



# KLUMP a la CARTE

by JOE ARCHIBALD

**Willie becomes a moocher at Finnerty's Homelike Cafe just so he can help wash the dishes—and uncovers a sink of iniquity!**

LATE ONE afternoon three very prim looking members of the distaff side entered the office of the Hawkeye Detective Agency, Inc., William J. Klump, president. Willie could only furnish two chairs so he had to dust off the top of an old iron safe for the third person, which was appropriate enough, the old doll being half the magnitude of a harbor tug.

"I have kept my business offices as small as this on purpose as too much publicity gits you well known with the crooks. I also try not to look like a detective."

"You have to try?" The skinny one wearing the fur boa sniffed.

The corpulent one got down to business. "We are representatives of the Women's Third Avenue Civic

Improvement and Guardians of the Public Health, Mr. Klump. I am Mrs. Alburnham O'Hooley, the president. These ladies are Mrs. Hildebrand Smeck and Miss Robena Prish. We have been trying to make certain restaurants and delicatessens adhere to the sanitary code, but can't seem to get no cooperation from the police. We have appointed a vigilante committee to get results."

"Where do I come in?" Willie asked, and quickly covered a comic book with his hat.

"There is one restaurant we can't seem to get the goods on," Miss Prish nasaled. "We know conditions there are abdominal and—"

"Natch," Willie interrupted, and Mrs. O'Hooley glared at him.

"Let me do the talkin', Robena," Mrs. O'Hooley said. "She means it's a disgrace, Klump. We are willin' to pay a fair fee for somebody to git the goods on that joint—er place."

"I see," Willie said. "About twenty-five bucks?"

The three crusaders ogled each other. Mrs. O'Hooley said, "All in favor of hirin' Mr. Klump signify by the usual sign. Opposed? None! Motion carried."

"Ten dollars in advance," Willie said. "The rest when I produce, huh?"

"Okay," Mrs. O'Hooley said. "But you write us out a recipe."

"What quick and dirty is it, ladies?" the shamus asked:

"Finnerty's Homelike Cafe," Miss Prish said. "We should warn you. If they should suspect who you are they might be very rough. Of course we'll pay a hospital bill within reason."

"Includin' one transfusion if needed," Mrs. Smeck said.

"I'll have a report within twenty-four hours," Willie said. "It is a privilege to take a part in civil improvement, girls."

WILLIE, when the three old dolls had departed, pocketed the ten clam advance and picked up the phone. He got in touch with Gertie Mudgett at a certain beauty salon.

"Gert, this is Willie. Look, somethin' has come up. Business. I will not be able to put on the nosebag with you t'night. Don't git sore."

"Who is?" Gertie yelped. "Always you look fer an argument, Willie. An' don't think you're dispensible an' I will suffer until I see you ag'in. Anyways, leave me hang up as I got an old bag under the drier an' she's almos' done. Have a good time with the blonde."

"Look, Gert, it is no bl . . . Huh, she hung up." Willie pawed at his face and sighed deeply. "That is dames for you. You are innercent an' they want to believe otherwise. You git guilty an' they beat your brains out. You got more chancet of winnin' in a crooked dice game."

At six-thirty, William Klump entered Finnerty's Homelike Cafe on Third and Forty-seventh and selected a table as near to the swinging door of the kitchen as possible. Preliminary observations convinced the private dick that the three old babes had good cause to suspect that flies or thumbs were more often than not in the Finnerty soup. The pies behind the counter were exposed, and a formation of winged creatures were circling over the coconut custard preparatory to strafing it. A counterman chewed on the remains of a poisonous looking stogie as he served the stool brigade.

A lumpy henna-tressed cupcake came to Willie's table and leaned against it.

"Whatchagonnahave?"

Willie judged that the babe's apron had not been laundered since Pearl Harbor. He picked up the menu, shook crumbs from same and gandered the setup *du jour*.

"The veal cutlet ain't bad," the

waitress said.

Willie scratched his noggin, looked up. "Who typed this—a Litheranium or a Jugo Slob? Curned beef. Cudfish an' curn on the cub. Purk chups. Cuttage cheese an' ulive san'wich? An' apricuts. An'—"

"Look, Buster, the typewriter was used has an 'o' busted in halves," the waitress sniffed. "I ain't got no time to fix it with no pencil. Take your time as I just love standin' here like I was the Stature of Liberty holdin' a torch."

