

# How Green Was My Valet!

"Dizzy Duo" Yarn



By Joe Archibald

Author of "Slip Service," etc.

*Snooty Piper and Scoop Binney, those two newshawk scalawags, came face to face with nobility—on a slab. But Snooty, nothing if not democratic, began to oil up the throne in the state palace—for the crowning event of a blue blood career.*

IT IS a very nasty accident that puts Boston's Back Bay in more than just a dither. It was a very well-known citizen of Brookline who was in the jaloupi when it did the jig over an embankment in Watertown. In fact, the deceased was none other than Count Bonaparte de Brix, who took it on the lam from Paree when Hitler's heels hopped the Maginot Line.

The count had no sooner landed close to Plymouth Rock when he had decided to rush a certain female character named Priscilla Pryne, daughter of one of Milk Street's Pryne, Pryne and Pryne. The society scribblers had called it one of the most romantic bundling campaigns of

modern times and that Priscilla's being heiress to close to two million fish had nothing at all to do with the count's picking her for a wedding.

Me and Snooty Piper arrive at the city room of Mr. Guppy's *Evening Star* just in time to hear of the fatality. A sob sister has writing paper in her Remingwood but she yanks it out as it is quite spattered with eye juice and mascara.

"Hello, Agnes," Snooty says to the doll. "You should not let the floodgates down so, as I did not bring my rubbers. You would think no other character ever did a Brodie in a boiler before."

"I—I c-covered the w-wedding," the

cookie says tearfully. "I n-never s-saw such l-love birds. Why, I s-stood right beside Count de Brix when he ate them peanut butter sandwiches. They postponed the w-wedding as the c-count was allegoric to them. The bride-to-be was p-prostrate an'—"

"I never even knew about it," I says. "Well, there is a sheet to get out even if the count is past tense, Snooty."

Snooty Piper opens up a copy of a morning rag and looks at the financial page. The crackpot has acted like a Wall Street wolf since he purchased five shares of Standard Suspenders at one and three-eighths.

"The market is slow today, Binney," Snooty says. "I must call up my broker and have him unload a share or two at the openin'."

"And break the market wide open?" I says, aghast. "It is not fair to all the other investors. Shut up and go to work."

"This is very odd," Snooty says. "The firm of Pryne, Pryne and Pryne has been closed up. They are in bad straits and even worse according to what it says here. Isn't it or wasn't it lucky for the count they had it while he was alive?"

"I hate riddles worse than charades," I sniff. "I don't like the look on your pan right now, not that I ever did."

"We should go to Watertown and look things over," Snooty says. "There might be quite a follow-up on the count's exit. Maybe he committed suicide and the insurance companies would like to prove it, huh?" Snooty goes up to Dogface and says we are on the way to Watertown.

"I have a hunch," Snooty says.

"And if you could go six days without water, Ripley would send for you," Dogface quips. "Awright, go to Watertown. Don't make me guess, Piper. You will do your best to make a first degree killing out of it, won't you?"

"The guy who made a steam engine started with a tea-kettle," Snooty says.

We go to Watertown. The boiler that went over the bank is still being stared at by the natives. It is the Prynes' twin-eight Gnash and it is quite a mess.

"It was very dry on the roads last night," Snooty says. "That jaloupi has lots of tread on its tires too. The speedometer only registered thirty-five, a cop told me a minute ago. It looks like de Brix shuddered at the thought of pressing his own pants."

"Where is the remains?" I ask civilly.

"Why, I imagine the citizens carried them away for souvenirs. Some characters are fanatics like that," Snooty snorts.

"It is at an undertaker's, of course. We will go there."

**T**WENTY minutes later we are in the swankiest mortician's parlor in the suburb. Berriam Deep & Sons. The cadaver of the count is reposing on its bier. It has not been tidied up yet. There is a big swelling on the right side of the corpse's face and a cut that disfigures him a trifle.

"Safety glass was a marvelous discovery, don't you think?" Snooty says to me. "What come out of his pockets? Any sugar?" he asks the senior member of the corpse-grooming outfit.

"There on the table. A pawn ticket, a wallet with three bucks in it, a handkerchief and other junk."

