

Headline Hawkshaws

"Dizzy Duo" Yarn



By Joe Archibald

The Boston bulls finally landed a real crook without Snooty Piper's crackpot assistance. And the only way left for the woozy newshound to regain face was to change his name to Smith and reserve a room at the morgue.

EVERY year something happens in the world that is supposed to be impossible, like Hannibal crossing the Alps with elephants, a two-headed calf, quintuplets, and the atomic bomb. So me and Snooty Piper should have expected Iron Jaw O'Shaughnessy to catch a criminal sooner or later. Iron Jaw has been a detective in Boston as far back as we can remember. A citizen could carry a bushel of tomatoes in Iron Jaw's derby, and two pairs of his old shoes could help solve the housing shortage. The only kind of anatomy Iron Jaw hasn't too much of is brains.

It all starts one morning when me and Snooty are in the city room of Mr. Guppy's

Boston Evening Star trying Dogface Woolsey's patience—which is not a difficult thing to do. "It is no wonder our circulation needs a transfusion, Scoop," Snooty says, as he peruses a copy of a rival sheet. "The Daily Bugle was smart in gettin' the Little Dabney comic. Why, everybody is talkin' about Jennie the Jackal from Upper Sloppovia. What have we got, huh? The adventures of Tiny Teena."

Dogface slams his shears down, picks up the paste pot and bangs that down. "Get your ugly mush out of that comic page and go to work, Piper! The Bugle also has a story of a near massacre at the Greek's last night. You two slugs didn't even hear about it though that is where you spend

most of your time. If you played for the Red Sox you would have to ask who DiMaggio was. Here is a rewrite, Piper. Get it back on my desk in just fifteen minute or you are fired. You, Binney, start answering some lonely heart letters as the doll is indisposed today.”

We go to work. After a while Snooty says to me, “Why don’t big crime news happen around here? This is a story of an eighty grand payroll robbery out in Pennsylvania. A guard that was bonged on the pate told the cops he got a good look at the boss of the bandits just before he spilled his marbles. He is the kind of character who can’t remember the details of what he sees, but could recognize them if he saw them again. The police of Punxatawney say it looked like the kind of job Boo Boo Benson would pull.”

“Boo Boo,” I says. “Public Enemy Number One! I heard about him on the radio, Snooty, and that is that as close as I care to come to the gee.”

“It says here the G-men want Boo Boo for six bank robberies, three rub-outs, a kidnaping, and an extortion charge.”

“Didn’t he never hear of treason?” I asks.

“Piper, drop everything,” Dogface says, and bangs up his phone. “You go along with him, Binney. A loft over on Boylston has been cleaned out of mink wraps. Look at what the U. S. Treasury will lose if the crooks get away with it and sell ‘em without the tax. They just found it out as the watchman couldn’t call when it happened, him havin’ been nudged with a heavy instrument.”

“We’re off,” Snooty says. “Come on Scoop!”

WE ARRIVE at the scene of the robbery and find two well-dressed citizens wringing their hands, and a third party rubbing an igloo over his right ear

and mumbling like a sheepherder touched by the sun. The smallest of the two pelt-purveying panthers says at least forty grand in minks has been lifted and that he is ruined.

“How do you think the minks felt when they was skinned?” Snooty sniffs. We hear something large moving about in the next room. “Sounds like a grizzly still very much in possession of its pelt, Scoop,” Snooty says. “Two guesses!”

Iron Jaw comes out and snarls at us. “You two lemonheads, huh? Well, keep outa my way.”

“That means we’d have to go out in the street,” I retort.

“Looks like Kilroy was here,” Snooty says.

“Well, if he was I’ll have him inside twenty-four hours,” O’Shaughnessy says. “Somebody will catch up with that punk yet.”

He pushes Snooty out of the way and says to one of the mink monopolists, “I’ve cased this jint thorough, an’ I found me a clue. It is one of ten punks I suspect, Mr. Otterbein, so you and Mr. Badger don’t worry as I’ll make an arrest within—”

“Twenty-four hours,” Snooty finishes. “Someday I’ll meet a cop who is different and will say forty-eight. Are you givin’ your public a snow job again, Iron Jaw?”

“You keep on, Piper, an’, I’ll skin you and use you fer a rug at my house,” O’Shaughnessy says, but he does not seem quite as nettled as usual. “Awright, whatever you type lice find now is yours. Ha!”

We mooch about for several minutes. Snooty comes up with a sheet of typewriting paper, folds it up careful, and puts it in his pocket. “I wonder if there is a fur bandit named Achilles. The Greek ought to know his fellow countrymen, Scoop.”

“Achilles,” I mutter. “He was a heel,

wasn't he, Snooty?"

"Let us go to the Greek's," the crackpot says.