"I'll take the cutlet," Willie said testily.

He asked himself how he was going to get into the kitchen.

"Huh," he answered himself, "that is going to be easy."

Then he saw a very big eyeful traipsing past. The sloe-eyed, lissome brunette ended up in the cashier's cage where she hauled out a compact and went to work trying to improve on a face that had no room for same. Appeared next a male character as big as the husband of a certain famous female golfer and he went over to the cage to slyly smooch with the taker of the tariff. It was very plain to see why Finnerty got his share of the customers.

Willie shared his observation with the waitress when she appeared with the cutlet that looked like a sun-curved shingle off a stable roof.

"Yeah, the boss ain't so dumb, mister. Wanna beer?"

Willie acquiesced, then attacked the cutlet. In the bilious-looking gravy camouflaging it he found a burnt match and lost his appetite. He ordered a piece of soggy lemon-meringue and found little ticket-punchings stuck to the egg-white. He called the waitress and asked for the check. When he got it, he told her he had lost his wallet somewhere.

"An' I'm goin' to give you a chancet

to use another ol' gag, Buster," the waitress said. "The black eye you'll have in a minute was got from runnin' into a door. Hey, Biff!"

The large citizen hurried over. "A moocher," the waitress said. "Finnerty won't like it if you t'row him out through the plate glass like you did the las' one. I'll open the door wide."

Willie said, "Let's arbitrate, huh? I desire t' do the right thing like washin' a few dishes an'—"

"Not bad," the waitress said. "One of our'n quit an hour ago, Biff. The sink is loaded t' the gills."

"Okay, Junior," the big character growled. "Foller me!"

Five minutes later William Klump's arms, as far up as his biceps, were as red as two brick chimneys. The private flatfoot made mental notes as he worked, hoping to remember at least one out of every six by the time he reported to his clients. He was pretty sure he'd bear one incident in mind, that one about the big mouse biting him when he reached for more soap flakes. He got a glimpse of a big pot of soup and asked what was floating around on top, was told they were croutons.

"With wings?" Willie wanted to know, and ducked a vicious swipe of a chef's cleaver.

FOUR hours later William Klump limped out of Finnerty's Homelike Cafe promising grim reprisal, the clatter of sudsy crockery in his noggin, his diaphragm all of a flutter as a result of the compote of the smells in Finnerty's kitchen. At the corner of Lexington and Forty-ninth he went into a tight spin and caught at a lamp-post, and a passer-by with a sugary voice and the new hemline gave him a helping hand. The little chickadee was helping Willie toward the nearest drug store when a cab pulled up.

Out stepped Gertrude Mudgett and Aloysius "Satchelfoot" Kelly.

"Plastered," Satchelfoot diagnosed elatedly. "What did I tell you, Gert! He was with a broad. Willie, you nogood—"

William Klump was immediately shocked out of all traces of vertigo when Gertie swung at the good Samaritaness.

"Look, lemme explain, Gert!" he howled. "I can prove—"

Gertrude Mudgett missed. A counter punch caught her right on the chops and both her earrings popped loose. Satchelfoot Kelly caught her under the arms and held her up while she wangled a partial plate back into place, and watched Willie run for his life.

"Okay, sister," the deliverer of the haymaker said. "You want t' go a couple more rounds later, I'm athletic director of a Y. W. C. A. I am leavin' my card."

"Huh," Satchelfoot philosophized, "Napoleon was the firs' t' find out, Gert." He eased her to the sidewalk and propped her up against the side of a meat market. "How's about leavin' me call a cab?" he said to the winner.

"That would be kind of you, I'm sure," the maid said, and let Satchelfoot have her arm. "A girl feels so defenseless this time of night."

A cab pulled up, drove away. Gertrude Mudgett got to her feet and pushed her hat from in front of her eye. Vowing to remove two citizens from the tax rolls, gripped by a Lucrezia Borgia complex, she groped toward the nearest underground. . .

In his room William Klump wondered how he was going to raise the scratch to get him as far away from the States as the Arctic Circle. Only there, he knew, would he be reasonably safe. The worry dew oozed out all over Willie. Finnerty's was now only a bad dream that had been and gone. This was a nightmare that hadn't as yet really whipped itself up. He would be

guilty until Gertie proved him innocent, which she never could and never would.