"What, no check for a short beer?" Snooty says.

"This is no place for levity," Berriam says. "If you can't respect the dead, get out of here."

Snooty Piper is not one bit abashed and he goes over to the table and examines the stuff that belonged to the count. When he comes back and looks at the deceased, he has no more color in his pan than a white wax candle has red corpuscles.

"It is not like you," I says. "Up to now I

never saw the time you couldn't share a room with three stiffs for at least a fortnight, Snooty Piper. Who killed him?"

"I need some air, Scoop," Snooty says. "I wish Iron Jaw was here to make me laugh. I—er—let's go and see the widow if we can. I think Abigail Hepplethwaite could get us an entree."

"I'm for it. I ain't et since last night myself," I says.

We go to see Abigail first. She is a sort of pixilated old don who has more hay than all the elephants in the world could consume in forty years.

"What's on your mind, Piper, besides dandruff?" Abigail asks.

"We have been looking at the count," Snooty says. "How is Pris—er—the countess takin' it?"

"I talked to her on the phone not five minutes ago," Abigail says, and scratches her ear with her lorgnette. "She is bereft, she says. Hmph! I never did like that snail-munching Dracula. He couldn't take it and he went off the deep end. What do you know, Piper?"

"Not much yet," Snooty says. "We want to see the widow. We thought you could fix it."

Abigail goes to a phone and she contacts the widow. She tells Priscilla it will do her heart good to talk to Piper and Binney for a minute or two.

"You could use a laugh at this time, couldn't you?" Abigail says. She is quite a card.

We go to Brookline and see Priscilla. She is quite attractive in an angular sort of way. She has a retrousse nose and uses A's broader than Iron Jaw O'Shaughnessy's brisket. She says she hopes the journals will not give her too much publicity as the Prynnes have been hit hard all around.

"Er—did the count seem depressed over reversals?" Snooty says.

"Of caw-w-wse," Priscilla says, and

dries her left eye. "The poor boy had so much pride and all that. He pawned most of his extensive wardrobe to keep up—"

"We will do all we can to lessen your sorrow, countess, won't we, Scoop?" Snooty says. "Er—you are young an' remind me of Mary Martin so much."

"You reaw-w-wley think so, Mr. Binney?" Priscilla says. "You are just trying to make me feel—"

"I never kid nobody," Snooty says. "Black will become you."

"Come on, Snooty," I growl. "You have not as many manners as a ghoul."

Before we leave Priscilla shows us the ring they took off the late count's pinky. It came right down from the Bonapartes as far back as Napoleon himself, she says.

Me and Snooty Piper go back to Beantown proper and stop in at the Greek's.

"I wondered why the corpse had a green circle around its little finger on the left hand, Scoop," Snooty says after emptying a beaker of brew. "If you put brass against some citizen's skin, it will turn the skin that color."

"Now I know your dome is solid brass," I scoff. "Look at that hat you wear. I bet if you put a brown one on, it would turn green. What's inside your dome, Snooty Piper?"

"After a while I think I will go around to various pawnshops in Brookline and see what the count's wardrobe looked like, Scoop. I have a pawn ticket here an'—"

"You stole that ticket from a corpse?" I yell. "You are quite a sinister character, Snooty. Did you leave its eyes?"

"Oh, don't be a fuddy-duddy," Snooty says. "It is just that things don't add up or do."

"Make up your mind," I snarl.

"There was no rash on the corpse was there?" the crackpot says.

"The heat was not on him," I quip.

“How could there be? You are talking nuttier than usual, Snooty.”

**A**N HOUR later we are in a pawnshop called Honest Henry’s. The little citizen who thrives on depressions shows us the turnip that the count hocked. It is a gold watch as thick as a cafeteria bran bun and it shows it was manufactured in Omaha.

“Interestin’,” Snooty says. “Now did the same citizen put some expensive tailor-made glad rags on ice, too? Such as tails and tuxes and sport coats and morning burlap?”

“My fran’,” Honest Henry says, “For t’irteen years I com to America. I go by three school and a collitch yet. But you speak like a foreigner. Start over, pliz.”