We arrive at our favorite bistro and order beers. Snooty flattens out his sheet of paper on the table, and I see the imprint of a rubber heel. There is a design on it, a dot inside a triangle. Snooty stares at it and scratches his dome. "It is very familiar, Scoop. Now where did I see it before?"

"Didn't you get a new pair of heels put on just yesterday?" I asks. "Lift up your foot, Snooty."

Snooty does. I nod my head and he throws the clues away. "You are not as sharp as usual, are you, Snooty?"

"There is nothin' perfect," Snooty snaps at me. "I wonder if Iron Jaw is busy arresting ten citizens as yet?"

We got an answer an hour later. Nick comes over and says one of us or both is wanted on the phone. "She sounds like he is that flapfoot, O'Shaughnessy, to me, Spiper. You should pay halves of my phone bill," Nick says.

IT IS Iron Jaw. He wants us to come to a tavern over in Charlestown right away. It is called Franky and Johnny's. We get there in twenty minutes and go upstairs to a crummy office where a very downcast-looking citizen is already handcuffed to Iron Jaw. Two other unlovely taxpayers, looking the worse for wear, are sitting on the floor. They are linked together and not by blood ties. The room looks as if two big moose had been deciding the mastery of a forest in it.

"Well, Piper," Iron Jaw says, biting a little loose skin off a knuckle, "don't say I never give you two clucks first crack at a big news story. I been lookin' for a crook with a cut finger. After callin' on two or three who didn't have one, I finally found one that did. Harpo Piza, here. The goon an' his palsies put up a battle, but what a

chance they had, huh?"

"You can say that ag'in, Iron Jaw," Snooty says in a very small voice. "How did you—?"

"Up in that loft I found a bandage offen a finger," O'Shaughnessy says, puffing up like a Goering. "Come offen a fat finger I could see. So when I found a crook with a fresh bandage on, boys, I just made the arrest. The bloodstain on the bandage I found just fits over the spot where the cut is on Harpo's finger. Exhibits A and B are there on the table, Piper."

Snooty falls into a swivel chair. "Now I have seen everythin', Scoop. There will be perpetual motion discovered next. Nothin' is impossible. At last—"

"I slugged a confession outa Harpo here," Iron Jaw says. "The furs are stowed in his garage three blocks from here, he says. I'm waitin' until the boys who went there call me back before I take these punks in. If they lied, they will git a taste of Bikiny. I—"

The phone rings. Iron Jaw grabs it. "H'lo, h'lo! Yeah? Well, what y' know, Mike? The whole load, huh? Well, we sure did this time, huh? Inside of twenty-four hours—"

Snooty groans.

Iron Jaw hangs up and gloats.

"Of all the cockeyed luck!" Snooty says.

"Go on an' chew on your sour grapes, Piper," the big flatfoot grins; "Let's see you swipe my stuff this time, ha! For weeks they'll be talkin' about this li'l slick piece of police work. Most likely the public will demand I get a permotion, from it. Maybe them fur guys will gimme a reward on the side."

"Well, Snooty," I says. "Let us hurry over to the *Evening Star* and write our exclusive story. 'Culminatin' one of the swiftest drives against lawlessness in the history of our fair city, Iron Jaw

O'Shaughnessy trailed the fur thieves to their den and subdued them with his bare hands. O'Shaughnessy, fearless and devoted to his duty of protecting the citizens of Boston, told reporters—'

"Shut up!" Snooty barks. "I won't write a line about the big slob, Scoop. It's all yours."

"You can't take it, ha?" Iron Jaw says, and nudges the head crook with a size seventeen shoe. "Come ahn, punk. We're goin' down to book you for the next few hundred nights."

Piza cusses Iron Jaw out and says he will get hunk when his time is up.

"Yeah? You'll know me by the brass-topped cane," Iron Jaw mocks, "and my long white beard. Well, that is all I have to say to the press, Piper. So long, Binney."

DOGFACE WOOLSEY compliments us on beating all other papers to the story of Harpo Piza's arrest and says Mr. Guppy will hear about it. "I don't see how you two creeps manage to do it, though. Just when I'm ready to fire you, you come up with somethin'. But that kind of luck won't never last. Yeah, that's the biggest crime story we've had in six months, locally. O'Shaughnessy'll capitalize on it. I guess you got a lot to take back about him, Piper."

"I say he still can't win," the crackpot yelps.

"I wish I could be as stubborn as you," I sniff.

The next A. M. the story of Iron Jaw's apprehension of the fur bandits gets every front page in the Hub, and one newspaper runs an editorial about him. I never saw Snooty Piper looking in worse health. He starts brooding and talking to himself. Finally at three o'clock in the afternoon, Dogface Woolsey calls him over to the city desk, and I follow.

"Yeah, it's a hard blow to you, Piper," Dogface says. "An' I'm goin' to give you an assignment I was goin' to give someone else just to show you I want you to get over your misery. How would you like to go to the Bradmore Hotel for three days, all expenses paid, huh?"

