

Willie got the doll by the
tresses and yanked



HUBBA HUBBA HOMICIDE

By JOE ARCHIBALD

*When a nightclub warbler is snatched, Willie Klump
is just the bird to trap the kidnaper in his nest!*

ONE morning William Klump happened to pass by a rooming house on East Forty-seventh Street and saw a small black coupe parked at the curb right in front of it. There were big white letters on the jalopy that said:

COLBY'S COLLECTION AGENCY

Several intrigued citizens had gathered and were ogling the auto, and most of them had knowing grins on their physiognomies.

"Quite a stunt," a fat character said. "You don't have to come right out an' say whoever lives in there is a chiseler. The landlady must owe somebody plenty, huh?"

Willie paused also. Then the door of the rooming house opened and an

energetic-looking man wearing a plaid suit and a big grin came down the steps counting a little wad of bills.

"She paid up, huh?" Willie asked. "It is legal what you are doin'?"

"Natch," the citizen said. "My card."

Willie took it and pocketed it. "How much is your cut?"

"Fifteen per cent. Sometimes twenty, accordin' to how tough the prospect is."

Colby got into his car and drove away.

"Why don't nobody tell me these things?" Willie said, as he hurried to his office to think.

The Hawkeye Detective Agency could use a subsidiary, in view of the fact that it was getting to be about as solvent as a hobo's poke.

"I can't afford an auto," Willie reasoned when he had his feet up on his desk. "But a bicycle with a sign on it would do just as good. He picked up the phone and called a sign painter. Two hours later the glass on his door read:

HAWKEYE DETECTIVE AGENCY, INC.
PRIVATE DETECTIVES.
MISSING PERSONS FOUND.
COLLECTION AGENCY.
William J. Klump, President.

"I'll need some letters sent out an' new cards printed so I got to hire a temporary typist," Willie thought aloud. "Gert will fork over a little of my savin's if I prove it is to improve my business." He picked up the phone again. He took a deep breath first. He and Gert had had a little misunderstanding, and he had not seen her for ten days.

"Hello," Willie said, when he dialed the beauty shop where Gertie worked. "Miss Mudgett, please."

"She ain't here no longer. Call Madame Mujay, Plaza nine, oh, oh, four oh!"

"Oh," Willie said. "She quit there, huh?"

He hung up and called the new number. A voice that was vaguely familiar said:

"Bon jour, M'sewer. Madame Mujay at your serveece!"

"Who? Er, this is Willie Klump."

"I told you to not never speak to me again, you bum. I am verree bizee an'—"

"Gert, you have no more French blood in you than a dash-hound," Willie sniffed. "What is the big idea?"

"Oh, awright. I'll explain tonight. Meet me at seven at La Parisienne on Forty-Sixth!" Gertie hung up.

Willie could hardly wait. When he met Gertie at the eating place, his Adam's apple spun around and went up and down like a dumb-waiter. Gertie had an upsweep hairdo and a new fur coat, and her face had changed. Willie saw her eyebrows had been narrowed to two little pencil lines.

"For a minute I thought I made a mistake an' come to Minsky's back door," Willie said. "If everybody in this country wanted to be French what would the UN do?"

"You wouldn't understand with your BB brain," Gertie said. "I have spread out."

"In places, I admit," Willie said, and escorted Gertie into the restaurant. "Look, what I wanted to see you about, I am expandin' a little myself and need a little financin'."

"Now I know you'll see it my way," Gertie said as she sat down and inserted a cigarette into a long holder. "I opened up my own place as a lot of the customers where I worked said I should, and two of them backed me with a little money, Willie. They says people flock to beauty shops run by French women as they got the savoy fare. So I took most of your money, Willie, to finance the joint—er—shop. Madame Mujay. I had to look the part, too, so bought a mushrat-dyed mink. Don't you think I did the smart thing, Willie?"