“This creep wants to know did the guy who hocked the watch, hock some clothes, too?” I help out.

“Nope. This is all.”

Right after we leave Honest Henry’s, we go to Watertown. Arriving at the scene of the accident, Snooty ignores me and walks down the road for about half a mile. He comes to a narrow lane leading to a cemetery and gets down on his haunches.

“Look, Scoop. Tire tracks,” Snooty says. “A boiler turned in here, then turned around. That track there is quite near that old post there with the rusty nail-head stickin’ out of it, don’t you think? I should be a G-man.”

“Nuts,” I says.

A motorcycle cop comes by and he stops and looks at us.

“S-Scoop,” Snooty says, “I told you this was not the right time of year to find wild strawberries. Let us quit bein’ silly.”

“Say, your name’s Piper, ain’t it?” the cop grins. “I can tell by that green hat and suit you got on. Me an’ Iron Jaw O’Shaughnessy are neighbors an’ he has told me the craziest things about you. What

you pokin’ around here for?”

“Come on, Scoop,” Snooty gulps. “If the cops start thinkin’ too much, they’ll steal my stuff.”

The gendarme on the motorcycle scratches his dome and gets a funny look in his eyes.

Me and Snooty climb into our old heap and go to the business section of Watertown. Snooty parks at a curb and sits there watching cars go by for three hours. A cop chases us and we park in another spot.

“What are you lookin’ for?” I says, getting quite impatient.

“A green sedan,” Snooty says.

“Green!” I choke out. “Does everythin’ have to be green? A green ring around the corpse’s finger. Your green cocoon and a green pawn ticket. I am getting quite bilious, Snooty. Anyway, all this is silly.”

It is quite late when we leave Watertown. Snooty drives over to Brookline and stops in front of the Pryne mansion. We walk up a driveway and Snooty suddenly grabs at me and squeals like a dame who has found a mouse in her reticule. He looks quite as helpless at the moment as a radio comedian without his script writer.

“What scared you?” I yelp.

“Over b-by the stable, Scoop. The jaloupi,” Snooty says. “It is green. Just the right shade of the paint that was on the head of the nail on that post a character got too close to.”

We go up to the stable and look the car over. On the right rear fender is a long scratch. Snooty buckles at the knees and then staggers toward the house. The butler opens the door and says the madam has helped at least fifty men start in at college since eight a. m. We can stay out.

“Who owns the green car up there?” Snooty says.

“Why—I do,” the butler says. “You are

very impertinent to say the least. What business is it of yours?"

"Were you out drivin' last night, by chance, Jitters?"

"The name, if you please, is Jarvis!"

"How would you like to be numbered?" Snooty says very fresh. "I suppose you had a nice drive, huh?"

"Rather. I took a spin on the Newburyport Turnpike."

"That don't take you through Watertown, does it, my man?" Snooty says.

"Uh? Er—of all the blarsted impert—!"

The butler tried to shut the door in Snooty's face but the crackpot pulls a gun.

"Don't make a move as I have got you covered!"

"S-Snooty, w-where did you get that g-gun?" I yelp.

"I picked it up in the pawnshop, Scoop. Get inside, Jarvis, as—!"

Whacko-o-o!

**I**T IS not quite clear to me how the buttling citizen kicked Snooty in the chin, but anyway Snooty ended up in some shrubbery ten feet away from the front door and his roscoe flew out of his mitts and bounced off my noggin. I am still reeling when Priscilla comes to the door and looks out.

"Oh-h-h!" Priscilla howls. "It is you two again! What did you say to Jarvis to make him such a beast? Jarvis, as a rule, is a very mild-mannered person."

"C-call a cop, call a lot of cops," Snooty says, crawling out of some arbor vitae. "He is a criminal citizen, that Jarvis. Scoop, there he is! Gettin' in that green car. Stop him!"

Snooty legs it down the drive and he picks up one end of a big chain that is fixed to a post. He hooks it onto another post just a split second before the butler gets into high. Jarvis steps on the brakes and he goes right over the wheel of the green boiler and

makes a big spidery design on the windshield with his pate.

We get the butler out and take him into the house. Priscilla is quite hysterical so I have to call up the cops myself.