"We're stalemates," he choked out. "What'll I do? If I can answer that I should try for double or no thin'. Of all the worst breaks can't be fixed up with a splint—"

Willie piled the dresser against the door and made sure the window was locked.

For three days Willie Klump moved about town as furtively as a cottontail lost in a timber overrun by hungry wolves. He disguised his voice when he answered the phone. Once it was Satchelfoot.

"Jus' checkin' up, Willie. How've you lived this long? I checked on Gert. She got a license t' pack a rod."

And Mrs. O'Hoooley came to call.

"We had the place raided, Klump," she snapped. "That report you sent in must of been a fake. There ain't a cleaner place in town! We want the ten dollars back or we'll notify the cops."

Willie sighed, and paid. When Mrs. O'Hoooley had gone, he snapped his fingers.

"Now I know where that badge of mine went. They got wise at Finnerty's as maybe they went through my coat while I was washin' dishes. I got a good mind t' quit this business."

Four more days went by. Then Gertie's voice sounded in the receiver of Willie's phone when he picked it up one afternoon.

"Oh, Willie, how can you forgive me? That dame come to see me an' tol' how it was an' proved she wa'n't with you that night an' we are now good frien's an' she is goin' t' give me boxin' an' waslin' lessons. Ain't that swell?"

"It is great, ha ha!" Willie gulped.

"You poor darlin', Willie. Only you could ever git in such a compermisin' mess anyways. You must practice doin' it. If your fambly had a coat of arms it was an eightball rampart on a field of poison

iv'ry. When will I see you?"

"I'll call you later," Willie sighed, and hung up. "I am glad she did not make frien's with a knife thrower," he told himself. . . .

NEXT morning, Willie was going through his mail which consisted of one circular letter ballyhooing a new mag when Aloysius Kelly entered the office. He wore a patch over his left eye.

"She sent me a package in the mail an' I figgered it was a present I sent her las' Chris'mas, Willie. I opened a box an' whammo, it was a jack-in-the-box with a hunk of lead for a noggin. I says I will see Willie an' tell him I was a heel."

"Don't flatter yourself with past tense, Satchelfoot," Willie sniffed. "I would trust you as far as I could throw the city hall with one hand."

"Oh, let bygones go by," Kelly said. "I would like to take you out for some beers, Willie. I know where is the best corned beef an' cabbage in town, too."

William Klump's spirit told him to tell Kelly he could go where he wouldn't need matches, but his flesh, not having been fortified by many calories the past forty-eight hours, was vulnerable.

"Okay, Satchelfoot. I am willin' t' give you one more chance."

They subwaved down to a bar and grill in the Houston Street neighborhood and were engaged in resuming diplomatic relations when a waiter came after Satchelfoot.

"It's Headquarters, Kelly. Looks like the Commish has t' git another sucker for a pinochle game. Why would anybody call you otherwise?"

The bonafide slewfoot hiked to the phone booth, spent a minute and a half inside it, then rushed back to the table.

"Willie, now I can show you I want t' be frien's. The Homicide Squad is on its

way to a big empty lot at a Hunert an' Twenty-sixth Street where somebody found a corpse. You can go, too."

"You think I wouldn't follow you?" Willie sniffed, and gave himself a last faceful of corned beef. "You would ring me in on the rub-out of some stewbum that don't mean nothin'."

Less than half an hour later, Willie was with half a dozen other cops appraising the remains of a citizen who was clad in very nice haberdashery. The rigor mortis expert judged that the unfortunate character had been defunct for close to seventeen hours, and stated that he had been shooed off for keeps by a Betsy of approximately thirty-eight caliber.

"He ain't no bum," Kelly said, as he frisked the remains. "The criminal person or persons emptied his pockets of all identification. Awright, take flash pitchers of the scene, men."

The deceased was lying prone and when he was turned over, Kelly found the watch.

"An' ol' model gold turnip," he said. "The guy must of carried it fer sedimental reasons as he also had a wristwatch as you can see by the stripe on his wrist. A huntin' case watch. Could be an inscription inside it. Leave me a loan of your penknife, Willie."

