wouldn’t put nothin’ past you. You pick me up an’—”

“There is a corpse waitin’ uptown,” Kelly roared. “If I dropped into the ocean from an airplane I would git swallowed by a shark and find you inside it. Put him in and let’s keep goin’, Mike. This flathead can get in on murders the d—est ways. This time he nearly gets half-killed to do it.”

“Wha-a-a-t?” Willie yelled. “Boy, is this my lucky day?” and he got up and brushed headlight glass off his blue serge, put a knee back in its socket, and asked what everybody was waiting for.

“You ain’t human,” Kelly said.

“Who got killed?” Willie asked when the police car got under way again.

“You might as well tell him, Satchelfoot,” Mike said. “It is a character uptown, Willie. Brandish Sneff is the name. But you keep out of our way, see? Or else—”

“If anybody tells Willie off, it’ll be me, Mike!” Satchelfoot snapped. “I have had lots of practise. Yeah, Willie, if you as much as feel how cold the stiff is, I will finish up what this jalopy failed to do.”

“I know my place,” Willie said in a huff. “Will it hurt you if I watch?”

In due time, the cops were looking at the remains of a citizen who lived in a little house sandwiched between two big apartment puebls on East Ninety-Sixth. He had just about passed his fortieth year and he wore spectacles with glass as thick as the piece of headlight Willie Klump kept trying to pry loose from his ear.

Brandish Sneff wore his hair long and all indications pointed to the fact that he had eked out a living of a sort by inventing things. There were all sorts of crazy looking gadgets on his work bench and old letters from patent offices were stuffed into a pigeonhole of his old desk.

“Here is a diagram of a—it is writ down,

Satchelfoot. It is a cigarette lighter that makes its own fuel. Hah, only an elephant could carry it in a pocket. The guy was balmy, Satchel—”

“I said not to touch nothin’, you clamhead!” Kelly yelped. “Oh, where is that stiff appraiser? We can’t do no work until that M.E. says how long he was dead and why. I don’t see why they need him anyways as—”

A little man carrying a black bag came into the room. His eyebrows twitched and he sneered at Satchelfoot Kelly.

“Look, you poor man’s Sherlock Holmes, I have been here a half hour and have already took an inventory of the corpse. I have been out makin’ a cup of coffee. This character has been defunct about eleven hours. He was shot in two places by—”

“Somebody should go and check at the other place, Kelly,” Willie grinned. “Maybe that is where the clue was left.”

“Just keep that up, Willie!” Kelly ripped out. “What I will do to you, people will fergit Nazi murder camps.”

“You won’t do nothin’, Satchelfoot. I have witnesses you hit me with a car. Let’s try and see who done this and see our lawyers after.”

**S**ATCHELFOOT KELLY groaned deeply and then went to work on the case the best he knew how, which was none too good if you asked William Klump. However, the assassin must have been a very careless one as she left a very dainty handkerchief at the scene of the crime, even if it did not bear any initials.

“A dame!” Kelly yelped. “Now why would a dame come to see, much less rub out a gee like Brandish Sneff?”

“He was an inventor,” Willie offered. “It could be he was workin’ on a girdle that would stretch even without elastics and dames would commit murder to get the first one. Or else—”

Satchelfoot Kelly sat down and mopped his brow with the clue. Willie apprised him of the fact that exhibit A was no longer of much use the way he had destroyed whatever perfume or print that might have been on the dainty square of nose cloth.

“You are worse than usual today, Satchelfoot.”

“I’ve stood enough!” Kelly howled. “I am goin’ to pick this cluck up and heave him out in the street, Mike. Give me room here—”

“A friend of mine knows a big lawyer,” Willie hinted. “I could sue for a grand as how do I know I did not git internal injuries as one time I knew a guy who walked around three months with a ruptured spleen.”

“Let’s git busy on the joint,” Satchelfoot said, after a long groan. He and his boys rummaged through Sneff’s roll-top desk and Kelly finally hopped onto a bill that had recently been sent to the inventor.

“For a cossage!” Kelly yelped. “Cost six cabbage leaves and he sent it on the twenty-eighth of the month whicht is only yesterday. We have got the name of the flowerist and they will know the doll who got it and I guess that is pretty good deduction for me, Willie Klump.”