Jarvis is able to squawk a little by the time the gendarmes get there. He says he does not know anything about anything and then lapses into quite a coma. Priscilla sends for the family croaker and he finds that Jarvis has a crack in his noggin and might be unconscious for days and maybe forever.

"Carryin' a gat, huh, Piper?" a cop says. "Does Guppy keep an arsenal without a license? I got you on the Firearm Law. O'Shaughnessy will love this."

"Oh, stop bein' technical and come over to that green jaloupi there. We will drive it to a spot in Watertown where it left tracks last night and I will show you where a nail made a scratch in that fender there. Jarvis says he wasn't in Watertown last night so he was lyin'.

"He knows what happened to Count de Brix. There was another character in that Gnash boiler that went over the bank with the count in it. He jumped out before it went over. Then the butler went out and picked the criminal citizen up so he would get away from the scene quick."

We all go out to Watertown again. Snooty drives the green sedan out there and when he gets there he backs it up right in the tracks it made the night before. The fender scrapes the nailhead in the exact spot where it had before. Even I marvel at Snooty this time.

"I hear that science is quite advanced in criminal investigation," Snooty says. "You take a sample of the paint on the sedan and compare it with that on the nail there in a lab and you will find it is the same. No two paints are mixed the same. Ha, ha. I ought to be a G-man."

"Y-yeah, Piper. Maybe you got

somethin' here. Say, you're smart."

"Make nothin' of it. I bet that widow would look good in black but maybe she won't have to wear it," Snooty says. "I imagine that Jarvis is quite comfy in a hospital right now. If he ever talks, we got a case, Scoop Binney."

We meet Iron Jaw O'Shaughnessy the next a. m. in the City Hospital where Jarvis is still bereft of his miggies and agates. The big porpoise wants to bet us we will be held for criminal assault and carrying cannon without a permit when the butler mends.

"You got into a mess this time, twirps!" the flatfoot says. "Casey of the Watertown cops told me he saw you foolin' around that place where the count went over. Hah! So you think Count de Brix was murdered. Ha, ha."

"I know he wasn't," Snooty says. "And that is all I will tell you, Iron Jaw."

Iron Jaw cuffs his derby back over his big coco and scratches his scalp. "He wasn't? You admit it? Then what you messin' around that accident case for? Somebody around here should be put away where—"

"It is Snooty Piper," I says weakly. "I agree with you for once, O'Shaughnessy. First he says there is foul play, then he says there wasn't. I am goin' home, Snooty."

The *Evening Sun* carries a story that night about the late Count de Brix's butler and valet having engaged in fisticuffs with two reporters from Mr. Guppy's *Evening Star*. The reporters had tried to crash the tepee of a sorrowing woman, the *Sun* says. Mr. Guppy fires me and Snooty early the next morning. He says we are a disgrace to the Fourth Estate and should be prosecuted to the full extent of the law.

"Awright," Snooty says to Guppy. "But don't think you'll get us back so easy when you want us. Come on, Scoop. I have been uneasy since I arrived. At times I am

psychic, so we will just go over to the City Hospital. There is a chance that a certain rough boy can read."

AFTER quite a to-do, we are allowed to look in on Jarvis. The character has rallied amazingly and a nurse says the butler did not have a fractured skull after all. Only a concussion. Jarvis opens his peepers and then groans a little.

"Did he have any other visitors?" Snooty asks the nurse. "What do you do when you are off duty?"

"There was a man to see him this morning but we wouldn't let him in," the nurse says. "He's comin' back. When I'm off duty, I don't go to work. Ha!"

"She reminds me of Mary Martin, don't she you, Scoop? I bet her chart belongs to daddy, ha-a-a-ah!"

I groan. The nurse looks at Snooty and shakes her head. "Why is it you have to stay so healthy?" she says to him. "And all the nice people we got here sufferin'. If I had a scalpel, I would fix you up for the emergency ward."

"If I ever get sick, I won't come here," Snooty snorts. "It is dames like you who lose business. Where is the head nurse?"

"They're takin' gallstones out of her right now," the doll tells Snooty. "You think she'd like another complaint? Now shut up."