Kelly got the watch open and something fell out of it and landed at his feet. A small sheet of thin paper folded twice. He picked it up and had a cop center a flash on it.

"Just a mush note," he said. "Don't mean nothin' as it is signed only by 'Sugarface.' Lissen. 'Dear loover buy. Sure, I'm still that way oover my big hunk of manpower. What makes yuyu think different? Why, natch, we have a date fer Wednesday at eight yoocluck. Loots of loove.' What kind of baby talk is that, huh?"

"Or is it you can't read," Willie said. "Well, there may be prints of felons on file on that billy duke, so don't throw it away, Kelly. The deceased was a handsome gee in a sinister sort of way, huh? Was toted to this lot in a jaloppy, as look at the lint on his worsted suit from a sedan Smyrna."

"I was goin' t' mention that," Satchelfoot said irritably. "Anyways you got too much t' say for a B pitcher shamus. When we want your advice we'll ast for it, Willie."

"Not that I was asked either, Kelly," the M. E. said. "But he's got evidence under his nails he clawed somebody before he made his jump across the Styx. Well, you can have him for the deep freeze unit." He snapped his bag shut.

"With all these clues, Kelly," Willie said, "you should expect Margaret O'Brien to clear this up before lunch tomorrer."

"Make out we never drunk no beer together t'night," Satchelfoot flared up. "I should get my dome examined."

"It'll never be possible," Willie countered. "No X-ray that powerful ever has been invented yet. You would wreck a pneumatic drill. I'll watch the papers to see how far you git with this just as if I didn't know."

"Get lost, beetlehead!" Satchelfoot snapped.

THE next afternoon Willie Klump called an assistant D.A. he knew and inquired as to the identity of the corpse.

"We ain't got a thing, Klump," he was told. "There was prints on that note but they don't seem t' be on file nowheres. Up t' now nobody has identified the stiff. Looks like a gang victim. . . . Say, Willie, why not come downtown an' see an ol' friend. I could use some laughs."

"There ain't no new stories goin' around," Willie said. "Oh, I get it. Listen,

you—"

William Klump went downtown anyway, early the next morning. Mr. Bullfinch, the sub D.A. announced that Kelly had made an arrest that might stick.

"I would believe you if you said the Russians threw a veto away," Willie said aghast. "Drive by ag'in a little slower."

"Yeah, a call come in from a cop lived in an apartment next to the empty lot," Bullfinch explained. "He got up with a jumpin' wisdom tooth an' happened t' look out the winder. He sees a jaloppy parked across the street by the big vacant lot an' bein' a cop first last an' always pulled on some clothes and went out to get a gander. He is a few yards from the sedan when it pulls away, but he gets the numbers on the license plate. Kelly traced the number through the motor vehicle bureau an' found out the jaloppy belonged to Big Grip Gargan, a bettin' commissioner, of all people. As Big Grip has been known to chastise certain gees quite roughly—"

"That took a lot of headwork on Kelly's part, didn't it?" Willie sniffed.

"Well, Satchelfoot did trail Gargan an' bring him in, Willie," Bullfinch said. "An' the big slob said he was drivin' past that vacant lot at between two and three a. m. an' got a cramp and had to park until he got his marbles back. There wasn't any scratches on him, though, but there could be on his confederate. Kelly says he'll grill the identity of his accessory out of Big Grip, give him time."

"I would say the cops have a head start," Willie admitted begrudgingly. "Then that mush note didn't mean a thing."

"Exhibit A?" Bullfinch snorted. "Nah. There it is in the waste basket."

Willie did not know himself why he bothered to retrieve it at the time, but he did. He spread it open and idly perused it

for a moment. Then he gasped as if a little gremlin had got wedged somewhere in his windpipe. Mr. Bullfinch became alarmed and reached for the phone.

"Poisoned food I bet, Klump. They been makin' a drive against unsanitary eatin' places, but—"

Willie stared at the following written words:

Dear luvver buy. Sure, I'm still that way uver my big hunk of manpower. Why, natch, we have a date fur Wednesday night at eight u'clock. Luts of luve. Sugarface

Willie choked out, "No; it can't be! Yeah, curned beef an' curn un the cub, but—"

Mr. Bullfinch got up and sidled toward the door. Once he had it opened he started running. Willie grabbed up his hat and hurried out himself, and he was halfway uptown before he realized he had the billet doux clutched in his big right fist. Ten minutes later the familiar smell of Finnerty's Homelike Cafe struck him flat in the kisser, and then he heard the lumpy waitress tell him to amscray.