“It is about time you hit on a crime you couldn’t help but solve,” Willie sniffed. “It is just my luck you picked me up on the way to a crime like this one.”

“And here is a small white rose, a little faded, right here by this chair,” Satchelfoot yelped. “She wore that cossage I bet when she eased her heartbeat off. Dames are cold-blooded awright. They can keep cossages in the icebox fer a week.”

Willie began brushing his newly manicured nails on his sleeve and Satchelfoot jumped at him and grabbed both of Willie’s hands.

“Why, dearie, you have a manicure!” he mimicked. “It is like puttin’ a gold dome on a glue factory. If you could only cook an’ sew—here, Willie; lemme pin a rose on you.

We don't need it, we got so much evidence!"

"Awright, go ahead and have your fun," Willie snorted as Satchelfoot pinned the rose to Willie's lapel. "Is it a crime I should want some refinery? I am just trying to rise above the likes of you."

"Only when you git in an elevator that I just miss, Willie," Kelly laughed. "Now I will call the flowerist." He got the posie expert on the public utility gadget and Willie plunked down in a chair and wondered why he couldn't trip over such a simple case of homicide.

"Hello," Kelly said. "Mr. Emsbok? I am Detective Kelly from headquarters and I am callin' to see who it was Brandish Sneff sent a cossage to. Cossage-cossage—can't you understand English? A what? A coresarge. Okay, have it your way. Who? You'll look it up, okay. . . . Yeah? It was delivered to a Miss Hermone Oglamack, Apartment C Four, Bilk Apartments? Oh, boys, she's cooked. G'bye Mr. Emsbok."

"Well, so long, Satchelfoot," Willie muttered. "I must go and buck that cigaret line on Lexington. I imagine the tail of it is in Passaic, N. J., about now. This smokes situation is gittin' awful an' I wish Gert would let me go back to chawing tobacco."

"Sorry you couldn't steal this one from me, Willie," Kelly said. "Read the papers t'night."

"I never miss Dick Tracy," Willie said. He made his way over to his office and found no mail and took some cold toast from a desk drawer and spread peanut butter over it. While he ate, he wondered if he shouldn't take down some notes to see why the rubout of Sneff was so easy. No murderer should be quite so dumb, he mused, to cause him to wonder about it.

"A rose," Willie wrote down. "By any other name is—no, I mean it was silly of Kelly to hand over even evidence that he might not have to use. Well, he pinned it on me. I'll save the petals when it is close to

being defunct and put them in a bowl.

"She leaves a hanky too. She deserves to git caught quick and I guess Hermone Oglamack is quite an amateur at murder. That means it was done in the heat of an argument and not planned so she beat the braising room up the river. Why am I botherin' with it anyways as Satchelfoot is already making an arrest.

"That is what puzzles me though. Satchelfoot making an arrest. It is like a foul ball goin' in the stands somehow. I guess I have not much faith in the big baboon. Maybe I should keep on the beam just in case."

Willie Klump had no sooner closed up his memo pad when a petal dropped off his rose and fluttered to the desk.

"Huh, it is wiltin' already so I better pick it apart and put it in the sponge dish here. I wisht it had kept until my date with Gertie tomorrow night—er—what am I sayin'? Why, I made one with that cuticle cutter, that Carmen Viranda.

"Why, I wouldn't dare—but I'm goin' to. Oh, boys, she has more curves than the whole Yank pitchin' staff—I got to think up a swell alibi for Gertie or by this time next week they'll be diggin' some dirt back in the family plot on the farm. What's got into me?"

Willie began peeling the rose apart. It was still damp and when he got close to the core of the posy, he began to wonder at certain particles that were stuck to the petals.

"That is darned funny," Willie said and examined them closer. "It is not pollen as roses don't have it that comes off and it is brownish yellor. Huh!"

He took a toothpick from his pocket and fished out one of the little particles. He tasted it. He bit it with his teeth.

"Cigaret tobacco," Willie said. "The doll got some in the rose somehow. Oh, I thought I had somethin' but it got in the damp petals when she banged a cig down on the back of

her hand before she touched it off. It is a swell smellin' rose and it is a pity one so fair—but was she? I will wait to see her pitcher. Carmen Viranda, m-m-m! I will wear my new yellor and purple tie."