WILLIE knew he had to say she did. Otherwise there would be the usual rhubarb. The waiter would come over and request they take a powder and Gertie would swing on him, and then they would be out on the sidewalk. It had been a monotonous routine.

"You did right, Gert," Willie said.

"How you doin', just as if I didn't know? Why don't you git pergressive, Willie?"

"A guy can't go far if they steal his railroad ticket," Willie said.

"There was dirt behind that, William Klump!" Gertie leaned forward, her elbows on the table, like the foreman of a jury when the D.A. draws blood.

"It is wonderful pot roast, huh?"

"It is tray chick," Gertie said, settling back. "I wonder do they serve patty defoy grass here."

"Look under salads," Willie said.

A miracle took place. They walked out voluntarily, with a full course dinner warming their meridians.

"Congrats, pal," the headwaiter whispered to Willie. "For a minute you had me worried."

"Oh, I'm sure on the ball now, Willie," Gertie said as they walked toward the nearest cinema. "Big shots are callin' me for appertments. I want you to acquire more polish, Willie, or elst my bein' with you will ruin my business."

"I will buy a carnation tomorrer," Willie said. "An' a can of shoe polish. I will even buy a pair of cloth-topped shoes with pointed toes, but nobody can make me eat snails. This is awful silly, Gert. You can't make a mink purse out of a chow's ear."

"That did it, William Klump!" Gertie yelled. "You go your way and I'll go mine!"

"That was only a figment of speech!" Willie yelled back. "You are just trying to

shake me an' not pay me back my dough. You are a Delilah, only worst, as she only trimmed Samson's locks, an' they'd grow in ag'in. Twenty-dollar bills don't have roots."

"It is heart balm coming to me, Willie Klump," Gertie yelled.

Willie, when the sound of Gertie's high French heels had died going down subway stairs, knew his chances of retrieving his lettuce were nil, not half as good as Gertie's accent. He went to his rooming house and sat and brooded, and had to get out of there when he realized his mind was too interested in some mouse poison he had in a bureau drawer.

He walked and walked, but no matter where he went, he found himself still behind the eight-ball. At midnight he was about to step into a beanery for a cup of coffee when a police car siren shook his ear-drums. He spun around, saw it scorch past, and turn on two wheels at the next corner.

Willie started running. Tires squealed, so he knew the jalopy had stopped not far away.

The commotion was taking place about a block from a neon sign that said,

"HUBBA HUBBA CLUB."

Willie recognized a familiar but repulsive face he had more than one reason to remember. Aloysius Satchelfoot Kelly had taken over and was pushing the crowd around.

"Stan' back! Give 'im air!"

"Why?" a voice sneered. "He can't breathe it."

"He might need it, though," Willie said. "All depends on how long the stiff's been here. Somebody git murdered?"

Satchelfoot banged his hat down on the walk, not a foot from a very inert citizen.

"You again! Willie, you are either a

zombie or a ghoul, as you are always around when I pick up a corpse. I'm warnin' you, you keep away. You make one false move an'—"

"Here we go again," Willie said. "This is a better show than they got over there at the Hubba Hubba."

Kelly ground his teeth closer to the nerves and went to work. He picked up an old slouch hat.

"Initials A.K.," he said.

"Your hat, Satchelfoot." Willie laughed and sat down on a hydrant. "Put it on or you'll catch lumbago."

The diagnostician of the defunct arrived and looked the body over.

"Death due to some blunt instrument," he said. "I figure this gee has only been dead about fifteen minutes. H-m-m, name's Hubert Wigg. Wearin' a tux, so must of come out of the hot spot."

"I'll do the 'detectin'," Satchelfoot said. "May I cut in?"

ANOTHER character in soup and fish shouldered his way through two cops and bent over Wigg. He had a long, thin, dark face and patent-leather hair.

"They got 'im," the man said.

"Awright, you know all about it, hah?" Kelly said. "Who rubbed him out?"