The nurse goes out and Snooty prods Jarvis. The patient groans some more.

"He is playin' possum, Scoop. He can't kid me. We have got to hurry up and grill him," Snooty says.

"Just look back," I says. "You are not a cop and you are out of a job, Snooty Piper. You have got no more right in this hospital than leprosy germs."

"The gun was not loaded, Scoop. The trigger was busted too."

I sit down and envy Jarvis and wish I had an excuse to crawl into the bed with

him. My dome is spinning and my legs are like two strips of boiled macaroni. The nurse comes back in and says we have got to get out.

"Name three reasons," Snooty says.

"Yeah? Well, that patient's visitor is back. It's his brother. There is a cop outside who says if you make any bother to just call him. And I got a quart bottle of iodine in my hand. Is that enough?"

"Come on, Scoop."

We step outside. There is a character standing close to the cop and he has a bunch of posies in his hand. One side of his face is bandaged.

"He's doin' nice, huh?" the citizen says to us.

"Yeah. He might pull through if somebody don't hand him a Mickey," Snooty says in a very funny voice.

Then I get cold all over as the crackpot suddenly dives for the visitor's legs and brings him to the floor with a very loud thump. The cop tries to pull Snooty off the visitor but Snooty sticks like a burr.

"You quit, Piper," the cop says. "I don't want to have to use my blackjack on you!"

"Why not?" the nurse says, peering through the door.

"Awright," Snooty says. "I'll let him up but you got to frisk him. If this is Jarvis' brother, then Hedy Lamarr is a twin sister to Zasu Pitts."

There is a brief scuffle outside Jarvis' door in the healing hacienda. The cop frisks the visitor and finds a bottle of white powder and it is not powdered sugar. It is arsenic, no less.

"There!" Snooty says. "Some criminal character is desperate. Take that bandage off his face, too, and I bet you will find scratches under it. Made by gravel alongside a road. Get him downtown and take his prints and see if he has a pedigree like the cur I bet he is. Somebody don't

want Jarvis to talk!"

"That s-stuff was to k-kill rats," the pale-looking character yaps. "Y-you ast Jarvis would I kill him? I am his p-pal. I want a mouthpiece."

**W**E TAKE the citizen to headquarters and book him. Three hours later we find out he is a character named Louie the Lip, who is wanted worse than a balanced budget in Chicago. He won't talk so back we go to the hospital.

"Well, we have got Louie the Lip in the jug," Snooty says. "Come clean, Jarvis, as Louie let his hair down worse than Lady Godiva. Where is Count de Brix?"

"He is dead, you dope," I cut in. "Snooty, you are gettin' more absentminded than a professor with amnesia."

"Don't be silly," Snooty says. "Jarvis knows better. Count de Brix is quite allergic to peanuts as they nearly killed him once when they fed him peanut butter sandwiches he thought was anchovy paste. Now in the stuff that came out of the corpse's pocket were two green peanut bar wrappers. Very fresh ones. The stooge liked his goobers.

"Oh, I have so many clues," Snooty goes on after a pause. "Sedan paint an' a pawn ticket for a watch that never was in France, huh? What started me off was Pryne, Pryne and Pryne goin' *phh-tt*."

"That mug won't frame me," Jarvis says. "I didn't do nothin' but pick Louie the Lip up to get him away from the neighborhood of the crime in a hurry. I'll talk. Yeah, this count landed in the U. S. all right. But he sailed from New Orleans. He was Duke Boris Ivanitch in Chicago an' I was his butler there.

"The count talked his wife into firing the butler she had. So I move in and Louie the Lip gets himself a room not far from us. So the count calls us one night for a pow-

wow. The dame has lost her sugar, he says to us. ‘This ain’t no place for me. I got to get an ‘out’.’”

“There’s a rich cupcake in Philly who is just swoonin’ for a title husband, so this Count de Brix has got to take a powder like Boris Ivanitch. We get our domes together. For a month we walk the streets lookin’ for a double for the count. Everybody has one some place. Well, we meet up with a character in Franklin Park who looks plenty like Phil the Prince—er—this de Brix.”