**A** MAN came in.  
"You William J. Klump?" he asked.  
"I am," Willie said.

"Have you thought of more life insurance, pal? You never know how close you might come to gettin' killed tomorrer. So—"

"How did you know about me an' Gertie Mudgett? You git out of here this instant!"

"Huh? Oh, awright. You look like a bad risk anyway, Buster." And the insurance salesman gave Willie a very uncomplimentary leave taking.

"The guy must be psychick," Willie bit out.

Now the very next evening, Willie shined his brown shoes, took his extra pair of blue serge pants from under the mattress on his bed and trimmed some cuffs of a Parrish blue shirt.

Two hours later he was sitting in a small bistro on East Forty-Eighth with Carmen Viranda, as slick a dish as was ever cooked up by Ma Pulchritude. Willie wondered if she had painted her wine-colored frock on and she had an upsweep hair-do and a shade of lipstick that turned his knees to cornstarch pudding.

"You are ravenous tonight," Willie gulped.

"You're not just kiddin', Sugar. I could eat a steak the size of a barrel-head and I will."

"A steak? Why—there ain't no steak to be had—is there?" Willie asked.

"Sure. They ain't on the menu. They got 'em here if you know 'em. Five fifty—with onions."

"Couldn't we have 'em without the five-fifty? I mean—I only got—one yesterday

an'—"

Willie perspired freely. His assets came to just two bucks, sixty. He wondered how he was going to beat this rap. "I got to make a phone call home," Willie said.

"You fergit somethin', Sugar?"

"I fergot to stay there. Well, I'll be back in a jiff. I—"

Carmen Viranda hooked an arm through Willie's and hung on until a waiter took an order for two steaks. Willie knew his ruse had failed. He said a prayer under his breath.

"Oh, git me out of here somehow, somebody. It is a busy place an' the dishes must be stacked ten foot high in the sink. Oh, Lord, if Willie needs succor now—he sung in the choir for four years—Amen."

"You look a little sick, Sugar," Carmen said and pulled at his ear. "Ain't you havin' fun?"

"I could scream laughin'," Willie forced out.

"Go right ahead," said a voice that Willie had heard many times before. He winced, swung his head around. Gertie Mudgett stood eyeing him, arms akimbo, jaw thrust out, and primed for combat.

"Who is the character?" Carmen Viranda wanted to know, and then Gertie pulled Carmen out of her chair by the ears, lifted her off the floor and then bounced her on her veranda. Carmen arose and swung on Gertie and Gertie ducked and threw a hook of her own that landed on the digit decorator's chops and Carmen's eyeballs would have clicked together like pool balls if it had not been that the bridge of her nose separated them.

Willie Klump watched all this from under the table. The waiters converged on the battling females and finally ejected them. Willie crawled across the floor to the kitchen and made his hurried exit in that manner.

"Well, my prayer was answered," he gulped. "The hard way."

Willie was in court the next day watching Gertie pay some lettuce for

disturbing the peace and he also read a paper where it said Hermone Oglamack was cleared of a murder charge, she having proved where she was every hour of the night of the rubout.

There was a picture of Hermone in the journal and she was a ringer for Bacall and Willie knew she was innocent right then and there, as why should a cute wren like her want to have a date with a very insignificant homely citizen like the late Brandish Sneff anyway.

"That means the murder case is open still," Willie told himself. "It is a free-for-all. I think I will mooch down to where that Sneff lived and see if I can git in an' look around."

THE president of The Hawkeye Detective Agency met Gertrude Mudgett outside a few minutes later.

"Don't you hit me!" Willie yipped. "You already paid through the nose an' anyway it was your fault you sicked me onto designin' dame. You pushed me right at her."

"But I never was so glad to see anybody like when you arrived an' saved me from K.P. Steaks, she ordered, Gertie. Oh, I was I in an awful spot an'—"

"It is only because I can't afford another assault with intents to kill, Willie Klump," Gertie snapped, "that saves you, you two-timin' bum! Well that lunchhook trimmer won't be in no shape to steal no other guys for awhile. The next one I catch you with I will ruin for life."

"You are sure devoted to me," Willie said. "If you don't mind, I have some business to look into, Gert. I guess you saw where Satchelfoot Kelly missed the bus again. If he ever has a conviction it will only be the courage of his."