"How'd I know? I am Mandy Costi, an' Wigg worked fer me. He was a bouncer an' escorted Venay Benuta around the corner, where she lives, between her numbers. Somebody come runnin' an' said they saw a pair of gees sock Wigg and push the girl in a cab an' drive off. I come as quick as I could. Nobody was mad at Hubert, an' the doll is a warbler and has no rich relatives, so why should they grab her?"

"I'll ast the questions, Bub," Kelly said. "Venay Benuta. Yeah, I heard her sing over the raddio. She packs 'em in the Hubba Hubba, Twitchell says. She would have plenty of wolves droolin' at her heels,

wouldn't she, pal? Some guy got brushed off an' won't take no for an answer."

Willie Klump sniffed, and leaned over, and picked up a bedraggled carnation from the gutter. There was a little pin with a pink head rammed through the stem. Willie tossed the wilting posy away and put the pin in his cravat. Satchelfoot Kelly's boys combed the area and found no clues. They could not think of a better motive for the liquidation than Kelly's.

"Not a thing to go on," Kelly groaned.

"They should never let concrete harden," Willie said. "Then killers would leave footprints like actors do in that Chinese theatre in Hollywood."

"I am in no mood for your guff, Willie," Satchelfoot yelped. "If they only got that cab's license!"

"If you don't need me no more, I beg to be excused," Willie said.

"Keep walkin' east an' don't stop even when you git to the river," Kelly snarled.

"Sensitive person," Willie said to a cop, then ambled away.

Willie forgot about the Hubba Hubba and the Grim Reaper the next morning. He breakfasted on a stale cinnamon bun in his office, washed it down with Nescafe, then planned his collection agency.

He thought of a muskrat-dyed mink coat which would have purchased a dozen bicycles and became a little nauseated. Well, he could start out from scratch with a sign on his back. He would get up a letter and have it mimeographed. He started scribbling. After a while he held up the finished product. It read:

Announcing The Advent of The Hawkeye Detective Agency Into Collecting Bills. No Bad Debt Too Small or Too Tough! Let Us Pickle Your Dead Beets! Our Rates Ten Percent And Up! Act Now And Don't Put Off Today What Is Due You Tomorrow. William J. Klump, President.

"That sounds good," Willie said.

He went out for lunch and bought a tabloid. There was a picture of the hot spot canary on the front page and a story that jogged Willie's memory a little. The Hubba Hubba had once been known as the El Clippo, a joint considered by night club addicts as a flea-bag. Mandy Costi had taken it over and renovated it, to say nothing of fumigation, and it had been Mandy's luck to discover Venay Benuta singing on top of a Steinway in a Sixth Avenue loud and dirty.

The doll had a voice that was low and husky, like a warning buoy in the harbor, but it had that quality which was poison to housewives and eager little mouses waiting at the church. Venay drew the customers like a magnet snares a pin, and it was quite apparent that Mandy's oasis would soon be one of the largest purchasers of red ink if the cops did not rescue her from the bad, bad boys.

"The El Clippo," Willie said. "Huh, I took Gert there oncet, an' we got bounced as I was short that evenin'. I have a scar to prove it, too. Gert hit the waiter over the scalp with a tray and swung on an ex-wrestler who tossed the undesirables out. I remember the cops arrived and took us both to the cooler. Who was it run that joint? What difference does it make? It says here there is no clues as to the identity of the kidnapers, an' that Mandy is at a loss to give the D.A. a motive as Venay was the quiet, home-lovin' type. Mandy didn't suspect no competitiveness as he was pals with them all."

THAT afternoon Willie inserted an ad in a newspaper. He had a water-cooler for sale. He figured whatever he got for it would defray the expenses of mimeographing.

"Dames!" he choked out when he accepted seven-fifty for the cooler just before closing time.

Three days later, a letter came in the mail from an undertaking parlor. They wanted to see Willie about collecting a bad debt. Willie went up to the other side of the Harlem River, walked through a loft filled with bye-bye hampers and entered an office. He asked for a Mr. Berriam.