“Ph-Phil the Prince,” Iron Jaw gulps. “I—I’ve heard of that crook. An’ Piper here gets him cold. Who has aspirin?”

“So we hire this bosco to impersonate de Brix for one night an’ pay him a hundred bucks. He jumps at the chance, see?” the criminal person goes on. “So Louie the Lip rides with him and Louie stops the boiler and slugs the guy on the chops so’s his face will swell up. He cuts him with a shiv too. Then he put the jaloupi in gear and lets it roll.

“Louie goes down to the wreck and whangs the citizen over the head with a wrench. An’ I had to scrape the fender on a nail! I never did see such breaks. This guy was dressed in de Brix’s best suit an’ things an’ had the fake ring on his finger. Cost a buck sixty-five in Hanover Street. Like I says, what breaks—”

“Go on,” Snooty says smugly.

“Louie the Lip was dumb, I always told the boss,” Jarvis gulps. “He shouldn’t have let that guy stop any place an’ buy peanut bars. It was a dead give-away.”

“Where is Phil the Prince?” Snooty tosses at the fake butler.

“In a hotel on Tremont,” Jarvis says. “Incognito. Ha, ha. Funny where you can git in a joke. The Hotel Elko.”

The next stop is the Hotel Elko. The cops make Louie the Lip knock on the unlawful citizen’s door.

“Who is it?” a voice growls from inside.

“It is me, Louie, Prince.”

The crook opens up the door and we all go in with Louie leading the interference. Phil the Prince goes for a Betsy but Iron Jaw picks him up and throws him into a corner. Iron Jaw has his good points.

“It is too bad,” Snooty says to the criminal person. “Crime does not pay. You were going to give Jarvis a powder and then take one yourself, huh? You told the countess you had hocked your swell duds she purchased for you, huh! Look at ‘em. All laid away nice in them suitcases there, boys. You had to have ‘em to woo the dame in Philly with. Well, there is a throne waiting for you in the state palace, Phil, and you will get a very hard jolt or two when they crown you.”

“W-what w-went wrong, Louie?” the scared character chatters.

“Oh, most everythin’,” Louie the Lip says. “The darndest things.”

“Most it was because anything green attracts me so, Phil,” Snooty grins. “Most everybody else would not have seen that green paint on a nail on a post. If the pawn ticket an’ the peanut bar wrappers had been another color, I might’ve just left ‘em where they was. But Louie the Lip will have lots of time to tell you about it all over the chicken dinner the D. A. serves before citizens walk a mile. I am a little weary. Let’s go and tell Priscilla, Scoop.”

Abigail Hepplethwaite is sitting up with Priscilla when we are allowed to enter the Pryne domicile. Abigail is advising Priscilla what to do when death comes.

“Drop everythin’,” Snooty says. “Cancel the coffin an’ the widow’s weeds, flowers and all. The Count de Brix is not dead. There have been other widows left behind him like you. He is a very hardened criminal called Phil the Prince and is now behind the grill work. Read the *Evening*

*Star.*”

Priscilla faints.

“You break news so gently, Piper,” Abigail says sourly. “Like droppin’ a sheet of plate glass down an air shaft. Now, go and get some water, you squirt.”

In five minutes we have Priscilla propped up in a chair. She wants to know who did get killed.

“John Doe he’ll have to be if he won’t get identified,” Snooty says. “I bet you feel like an awful load is off your mind, huh?”

“Listen to her sing,” Abigail says testily. “Get out of here, Piper, even if I do think you are wonderful. How do you ever do it?”

“Reaw-w-w-wly, Miss Hepplethwaite. He is maw-w-wvelous. If he only had a title—”

“Let’s go, Scoop.”

The phone rings. Abigail answers it and she tells us it is Guppy calling. “He has called all over town,” the old doll says.

“We are not here,” Snooty bridles. “Tell him to keep tryin’. I will teach him to fire me.”

“Us,” I corrects him. “And Mr. Guppy does not need instruction in the art of firing. I intend to call him the moment Abigail hangs up.”

“You will never get no place, Scoop.”

“If I do, I hope you won’t be there,” I says swartly and walks to the phone.