Willie pulled himself together. "Maybe you don't know I'm a private detective, sister!"

"I wouldn't care a pantie offen a lamb chop if you was a general of 'em, Buster. Beat it, you chiseler! Sure, we found that tin badge that time."

"Yeah?" Willie asked. "Well, who was it banged out them menus on the typewriter is all I want t' know?"

"Who?" the waitress snapped. "The babe who was the cashier here. She quit over a week ago. I guess that boy frien' she had finally got her in a night club like he promised."

"Boy friend?"

"Why sure, you lemonhead. There still are such things, thank heavens. This guy was some kind of a big operator an' was

named Eddie Muzzell. I seen him come in a dozen times. He always lef' me a buck tip."

"You got that typewriter?" Willie yelped.

"Nah. It was Dreena's. We usta letter the bills of fare by han' but nobody could hardly read 'em an' Dreena says it would look classier if we should type 'em out, so she bought along the LaCorona an' knocked 'em off."

"Also with a Roscoe," Willie said abstractedly.

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

"I said somethin'? Look, what is the babe's real name an' where does she live?"

"Dreena Del Roye. I never knew where she hung out, Buster. An' why ast me all these questions? You'd think she murdered somebody!"

"Ha, wouldn't you?" Willie sniffed. "Now what you got t' do, sister, is come down to the morgue an' identify a corpse whicht I am positive is Eddie Muzzell an' whicht can't be put in a cemetery until it is. Why, you could get your pitcher in the paper because of this."

"I could?" The lumpy femme took off her apron and tossed it aside. "Wait'll I change, big boy. Won't take more'n a minute."

**W**ILLIE sat down at a table and went to work with a pencil as if his thoughts were not soon put into writing they might just as well not have cut loose from his noggin.

No.1. "The papers, come to think of it, mentioned the mash note found in the defunct character's watch, and if the pip of an ex-cashier was as smart as she should be, she would—"

A big hand dropped to Willie's shoulder. "Why, you punk stool pigeon! Dirtyin' up a clean cloth wit' a pencil, too!"

Awright, one—two—three—”

“Leave go of him, Biff!” the waitress yelped. “He happens t’ be a frien’ of mine.”

“You’re fired, Flossie!”

“No kiddin’? Where’n I send you the reward? Come ah-h-hn, Sugar. Also I might tell you how crumby this joint really is.” She took Willie by the arm. “Let’s get out of here, huh?”

“It is my fondest wish,” Willie choked out, sputtering and coughing.

Down at the stiff repository the waitress took a gander at a specimen, wheezed out, “It’s him—it’s Eddie Muzzell,” and swooned. A hovering newspaper legman hurried to a public utility coop and feverishly spun the dial.

Willie fanned the lumpy doll with his hat, led her out and to the nearest subway kiosk, and gave her a nickel. Then he went to a phone and called Mr. Bullfinch.

“Yeah,” he told the assistant D.A., “Eddie Muzzell. I am told he was in the chips. I would have them grill Big Grip Gargan an’ make him confess now. Most likely a lot of racketeers’ll reckernize Eddie’s name an’ we’ll get the lowdown on him.”

“Thanks, Willie. I’ll tell the D.A. you’re cooperatin’.”

“Tell him I am also broke.”

Certain underworld characters admitted they had heard of Eddie Muzzell but stated emphatically that he was not in any of their enterprises. “Bosco” Spumoni, bubble-gum vending machine monopolizer, claimed Eddie owned a fifty-and-hundred-buck club meatball named “Kayo” Dilley.

Willie was downtown when Satchelfoot grilled Big Grip Gargan. The betting biggie snarled and waxed indignant.

“Never heard of the punk! I know personal every gee on my pay roll an’ you

think I’d do the job myself if there was a doublecrossin’ employee had t’ be knocked off? Go ahead an’ ast me questions as I got nothin’ else t’ do. You try an’ prove nothin’.”

“Kelly has been doin’ that for years,” Willie said, and went out. He had to look for a dame. “Hah,” he said to himself, “Eddie couldn’t have made his roll even on quiz programs. The waitress said he . . . There is one thing I must do.”