"Here," a beetle-browed citizen said. "You from the collection agency? Here, take this bill. You'd think a guy would pay up cheerful buyin' a box for a mother-in-law. He still owes forty-nine fifty on the coffin an' he only paid sixty. There's his address."

Willie lost no time. He was standing in front of a door in a tenement on One Hundred and Seventh Street, just twenty minutes later. A big character in his undershirt opened the door and nearly blew Willie back to the stairway with a "Whadda ya want?"

"You are Patrick G. O'Gatty?"

"Maybe you expected Van Johnson?"

"Er, it is about a bill you owe," Willie said. "For a casket. It seems it slipped your mind."

"So that ghost wrapper is puttin' the hooks to me, hah? Listen, beetlehead, that crate wa'n't worth ten bucks as it was only made of beaver-board. Go dig it up an' take it back, an' don't never put no bee on me ag'in or your relatives'll be payin' for one, too!"

Wham! The door slammed in Willie's face, but literally. Willie was sure his proboscis resembled a stepped-on over-ripe peach as he staggered away. Well, he said philosophically, you can't win them all. Better luck next time.

Willie wrote Mr. Berriam a letter. He told the mortician that Mr. O'Gatty had been willing to return the article, which seemed all right and only fair as people were allowed to return pianos, radios, ice-boxes, etc. The letter Willie got in reply was one he did not think advisable to use as

a testimonial.

"I could have him arrested if I turned this over to the post-office," Willie said. "This business ain't as easy as it looked at first, but I will I quit? I should, but I won't."

The door opened, and Willie quickly crumpled up the letter.

"From Hedy LaMarr maybe?"

Willie looked around and saw Satchelfoot.

"Wait'll I open the window," he said. "The air is bad in here."

"Let's stop hatin' each other," Kelly said, and sat down. "We could use each other to mutual advantage, Willie. You got any ideas on why they kidnaped that canary?"

"I'd forgot about it," Willie said. "It could be a publicity stunt, like them rich babes who lose diamonds they never did."

"I thought of that, too," Kelly said. "Look, you been lucky at times with cases, an' I says what can we lose if we cut Willie Klump in? The D.A. says for me to tell you he will welcome any corporation on your part an' will see you get renumerated."

"Is that good?" Willie asked.

"He means dough," Satchelfoot sighed.

"Well, gimme a lead," Willie said.

"They're ain't any," Kelly snapped.

"You are very big-hearted, you an' the D.A.," Willie said, off the alkaline side. "You would give away knives without no blades. If I find anythin', I'll let you know."

"I just did what the D.A. ast me to," Kelly sniffed. "You don't think I'd come to you for nothin'?"

"That is just what you'd git," Willie said. "You seen Gertie?"

Kelly grinned. "Oui, M'sewer. Imagine that broad posin' as a French mouse. I have got as much chancet of passin' off as Shirley Temple."

"I will not sit here an' let you—"

"Awright, Willie," Kelly yelled. "If you only knew what she called you. Oh, brother!"

"I know them all," Willie said. "If she thought up anythin' worst, they are in French. Anyway, I do not wish to discuss my interment affairs."

Satchelfoot Kelly paused to read the new lettering on Willie's door, laughed out loud, and went out.

NEWSPAPERS kept the Hubba Hubba rub out and kidnaping as hot as a pistol. The cops kept calling on Mandy Costi, accusing him of holding back a ransom note, as whoever heard of a kidnaping without one? Mandy kept insisting that he knew no more than the cops, which would never qualify him as a Rhodes scholar. Satchelfoot Kelly was quoted in one journal, space apparently being as plentiful as G.I.'s in college.

We believe Costi is not cooperating with the police. He has a reason, maybe, because his night club looks like a bus stop at Cranberry Bend, Vermont, at two in the morning these nights. Getting this Benuta back in a shroud wouldn't pull him out of the red.