"There's a catch somewheres," Snooty says. "It has got eight cases of polio there, huh?"

"Always suspicious, ain't he, Binney?" Dogface asks of me.

"Under the circumstances, I can't blame the crackpot," I snap.

"No catch to it," Dogface says. "Let me explain, Piper. In just a couple of days there is a convention goin' to be held at the Bradmore, the oddest one I ever heard of. It is a convention for all the John Smiths that want to come from the metropolitan area. Mr. Guppy suggested that we try an unusual stunt, and not just send a man they'll all know is a news reporter. We'll send a John H. Smith, Piper. You are that Smith."

"What'll they think of next?" I snort.

"Not bad," Snooty says. "There is a cute mouse on the newsstand in that joint, Dogface. When do I register?"

"On the first day it starts," Dogface says. "Now bein' one of the Smiths you'll be able to get some human interest stories you couldn't get, if they knew you was from a newspaper and wasn't named Smith. They wouldn't let their hair down to the fourth estate."

"I'll take it," Snooty says. "It'll help me forget Iron Jaw bein' a hero."

"Where do I come in?" I asks pleasantly enough.

"Only to visit him," Dogface says. "If you make any breaks to spoil this I will murder you, Binney."

"All right, Snooty," I says. "So—"

"I beg your pardon?"

“Excuse me, Mr. Smith,” I sniff. “Of all the—”

“That’s the ticket, Piper,” Dogface approves. “Start living the character. You are John H. Smith from—er—Saugus.”

“What is journalism comin’ to?” I want to know. “This is sillier than any moron story.”

TWO days later I follow Snooty Piper into the Bradmore Hotel. The chowderhead’s ensemble, with the exception of his brown shoes, is a very miserable shade of green. He carries an alligator suitcase borrowed from Dogface. “Good afternoon,” he says to the clerk. “Any of my brothers arrive by chance?”

“Oh, are you a Mr. Smith?”

“I ain’t one of the Brown boys, ha,” Snooty says and scribbles with a pen.

“John H. Smith,” the clerk says. “A Smith registered some time ago, the first Smith. The camera men are waitin’ for him to come down.”

“That is just my luck, Scoop,” Snooty wails. “I would have to be just the second one. Oh, well, give me my key as it was a gruellin’ trip from Saugus.”

“Huh?” the clerk says as a bellhop grabs Snooty’s bag. “Saugus is only about—”

“I flew,” Snooty says loftily. “Our instruments went out an’ you know how foggy it is out. We went to Providence by mistake an’ had to fly back. I hope you give me southern exposure.”

We tread toward the lifts and then the rhubarb starts. Some guests emerge from the cage. One is a citizen wearing a very natty pin-stripe suit, camel’s hair coat, and dark glasses. A bellhop yelps, “That is him, gents!”

Up from a divan pops two characters packing flash boxes. One is built along the lines of a grapefruit and the other is tall and thin, like a pipe-cleaner.

“Awright,” says the fat boy. “Let’s git some good pitchers here! Stay right where you are, Mr. John Q. Smith. That’s a good feller. Now—”

Smoked-glasses looks quite astounded and he is also getting huffy. “What’s the idea? Git out of my way!” The bellhop gets hold of a camel’s hair sleeve. “It is just they want a pitcher of the first John Smith to register, Mr. Smith. They are from the press. They—”

“Nobody is takin’ my picture!” John Q. Smith yelps. “What’s the big idea anyway?”

“Why, the convention of course,” a photographer says. “Now just hold it like that. That’s the—”

There is a flash that makes a blink. There is a sound of a plate being removed and another one sliding into place. Then the gent in the camel’s hair rushes at the fat boy. He picks him up and tosses him right into a portly doll’s lap. Dames scream and a lot of them faint.

John Q. Smith gets the camera, hurls it against a marble column, and it is no more. “I said I didn’t want no pictures. Is that plain?”

THE house dick appears just as the skinny photog, irked by the attack on the fat boy, hurls himself at John Q. Smith. “Beat up my pal and smash his camera, hah?” He makes a pass at John Q. He misses. Then the boy in the camel’s hair makes a pass and does not miss. *Kerchong!* The skinny cameraman is knocked right into the house cop’s arms. More dolls pass out, and the ones that do not start yelling like Comanche squaws.

“I think he is bein’ unreasonable,” I says.

“It is a break, Scoop. Now they’ll take me instead.”

The manager gets into the melee, also two cops from out in the street, but they

cannot stop John Q. Smith from getting possession of the second flash box and throwing it over the top of the cashier's cage. There comes a smashing sound followed by a shrill scream. The house dick tries to pin the guest's arms but doesn't quite. He gets an elbow in the teeth and staggers backward, probing at loose choppers.