The president of the Hawkeye forgot that one thing for a while, though. He went uptown to see Bosco Spumoni who told him Eddie Muzzell used to live in two rooms in a modest apartment hotel just off Lincoln Square. Willie went to that place and found cops holding off a mob trying to get into the place.

“They’re tryin’ t’ rent the two rooms,” one gendarme hurriedly explained.

Willie finally got in to see the super an hour later. He was told that Dreena Del Roye had also lived there, but had moved out some time ago. She left no forwarding address.

William Klump made his way to his office and did the thing he’d almost forgotten to do. He consulted a classified directory and then started calling places where typewriters were bought, sold and repaired. He guessed he had called six dozen places within the space of an hour. They would all check up and call him back, they assured him. He was getting groggy as he conversed with the seventy-third prospect.

“Y-yeah, a portable doll with a brunette keyboard,” he droned out. “This typewriter has eyes like Hedy LaMarr but her o’s are cut down t’ u’s. Dreena La Corona—yeah, a Del Roye typewriter.”

“I think you’re batty,” the man said, and hung up.

Willie felt a little empty inside and went to an old filing cabinet and found a



three-day-old cruller in a paper bag. He ate half of it, then picked up a stack of correspondence he had been trying to laugh off for three days. Each one said he would please remit. The deadline on most of them were as close to him as his skivvies. Suddenly he took paper and pencil and started a letter to the custodian of all the clams he had ever gleaned out of the Hawkeye Detective Agency.

Dear Gert: I got to have a hundred and fifty bucks right off as I am desperate. I will not have no roof over my head and will also be evicted from my office. I will be ruined. If I don't git the hundred and fifty by return mail I swear I'll—

HE could not make up his mind right away as to just how he would plan his own demise so he took time out to make a pot of coffee. He plugged in the hot plate and then placed it on his desk.

"I could jump out the winder," he mumbled as he measured out the java. "But I'm scairt of high places. I could tell her I will take poison or would turn on some gas."

Willie turned his attention to finishing his own dunning missive while the jamoch perked. Then he heard the door open and swung around in his chair.

Two citizens nodded to him. One was a male who looked like an ad man of distinction who had switched to Calvert. He had a waxed mustache, big shoulders and just the right amount of white at his temples. The party of the second part was a female, a platinum blonde wearing a short fur Benny and a skirt that was a shame considering the kind of gams she had been endowed with. She had a wide mouth which was well shellacked and a pair of eyes that stirred the sleeping butterflies in the Klump diaphragm.

"You are Mr. Klump?"

Willie nodded, surreptitiously tugged at an electric juice cord and shoved a big

dictionary against the hot plate.

"But what is the idea snappin' that Yales lock?" Willie got up slowly. The dame was smirking at him. "It is a mistake whatever it is, as I never saw either of you in my whole life."

The doll closed the transom. "See, darlin'?" she said to the male. "I told you he wouldn't recognize me."

"Who-o-o are you?" Willie choked, as the male citizen displayed a very ugly-looking Roscoe.

"Tell him, Baby."

"Remember Finnerty's Homelike Cafe, Junior?" the doll tossed at Willie.

Willie tried not to. He also told himself he was crazy to think this glamour puss was Dreena Del Roye.

"What a dumb jerk," the converted platinum blonde purred as she walked toward Willie's desk.

The big character motioned Willie toward a wall where there was no window.

"You think after I heard about the note they found in Eddie Muzzell's watch, I'd sit an' wait for the cops to come with the wagon?" The doll sat down on the side of the private dick's desk and took a cigarette case out of her beaded handbag, selected a long coffin nail and touched it off.

"I will scream for help," Willie said in a voice that seemed filtered through mud.

Mocking laughter.

"You wrote somethin' on a tablecloth at Finnerty's," the cheesecake number said. "Who did you think would see it—the F. B. I.? The big slob named Biff gave me a buzz at a certain place he knew he might find me. He don't know from nothin' but he had a hunch after what happened to Eddie I might be in a spot. So he tipped me off to what you scribbled just in case. Maxie, this Keystone Comedy flatfoot, is almost too dumb t' be real."

"But we don't take no chances he has done somethin' by accident, Baby. He's

gotta go!”