"I don't see you solving no cases, Willie Klump," Gertie retorted. "How do you expect to support me I want to know."

"Why, I never expected, I mean—that

is—I we are still young. We—" Willie backed away. "Let's talk things over sometime, huh?" He got to a kiosk and ducked out of sight.

"I wisht she wouldn't rush me like that. Only two years we been goin' together. You look at a dame an' they think it is a promise. Well, where was I goin' now? Oh, yeah, Brandish Sneff's."

WHEN Willie got to where Sneff once lived, he found the door open and he walked in and made his way to the ex-inventor's workshop. Here he found a little male number with pink eyes and a cowlick looking over Sneff's belongings. Willie nodded pleasantly.

"Are you the feller executing his estate?" he asked.

"I am Leander Sneff, poor Brandish's brother. And who might you be?"

"I am William Klump, Detective. Here is my card."

"Really? Well, I hope somebody can find out who did this awful thing," Leander said. "This is quite a strange looking contraption I have here, isn't it, Klunk?"

"The name is—skip it. What is that?" Willie asked.

"He had a label on it. It says Manicursel," Leander replied. "Wonder what it means? Here's another invention that could of made him rich, Krump. A door key and flashlight all in one. Oh, he was smart as they came, wa'n't he?"

"But not smart enough to stay," Willie quipped. "A manicursel. It says just what it means. You don't have to go to a barber shop to git a manicure and look at the dough a dame could save. Well, you find any clues saying a murderer might have been here and who it could of been?"

"I ain't a detective, Kump. What beats me, though, is what they said about Brandish havin' a tate-a-tate with a member of the opposite sex. Why he was scairt of women."

Brandish would pull his hat down over his eyes when he passed a show window of a store displayin' lingery."

"It beats me," Willie said. "Unlest he reformed. I am tryin' to think of somethin' I can't very well. I should go over to my office and put down some notes. I feel for you durin' your bereavement, Mr. Sneff."

"Don't mention it," the little citizen said, and busied himself with another gadget he found thrown into an old box. Willie looked about for several minutes but found nothing in the way of a lead.

He left the place and meandered to his office and there he sat down and tried to reconstruct a crime although he had no idea how it had been built in the first place. The telephone set up a fuss and Willie answered it. It was Gertie.

"Hello, Willie. You know what? That Carmen was reg'lar. She called me an' said you never told her you had pledged a trough with me or elst she would have kept her hooks off. She wants that we should join her an' some friends in a party Sat' day night an' make it a sixsome."

"Is that good?" Willie wanted to know. "The first thing I know, Hitler will be forgiven an' git invited to dinner in' Drowning Street. Awright, but somethin' tells me it will end up in a night court some place."

"You be sure an' behave, Willie Klump!"

"Me? Who starts it every time, huh? I er—let's drop it as we'll—okay, I'll meet you at six-thirty, Gert. A client just come in so I have to hang up." Willie turned and saw a woebegone Satchelfoot Kelly take over the other chair.

"Don't look at me like that, Willie," Kelly said. "You got to admit if you was in my place, you would have figured it just as easy."

"Tryin' to make me admit I am as dumb as you, huh?" Willie sniffed. "I won't. I bet

the slayer was not a doll but left clues only a doll would leave so's the cops would chase dames everywhere instead of males—what am I sayin'? That could be true!"

"You got somethin' there, maybe," Satchelfoot admitted. "But there ain't a clue, nor no motive. The little victim had no more enemies than Little Eva in Uncle Tom's Cabin. I wisht I had just a little start. Willie, you hidin' anythin' from the cops like always even though you never know you are unless I tell you?"

"Stop braggin'," Willie said. "You only got your dome to keep your ears from sticking together. An' I am a very busy man as I keep office hours. So long, Buster."

"The next thing I pin on you won't be a rose, flathead," Kelly snapped.

"By the way, Satchelfoot," Willie grinned. "Don't never give away souvenirs at the scene of a crime. There is no way of tellin' who it once belonged to. Not that it means anythin', but remember it was you give it away."

"You would catch a fish an' throw it back in and it would be caught the next day by somebody else who would cut it open and find a sparkler worth about sixty G's in its stomach."

"If you get what I mean. Satchelfoot, it is just you are glued to the eightball."