"Kelly is settin' journalism back fifty years," Willie said with contempt as he tossed the tabloid onto a pile of comic books in a corner of his office. "This is a funny case though."

At the beginning of another working day William Klump went through his mail. One letter asked for contributions from the altruistic minded to a fund which would insure a pint of milk every day for anemic Madagascarans. The other letter was from a Lexington Avenue Florist, I. Bloom. Mr. Bloom wanted to see Willie right away about collecting a sizable bill.

The president of the Hawkeye Detective Agency hiked over to the flower shop and had to wait for Bloom. He sat

near a little desk where husbands, sweethearts, etc., wrote sentimental notes on little cards. There was a paper box at Willie's elbow, filled with little pins with pink heads. Willie asked a blonde about them.

"They're to pin flowers on lapels, of court. We got pink heads on 'em as then people know where the flower come from without astin'. Good advertisin'. We got an agreement with other florists not to use the same color."

Willie sighed and removed his stickpin. It wasn't very exclusive, he thought. Then Mr. I. Bloom came in and he led Willie into his little office.

"Such chisellers nowadays, Mr. Klump! Not all of them are sculptures. Here I have it a bill five months old for just carnations only. You get fifteen per cent if you can loosen this character up. I warn you, he is very unreasonable. Here is his card."

Willie read it aloud:

ANCIL V. GAZELLI

One Hundred Six West Sixty-Eighth Street.
IMPORTER.

"I give you twenty per cent, Klump."

"It is a deal," Willie said.

Pins with pink heads. Gazelli. The light on the switchboard in Willie's noggin blinked and buzzed, but still he did not plug in. He pocketed the bill which was for eighty-seven dollars and fifty cents and made his way crosstown and up a dozen blocks. Arriving at the address, Willie found that it was an unimpressive pueblo of about eleven stories. He had a chance to recover, he thought, if he was thrown out of an eighth story window. He still wished he had an auto with his name on it.

"Well," Willie said, "this will make or break the Klump collection agency," and went inside.

He took a self-service squeaky elevator

to the floor where apartment 7-C should be and walked down a long hall. He paused in front of a door, then rapped with his knuckles. For a few moments there was no answer. Willie was positive he heard subdued voices. He knocked more authoritatively. "Keep your shirt on!" somebody said then.

The door opened. Willie put his foot over the sill and the door was banged against it. Willie let out a painful yowl and the citizen grabbed him and pulled him inside.

"You want I should git evicted with such a house shortage?" the host snapped. He stared at Willie, his beady eyes half-drawn. "Say, you look familiar!"

Willie looked at his prospect. "You Ancil Gazelli?"

"Yeah! What's it to you?"

The private detective looked at the carnation in Gazelli's buttonhole and the light in his dome blinked brighter and buzzed a little louder. He looked at Gazelli again. "You look like somebody, too. You are familiar to me in an uncomfortable sort of way. I come here to collect a flower bill."

"Huh?" Gazelli grinned. "What chancet you think you got?"

"Fifty-fifty," Willie said. "You do or you don't."

HE THOUGHT this Gazelli was getting more familiar than ever. The Latin was a suave-looking gee and had certainly never walked up four flights for the suit he wore. With that plaid, you never got a baseball bat. Willie felt a chill coming on. He wanted his dough and a quick out.

"How about it, Mr. Gazelli? Le's clean up this little matter of Mr. Bloom's, yeah?"

"Phooey," Gazelli said.

"That is not the right attitude," Willie sniffed. "It is a honest debt. Think of the expense of all the little pink pin heads

alone.”

“I seen you somewhere before.”

“Could be I was there,” Willie gulped.

He happened to jar something loose from the table with his elbow, he was beginning to shake that much. He leaned forward to pick it up and a size ten shoe covered his fingers. But Willie could see the big gold initials on the doll’s reticule. “V. B.”

“Git off my hand,” Willie said. “What is the idea?”