“You ain’t kiddin’, honey,” the blonde said, and idly picked up the letter Willie had been writing.

She read it in a hurry, stared wide-eyed at Willie, then laughed gloatingly. The president of the Hawkeye wondered if this was the Inner Sanctum.

“Maxie,” the blonde said, “this is our out. This dumb ox wrote it for us. A suicide note.”

“Wha-a-a-a-a-a?”

Willie became petrified and he slapped both hands against the sides of his whirling noggin.

“Oh, only I could think of doin’ this t’me!”

The dame read aloud to Maxie. Maxie shook his head incredulously, then laughed mostly under his belt.

“Oh, brother, what a setup!”

Dreena Del Roye’s peepers shot lancets at Willie.

“Thought I was a dumb babe, huh? I wouldn’t think after they found that note on Eddie you cops would maybe trace that typewriter with the bum ‘u’ on it? Guess you don’t know how much me an’ Maxie have got at stake, you mental runt! Sure, I think back. They found a tin badge on you the day you washed the dirty dishes, Klump. Then after Biff tipped me off snoopin’ was bein’ done, I said I’ll beat ‘em to the punch. Like Mahoomit I didn’t wait for no mountain to fall on this kid.”

“She’s a smart number, Klump,” Maxie grinned. “She says the cops’ll call typewriter places an’ check who’s brung in a La Corona to get fixed an’ that her address would be left there. I’m a lucky guy awright.”

“Thanks, honey,” the dame said. “Let’s git this over with.”

“You won’t git away with it,” Willie said.

The gee named Maxie said, “Sit down

in your ol’ chair, Klump, as that is where you are t’ blow your brains out.”

“What brains, Maxie?” the ex-cashier taunted. “I’ll bet the joint’ll be filled with sawdust. We ought t’ tell the punk why we got t’ do this.”

“I will, Baby. You see, pal, Dreena was only workin’ at Finnerty’s while certain heat got took off,” Maxie boasted. “Eddie Muzzell also had a sideline an’ his managin’ a dumb meatball was only winder dressin’ to keep the cops thinkin’ he was legit. But maybe you recall maybe six or eight months ago a swanky joint on Park Avenue was touched for sixty grand worth of jewels. Well, take a look at the brains behind it. Some gorgeous package, ain’t she?”

Willie took a gander at the doll. He had to admit she was. It occurred to him that the only other bit of fluff he would ever ogle would be stringing a harp or preening her wings, and his spinal column began a La Conga.

“Yeah, an’ she an’ Eddie had t’ lay low until the heat was off an’ t’ line up fences would handle the rocks,” Maxie went on.

Willie had to ask, “But why was Eddie Muzzell knocked off?”

Dreena Del Roye stifled a yawn and consulted her wristwatch. “I’ll answer that one, Maxie,” she said. “It seems Eddie crossed me by hocking one of the baubles behind my back. Then I meet Maxie and I know even if Eddie had kept his nose clean I would of got rid of him.”

“Sure, Klump. Look at me an’ then think of Eddie’s pan,” Maxie grinned. “A swell gal like Dreena deserves the best. I guess I was just born lucky. Here I fall into sixty grand and git me a million-dollar baby at the same time. Yeah, we eased Eddie off an’ took him for a ride an’ dumped him.”

Willie looked at Maxie’s right hand

and saw the healed scars.

"Sure, he rushed me just as I was goin' t' let him have it, Klump," Maxie snapped. "We wrestled for a sec an' he nearly made me drop the Roscoe, but I got him. Tell me if I'm wrong, Klump. A private flatfoot hides most things he finds out from real cops as why should he let them in on secrets, huh? I bet they don't know from nothin' about us downtown."

"You are a fiend," Willie gulped, and wished he could tell Maxie he was wrong.

"Okay, let's git it over with, Maxie."

"Get in the chair, Klump. Baby, when I give you the office, you drop that big book on the floor, see?"

"I'm ready. Hurry up."

Willie Klump staggered to his chair and fell into it. He could hear the splash of oars and the popular tune the River Styx ferryman hummed as the shores of Never-Never-Come-Back-Land came closer. And he had given his assassins a perfect alibi and wished he'd busted his writing arm a week ago.