"I never knew I could hate you, Willie, more than I did yesterday," Satchelfoot yelped. "If somebody hated Sneff like I do you, then I am glad I am unable to git on his trail. The next mushrooms you eat I hope ain't them at all, just toadstools!" And Satchelfoot Kelly went out and slammed the door.

"He is more fun," Willie grinned. "Now what was it I said? Oh, what was it? About a guy plantin' the clues so's people would think—I must of forgot."

On Saturday night, William Klump met Gertrude Mudgett in front of the latter's rooming house and they took a cab to



Carmen Viranda's apartment on West Fourteenth Street. Here a party was already in progress and the radio was on and Willie first looked at the handsome looking gee who was dancing with a red-headed dish.

But for a slight mouse under one eye, Carmen seemed in the pink and Willie was sure she had been imbibing more than just celery tonic, or she would not have been sitting on the mantel with a candlestick balanced on her hair-do.

"Park the bodies and name your liniment," Carmen said. "We even emptied our lighters in them skull-busters."

"Well, you ast for it," Willie said under his breath to Gertie.

"Listen, we will be somebody after this," Gertie replied. "So—"

"If we can remember we are," Willie countered. "Let's get interduced."

CARMEN'S date was an ordinary looking bar-fly. The redhead's was something else again. He had all the good looks a dozen other men had been robbed of. He was the athletic type and fairly reeked of savoir faire. His locks were curly and the color of an old pair of well polished cordovans. Carmen Viranda came down off the mantel and introduced the redhead to Willie and Gert.

"Carelesh of me, huh? Meet my ol' pal, Claire Bonnay, who makes more lettuce in the manicure business than anybody in the big town, Willie. She can afford to support that big han'shome bum of a husband without him workin', and who wouldn't if they could an' had a chance? At the same time, meet the great hunk of wasted man power. Byron, this is William Klump, a detective."

"A pleasure, Mr. Klump. I'm a dog, aren't I? But I love it. I never did like to work and isn't a person crazy who doesn't have to and does?"

"Ah—er—I would think a citizen would have some pride," Willie sniffed and shook hands with Byron's workhorse.

Gertrude Mudgett said, "You be careful what you say to my frien's or I'll—"

"Oh, forgit it, Gertie," Claire Bonnay said. "Byron has been insulted by experts and does not take offense at all, as he knows what a louse he is. As long as he can live without working that is all he cares. If I didn't love the no-good bum like I do, he'd be out on his ear tomorrer morning.

"Let's forget every thin' an' have fun, shall we? Come on, fill your glasses again. Anybody who ever claimed they was able to go out on one of these binges even on their hands and knees was liars."

"I think we should go, Gertie," Willie said, shuddering as Carmen poured more panther perspiration in his glass. "If you knowed what just one is startin' to do t' me—"

"They won't never drink me under no table, Willie Klump. I'll show 'em! Come on, fill this up ag'in, or is a Scotchman tendin' bar?"

"Look, Gertie—"

"Shut up, Willie. Nobody is goin' to say I am no wet blanket."

"No good'll come of this," Willie groaned. "One swallow of this I got just snapped my head back. I—"

"Byron," the redhead yipped. "Roll me a cig too. Show these folks how we lick the shortage. We don't stand in them long cig lines, not us. Another reason I am willin' to support the han'some bum. He can make a cigaret as good as any machine. He'll roll us all one, won't you, darlin'? Or do you want me to bend a chair leg over your sculpture's dream of a noggin?"

"Why, I would be charmed, I'm sure," the parasite said. Willie slyly poured his cocktail into a plantpot and the begonia began to wilt in hardly any time at all. Then

he sat back and watched Mr. Byron Bonnay display his skill at fashioning a coffin-nail.

And for the first time, Willie Klump became aware of the fact that the human leech was wearing a white rose in his buttonhole. An association of ideas had a conference in the back of Willie's head. He began to take interest in the party.

"Watch him," the redhead said. "Hardly spills a smidge of tobacco. No cowboy could even tie this handsome jerk! Give that one to Gertie, Byron."

"He's a lucky stiff," Carmen's boy friend piped up. "What a wallop he'd get if the manicure business took a dive and it was fashionable to bite your own fingernails off, huh?"