“I’m trying to figure that out myself, Bub,” Gazelli said, and his eyes were getting like Karloff’s. “You wasn’t always a bill collector.”

“So what?” Willie choked out. “Mr. Truman wa’n’t always a President. Look, I’ll come back next week when you are more flush, huh?”

“You take me for a pinhead, Klump? Klump—that name is—you ain’t so dumb as you look, as nobody could possibly be. You know who belongs to the handbag, hah?”

“I have no idea,” Willie protested. “It is none of my business if you are havin’ a tater-tate with somebody’s wife or—”

“Come on out, Venay, as this punk is wise.”

Willie’s mouth snapped open and his stomach fell. A gorgeous blonde shut a door behind her and ogled him with lustrous grey-green eyes. Venay Benuta, the Hubba Hubba groaner. Here—with Gazelli. Everything flew around inside Willie’s head. A corpse in a tux, a bedraggled carnation, a pin with a pink head.

Willie remembered a movie he had seen a week ago. He got up and shoved his hand in his topcoat and made as if he had a Betsy.

“Don’t shoot—er—or—I’ll move,” he said desperately. “Frisk him, lady.”

Gazelli lifted his hands. Venay Benuta took a Roscoe from Gazelli’s pocket and when Willie took both hands out of his pockets and hurried over to get the persuader, the night club warbler pointed it right at his ticker.

“Stay put, Buster!” she said.

“I don’t git it,” Willie gulped out. “Don’t you want to be rescued?”

“No. Funny, ain’t it, flatfoot? I found out I liked it here. I took a likin’ to Ancie. We’re that way about each other.”

“Dames,” Willie sighed. “They don’t make no sense.”

“Awright, Klump,” Gazelli grinned. “In that closet where I’m pointin’. Git in there before I break your legs an’ arms and put you in a dresser drawer. We got to figure the best way to bump you off.”

“Look,” Willie yelped. “You—you bumped off Mandy’s bouncer! Oh, I see it all now. You fiends! You are flirtin’ with the hot seat, babe. You better—”

“Me?” the blonde said in her gravelly voice. “I’ll get turned loose soon as we put a deal over, lemonhead. I’ll tell the cops I escaped. I couldn’t identify any of the kidnapers as they were masked and I was blindfolded. Get in that closet, sucker, and don’t drag your feet!”

Willie had no alternative. He went in the closet and the door slammed shut on him and a key turned in the lock. It was as dark as the inside of a lump of tar. He could hear Gazelli talking. The rough person said something about a cement block and the East River. Willie groped around for a light cord and found it. He yanked it and there was light.

He sat down on an old suitcase and heard Benuta say something about shipping a trunk to Argentina with dry ice in it. He wondered what they intended to ship that was that perishable. He thought of one thing, and shuddered.

"All looks lost," Willie said. "I come to collect a bill an' fall over the payoff, just as if it will do me any good."

A decade seemed to slip by. Then Willie heard a knock somewhere. He got up and pressed his ear to the door. Gazelli growled and swapped words with the blonde dish.

"It's awright, Ancie," Benuta said. "I ast her to come."

"Wha-a-a-a-a?"

"Oh, go and open the door. I've been locked up for four days an' look at my hair. That dame is the dumbest cluck in the world next to what we locked up in the closet."

A DOOR opened. "Come in, M'dam," the warbler said. "Am I glad you got here! Look at my coffure. Isn't it ridick? And the dark roots are showin'."

"Bon juror, M'dam," a voice replied, and Willie's legs became strips of boiled spaghetti under him. "Eet ees ze nice day, none? Ah—er—you got kidnaped!"

"Look, you dumb crumb-bun!" Gazelli yelled. "You ast this dame to come here knowin' every cop in town was lookin' for you? Now, we got two bodies to dispose of!"

"So the more the merrier," Benuta countered. "These locks of mine will be beyond help if I let 'em go another day, Ancie!"