The dame with the platinum blonde wig took her place and reached for Webster's best seller. Willie knew that Maxie's mustache was a fake, too, and that the signs of age around the mugg's ears were also misleading.

"Okay, Klump, turn your dome to the side a little as I don't want t' mess you up with two shots," Maxie said a little impatiently. "I'll just lean forward like this, Baby, an' git him up clost as it has t' be suicide."

"Stop makin' a speech, Maxie, an' give it t' the punk!" Willie shut his eyes and shuddered, and thought, "Why she could some day be somebody's mother!"

Maxie leaned forward and pressed his left hand down against Willie Klump's hot plate and then he let out a great roar of pain that lifted Willie right out of his chair and popped his eyes open. A Betsy

clattered to the floor and then Willie suddenly realized the heat really wasn't off the criminal persons, and he sprang into action.

The blonde blister also recovered surprisingly fast and threw the big wordy tome at the Klump coco. It grazed Willie's pate and put a blur in front of his face for a few seconds, but he fell right on the liquidator and dug in as far as the linoleum rug would permit.

"Get him, Maxie!" the doll screeched and covered Willie and got both her fists filled with his corn-colored hair, and pulled.

The tears streamed from Willie's glimmers as he lifted himself up like a bucking bronco and threw the babe loose. He rolled over on his back and saw big Maxie diving for him and he wondered if he'd go through the floor and into the lap of a stenog in the office below.

**S**ELF-PRESERVATION was the first law Nature had passed and Willie was for it a hundred per cent and so he brought up both feet when Maxie was about to make a three-point landing, and kicked very vigorously. *Oomp!* Willie's Size Twelve brogans got Maxie plumb in the breadbasket and the big crook did a halfspin and landed on the floor with his nose down.

The fake blonde still had fight and some moxie left in her, and Willie saw her winding up with the empty beer bottle just as he flipped over on his stomach again and got his hand on the artillery. The bottle just missed the Klump cranium, hit the wall and came up with a billiard shot that ended just above Maxie's left ear.

"Shot or I'll stoop!" Willie yelled, just as half of New York seemed to be trying to break in.

Dreena Del Roye legged it to an open window, looked out, changed her mind.

"The devil with it," she gulped. "I'll sing for the Commonwealth!" She sat on the sill and gaped at the Betsy Willie had pointed right at her bra, and then the door gave way.

A big elevator man was in the van wielding a fireax. Next came a big cop, and five characters who believed in peace in our time.

"What goes on?" the cop yowled.

"What would you expect in a detective agency—a sugar maple party?" Willie managed to articulate. "Watch these two dishonest citizens close as they rubbed out Eddie Muzzell. An' the doll here with half her wig off was in on a sixty-grand jewel haul not so long ago. They come here t' rub me out." Willie went over and looked at the floor plug where he'd connected the hot plate. "Hah, it wasn't quite disconnected an' give off with enough juice t' keep the life-saver hot. Maxie could not shake a pair of dice for a month at least and anyways where he will end up won't have just a poor connection. I think I have the gat washed up Eddie Muzzell."

The decided blonde put up quite a fuss before consenting to accompany the limbs of the law. She had an eye now that matched her real hair and an ear almost as red as her kisser.

Maxie owned up to be an ex-con who had been dabbling in a little burglary. His

last name at the moment was Luza, he said.

"Spelt with a 'o' and 'u'?" Willie grinned. "It looks like that was a hot menu I picked up that day in Finnerty's huh? Who'll have a cup of coffee, as the plate is still hot."

"I don't believe this," Dreena said dolefully, "even if it has t' be true. I'll talk!"

Downtown, sometime afterward, Willie sat in the real D.A.'s office feeling sorry for Satchelfoot Kelly who was sitting at a desk trying to figure it out with pencil and paper. Kelly had eaten half the pencil before he gave up.

He said before he groped his way out into the hall, "I am goin' on a lost weekend an' hope it stays lost with me. He'd be president t'day, instead of Harry, if only he'd been born the village idiot." Kelly slammed the door.

"Jealousy must be awful t' have, D.A." Willie grinned. "How much reward did you say I'd git from the Park Avenue citizens? A thousan' bucks?"

The D.A. brushed spots away from his eyes. "Yeah, Willie. How do you do it?"

"As if I knew," Willie sniffed and reached for his hat.

As if anybody knew.