"You bring up a point there," Willie said, wondering if someone else had spoken. He saw a few particles of the makings spray the white rose and he uttered a little choking cry and nearly passed out. The redhead rushed to the bathroom and brought Willie some ammonia.

"Imagine it," Gertie Mudgett said. "What a weaklin' I got. Two snorts and he is ready for the cleaners'. Oh, I'll train him. Willie, stop actin' silly. I am on my seventh and I can't feel a thing. I could walk a chalkline right now. I—"

Plunk!

"Gertie!" Willie cried out.

The redhead sighed.

"That is how they generally go out, Willie. But you have fun just the same."

Willie Klump glared at the survivors, dared them to mention Gertie's fadeout in a derogatory manner. Nobody made a crack.

"Roll Willie a cigaret, Byron," the redhead said. "Show him how you can."

"Amazin'," Willie enthused as he watched the legalized gigolo roll a casket spike. He thought of an invention that had never hit a market and a lot of little needles began tatting up and down his spine. He took the cig and let Byron light it and he could

smell the scent of the parasite's posy. It reminded Willie there was a book he had yet to read— "A Tea Rose in Brooklyn."

"You know we should get home too, you pretty bum," the redhead said, after a third nightcap. "Somebody's liable to break in and lift the family jewelry. They have robbed a dozen apartments in the joint the last three weeks."

"Yeah," Byron said. "An' if I only catch any of the crooks in the act—I may not be a breadwinner but I got the stuff to protect the bread my baby brings home."

"Come on, this is getting to be a dead party," Carmen said. "Fill 'em up."

"Speakin' of dead parties," William Klump said, as unthinking and as blunt as always, "no doubt you read of one named Brandish Sneff. Somebody rubbed him out."

BYRON'S glass shook and splashed giggle water on Carmen's frock.

"The assassin was careless an' should of wore gloves," Willie said. "There was fingerprints at the scene of the deed. We git them matched up right—"

"What you lookin' at my husban' like that for, Willie?" the redhead screeched. "You'd think he done it! Ha—"

"Did you?" Willie asked the parlor type.

"Wha-a-a-a? Are you crazy, Klump?"

"I've been called that," Willie said. "All I know is Brandish Sneff invented a gadget that would of put bowcoop manicurists out of work if it had been made in big lots. Sneff called it The Manicursel and it was why he was liquidated, I'll bet my clean shirt. The criminal lost a rose out of his lapel. Coincidents, huh? That is no geranium you got, Junior!" he tossed at Byron.

"This is silly," the redhead gulped, shocked cold sober as she got a gander at Byron's touch of ague. "He couldn't hurt a flea."

"Sneff wasn't a flea," Willie pointed out. "Alls he has to do, your han'some spouse, is

offer to give his prints to show he is innercent. If I ever saw murder in the worst degree—how about it, pal? We can make an ink-pad an’—then we can forget it was you who spilled tobacker flakes in a rose while rolling—”

“Stand back!” Byron Bonnay cracked. “They won’t never take me! Everybody—”

“Why, he packs a Roscoe,” Willie said. “Would those bullets that are now on the D.A.’s desk and which was took out of Sneff’s cadaver match with the ones left in that rod? It is no use. The joint is surrounded an’—”

“You goin’ to stand there an’ let this flatfoot send Byron to the chair?” the redhead howled. “Fair weather frien’s, hah? All the hooch you drank on us. Now is the time for all close pals to come to the aid of a party I married—we fix this goof’s wagon an’ nobody can—”

The redhead’s friends rallied together and rushed Willie Klump. Byron Bonnay danced around and tried to get a shot at the president of the Hawkeye Agency and thought he saw a good chance. He fired and Carmen Viranda lost an earring.

Carmen’s male date had Willie around the knees and was sinking his bicuspid in Willie’s calf. The redhead had a babushka wrapped around Willie’s neck and was really getting plenty of leverage on the Klump windpipe. The idle husband took another shot at Willie and just missed.

Willie knew the citizen couldn’t keep missing and he tried to screech for cops. Everything got blacker and he knew he was due for the final curtain. Byron was leveling the Betsy right at his brisket when something flew across the room and knocked the redhead’s mate flat on his face.