"Just a minute!" Gertie Mudgett, alias Madame Mujay, yelled. "I've had an ear botherin' me for a coupla days, but I am sure you said somethin' about bodies! What goes here? So you put on an act, hah? Maybe to git publicity, Benuta? But if I remember right, a certain party was knocked off, an' don't tell me it was a wax dummy."

"Look, you phony French twist," the Hubba Hubba Hartz Mountain canary said, her voice as unlovely as a cheetah's snarl.

"You ain't opening your kisser, see. I have already sent you a dozen customers, ain't I? An' there'll be five grand in it for you, too."

"Why, you—you—you are talkin' my language," Gertie said, and Willie sank down on the suitcase and crossed off all the years that should still be coming to him.

"Greed," Willie moaned. "Avarish. How can there be a better world? There is Gertie sellin' out for sordid gold."

"Ain't I see you somewheres before, Handsome?" Gertie asked.

"I git around," Gazelli said.

"You sure have," Willie gulped. "You dumb dame. It was him had us throwed out of the El Clippo before it was the Hubba Hubba. Oh, it is all clear in my dome."

"Well, let's get after my hair, M'dam," Benuta said. "You think Mandy'll show up pretty soon, Ancie?"

"Yeah. That night club ain't been doin' no more business than a oil-burner salesman in the Sahara," Gazelli quipped. "Yeah, I see you somewhere before, too, babe."

"Maybe at a convention," Gertie said. "When do I get the five grand?"

"When we git ours," the Hubba Hubba doll said. "What you starin' at?"

"A hat," Gertie said. "It looks like somethin' I also saw somewheres before."

"Yeah?"

"Wa-a-i-i-t a minute," Willie heard Gazelli say. "Now I remember. Sure! I spent nine bucks for a hunk of black market sirloin to put over my eye. It was a night at the El Clippo, babe. You ruined three waiters, a bull fiddle an' a bass drum. The punk with you—"

"I never heard nothin' so silly," Gertie said. "You must use more snow than Goerin'. M'dam, show me where to plug in my curlin' iron."

"Awright," Gazelli said. "So I'm wrong. Awright. I'll just sit here an' keep

rememberin'."

A door closed. Gertie's and Benuta's voices were muffled. Willie heard Gazelli's voice at the keyhole.

"You know I ain't kiddin' don't you, Klump?"

"It is all Greek to me," Willie called out.

A key turned in the lock. Gazelli opened the door.

"Come out, punk," he whispered. "Make one yeeep outa ya an' I flatten you with this jack."

"The murder weapon," Willie whispered.

"No kiddin'? When she comes out, you'll be sittin' there in that chair. I'll know by the expression on her pan if I'm right."

Willie sat down. So did Gazelli. The erstwhile boniface of the El Clippo had a Betsy aimed at Willie. In the next room, Gertie and Venay Benuta were talking. The long hand on a clock crawled around and around. Gazelli suddenly stiffened and sniffed at the air. Willie's nostrils picked up the smell, too. Gazelli was on his feet just as Benuta screamed:

"Fire!"

Gazelli flung a door open. Smoke was pouring out of a chaise-longue. The night club nightingale was slapping at the little tongues of flame. Willie saw Gertie slap Benuta with more than a pillow. Gazelli leaped at Gertie and tripped over some electric cord.

"Careless of me to put that hot curlin' iron in that shay long, wa'n't it?" Gertie screeched, and jumped on Gazelli's back and started punching. "Come on, Willie! I know you are there somewheres!"

WILLIE came in just as Gazelli arched his back like a wild mustang and Gertie flew into a corner and struck her noggin against a radiator. Benuta, her eyes

crossed, was on her feet and throwing a lamp-base. Willie ducked it and it whanged Gazelli right in the equator and flattened his bellows.