A very familiar war cry cut through the buzzing in Willie’s ears. Pressure eased up on his gullet and his eyes cleared. Somebody grabbed at the redhead and tossed her right into the bathroom.

“It’s okay, Willie!” Gertrude Mudgett roared. “I can handle this riff-raff! Just take a seat an’ rest up as—”

Willie crawled to a divan and fell across it just as Carmen Viranda flew over it.

“No punch can keep me down for long,” Gertie yelled, “whether it comes out of a bottle or a bunch of knuckles, Willie!”

“I should of known,” Willie forced out. “I wouldn’t bend Carmen’s boy frien’ anymore, Gert, as he might snap like a ginger-cookie. Anyway, Byron—look ou-u-ut!”

The redhead’s torch was up on his hands and knees and trying to grab for the gun and Gertie Mudgett came down on the character’s fingers with both heels and Byron screamed like a hyena with an ulcerated tooth and Gertrude Mudgett sat on him and beat him over his handsome skull with both dukes.

“Gather up the gun, Willie,” she yelled. “I think we have occupied this atoll.”

“Yeah,” Willie muttered. “You’d think MacArthur or somebody would of sent the air corpse in first, though. Send a runner to the C.P. and ask for artillery support. These Japs ain’t pushovers—what brought you t’ Okinawa, Gertie? Why didn’ you tell me you joined the Marines? I—”

“Oh, snap out of it, Willie,” Gertie sniffed. “Git hold of yourself. We are in the U.S. and have caught the killer of Brandish Sneff. Remember?”

William Klump picked up his marbles, one by one. When he had his full set, he grinned at Gertie.

“I guess we make a good team, huh? Imagine it, Gert. That Satchelfoot Kelly pinnin’ a rose on me! Call the cops, will you?”

It was sometime later that Byron Bonnay, realizing that even a Philadelphia mouthpiece with connections in Washington could not get a nod from a jury of twelve good men and true, let his hair down to the

floor. He dictated the old business he was to get in due time up the Hudson.

"Yeah, if that guy had put that on the market, I would of had to go t' work. A friend of mine who was the patent attorney Sneff went to tipped me off the gee had a gold mine in that automatic fingernail trimmer and polisher. Anythin' but goin' to work is my motto.

"I sat up nights thinkin' what it would be to have to hop out of the sack at six A.M. It was a fate worse than death. My babe would've had to look fer a job, too. I planted the female clues to keep the cops off the scent.

"Oh, I should've ditched that artillery, but they are hard to get an' there was burglars in that apartment house an'—why wasn't I born willin' to work like anybody else? I'll plead insanity—"

"I've never heard a worst motive," Willie clipped. "You should be ashamed of yourself, you fiend. Roll me a cig, huh?"

"I'll talk to the reporters anytime," Gertie Mudgett said. "I bet Mrs. Thin Man will give out with a slow burn. Let's git a radio program to write us up, Willie. Of courst we got to git married as while solving crimes we could easy git compermised."

"That can wait," Willie said quickly. "Why, if it ain't Satchelfoot Kelly!"

"Don't try to act friendly, you doublecrosser! The D.A. is goin' to throw

the book at you for interferin' in boner-fried police business! Stole evidence that—"

"You pinned it on me, Satchelfoot, an' I can prove it," Willie said. "An' a rose by any other name if given by you, smells. Read the guilty citizen's confession, Kelly, an' see what the motive was and how I tripped him up. The cigaret shortage helped. Show Satchelfoot how you can roll them better than the Lone Ranger, Byron."

Satchelfoot Kelly walked to a door, opened it and left the room, slamming the door behind him. "It must be dark in there, Gert," Willie grinned. "That is a closet."

"As I was sayin'," Gertie Mudgett said. "We should git married right away as like I said—"

"The place you get licenses is right across the street," a cop suggested, winking at a newspaperman.

"Nobody ast you," Willie yelled.

"He has got a right to talk," Gertie howled. "An' I'm askin' right now, William Klump! What are your intentions?"

Willie got up and started running when Satchelfoot Kelly came out of the closet holding a fire extinguisher. It could also snuff out a life and that seemed to be Kelly's intention. When Willie hid in a cellar six blocks away a half an hour later, he indulged in a wide grin.

"It is nice havin' a pal to come to bat for you just when you need him. Like Satchelfoot," he said.