Then the President of the Hawkeye Detective Agency found himself locked in mortal combat with Venay Benuta. It was a clinch lacking a trace of glamour. Venay's talons raked Willie, and missed his jugular by the width of a sheet of cellophane. Willie tickled her in the ribs and she howled and let go of his throat, and he got Benuta by the tresses and yanked with all his moxy.

Gazelli got up. He fired at Willie, and the bullet went through Gertie's upsweep. The smoke was so thick now, identities were a tossup. Outside fire sirens screeched. People were hammering on the door. Willie saw a figure loom up in front of him and he let her have it. Somebody got him by the leg and chewed.

"I'll get hunk with you, Willie!" Gertie yelled.

"I thought it was the blonde," Willie called out. "Where is she at?"

"I am walkin' on somethin' lumpy, Willie. It squawks like a doll. We got to git out alive."

"That's logic," Willie choked, groping through the smoke.

The door fell in. Cops and firemen filled the reeking flat. In about ten seconds four pairs of handcuffs were snapped on the rioters.

Out in the hall, Willie Klump yelled:

"Git that blackjack in there. That blonde is Venay Benuta. She an' Ancie Gazelli there kidnaped her. I am Willie Klump, private detective. I mean Gazelli kidnaped the canary."

"Yeah," a cop said. "This is that Benuta babe. Wait'll Kelly hears about this! Why, it is Willie! But who is this other blister?"

"Be careful what you call me, you ape!" Gertie yelled. "I am William

Klump's fiancée."

"Ancie knocked off Hubert Wigg," Willie said. "You get hold of Mandy Costi an' bring him downtown, too."

"Willie how did you happen to get wise to this job?" a cop wanted to know as they put a pulmotor on him.

"Tryin' to collect a bill for carnations he owed I. Bloom," Willie said. "Li'l pins with pink heads."

"Give him oxygen," Gertie squeezed out. "He is gaga!"

"Oh, you dumb chickadee!" Gazelli threw at Venay Benuta. "Makin' an appertment with a hair-dresser. Well, you'll git braised, too."

"I will not!" the night club sparrow squawked. "I wa'n't in on this until I woke up in this dump. I'll talk my brains out!"

"Then I ain't worryin' much," Gazelli said. "One word won't be enough."

"I found the blackjack on him," a cop said.

"All of you git out of here," a fireman said. "How can we put out a fire? I wisht LaGuardia was mayor."

"Let's go," Willie said.

It all came out an hour later. Mandy Costi admitted he kept things from the cops for a good reason. He said he was just about ready to call on Gazelli and agree to handing him over a twenty per cent cut on the Hubba Hubba take. It was worth it to get the dame back. Mandy went into a tantrum when he heard his chick had allied with Gazelli when she got the real lowdown.

"You better git more'n one Philadelphia lawyer to make a jury believe

you started right in with that mug from scratch, babe! I'll testify you was an excessory!"

"Why, you dirty doublecrosser!" Benuta shrieked.

Satchelfoot Kelly sat in a chair talking to himself.

"He went to collect a bill. Gertie, who was Madame Mujay, got a call from the kidnappee to fix this Benuta's locks. Willie walked right in on the warbler's kidnapers, an' then Gertie joined him. . . . Wait, I'll start all over."

"Shut up, Kelly!" the D.A. snapped. "How can this stenog concentrate? What was that, Gazelli?"

"We are not needed here no more, Willie, dear."

"Just a sec, until I remind him of the remuneration for my corporation on this job," Willie said.

"You'll get paid," the D.A. said.

Willie and Gert left the gray building and limped toward a subway, looking like two survivors of an atom bombing.

"We're some pair, ain't we, Willie?" Gert asked. "What would we do without each other like shad an' roe or ham hocks an' cabbage?"

"Live to a ripe old age, that's what," Willie said.

It went over Gertie's head. Then she said she was sick of trying to talk through her nose all the time, and was selling out because of the overhead.

"Whicht reminds me," Willie said. "I got to git some aspirin."

Gertie sighed. "Make mine penicillin, Willie."