"That is a disgraceful way for a Smith to act," Snooty says. "You have disgraced us!" Before I can remonstrate with the crackpot he is pushing a fist into John Q. Smith's pan.

"Yeah? I'll murder you also!" the citizen in the camel's hair yelps and almost does. Snooty ends up at the base of a rubber plant with his eyes crossed. I pick up his hat, a key with a plastic tag hitched to it, and a partial plate.

"You are in no shape now to pose," I says. "I wonder will they arrest John Q. Smith."

There is quite a conference between the manager of the Bradmore, the house dick, and two cops. After awhile they decide to forget it all before it gives the convention a bad name at the start. "It's a citizen's right not to want his picture taken, ain't it?" John Q. Smith argues. "I was mindin' my own business an'—"

"He has a point there, Scoop," Snooty says. "All that was needed to make this Donnybrook complete was Pocahontas rushin' in looking for a John Smith. Well, let's go an' look at my room." He staggers into the lift. I pick up Dogface Woolsey's bag and trail him in. There is no sign of our bellhop.

"We'll save a quarter," Snooty says. "Anyways, I got the key."

"I might of known," I says. "Any place you go you can expect an upheaval of some kind. It is a good thing you can't get into the UN."

"Stop gripin'," Snooty says. "Eleventh

floor, please!"

OUR key is number 1102. Snooty opens up and we go in. It is a very desirable cubicle with twin beds and a bath with a sunken tub, but there seems something wrong with it.

"You notice anythin'?" I asks Snooty.

"It is occupied, huh?" the crackpot says. "I'd better call up the desk an' complain. Two beds. They must have put the cough-drop Smith brothers here, Scoop. Where's the phone?—er—wait a minute!"

He sits down on a bed and stares at me. "I do not believe there is one citizen in twenty thousand that hates to get his picture took, Scoop. The citizen in the camel's hair was very photogenetic. Why all the fuss he put up, huh? I bet you picked up the wrong key I dropped. You would!"

"It was the one closest to you," I protests.

"You picked up John Q. Smith's key, I bet," Snooty says. "He dropped it when he pasted the fat boy. Just for fun let's look about a little, huh? He didn't act like he knew he was at a convention."

"You realize, of course, it is illegal," I point out. "But why should that bother you?"

"First, I am a newspaperman," Snooty states dramatically. "Second, I am a John Smith. I have a hunch, Snooty." He picks up three newspapers and peruses them for a while. I do not like the look in his eyes. "That is funny," he mumbles and tosses them back on the dresser. He walks to a closet, opens it up, and looks inside.

He comes back, leans against the dresser, and ogles in a black bag which is just visible under one of the beds.

"Don't you touch it," I says and shakes all over. "If the house dick hears of this—"

"He is at the dentist's about now, Scoop. I wonder is the bag locked." He looks into the mirror and talks to himself.

“Would you do it if you was me, pal? Yeah? Okay, I will.”

“Good afternoon,” I says. “I’ll call you about Friday, Snooty. I do not intend to be an accessory in a burglary, especially when you are usin’ an alias at the moment.”

“I might not be the only one,” Snooty says, and picks something off the dresser and holds it up to the light. “A necktie clasp, Scoop. The initials are not J. Q. S. We have fallen into somethin’.”

“I am sure we will, if a certain citizen comes in. Right out into Copley Square, and it is eleven stories down.”

“Don’t be so pessimistic, Scoop,” Snooty sniffs. He goes over by the bed, kneels down, and hauls out the black valise. Of course he finds it locked, but the discovery amazes him.

“Kind of heavy,” he says, and takes a penknife from his pocket.

“Don’t you dare do that, Snooty Piper!” I yelp.

“Watch the door, Scoop.”

“I am goin’ through it and shut it behind me!” I snap, but before I can, it opens. In comes the character in the camel’s hair coat. I am sure smoke is coming right out of his cheaters and I can hear his teeth grinding. More than that he has a very wicked-looking Betsy in his right fist. He shuts the door behind him and snaps the lock.

“Awright, boys, so you got the wrong key, huh?”

“Mistakes do happen, ha ha!” Snooty gulps and gets up on his feet and sways like a tower of kids’ blocks built up too high. The beads on his pan are not from early morning dew.

“Like openin’ the wrong bag, pal?”

Snooty, for once in his life, cannot come up with an answer.

“Okay. I’m out in the street when I tumble I’ve forgot a handkerchief. I go to the desk an’ ast for my key. It ain’t there,

so I says I must of left it in the door. It is too bad for you punks I caught a slight cold yesterday.”

“Ever try them menthol sniffers?” Snooty asks. “The best remedy for a cold I ever—I can explain, Mr. Smith. This pal of mine is absent-minded like a Harvard professor. He was sure he got into the wrong room but not quite, so he says if we look in the bag he could know for sure seein’ he has his initials on his shorts.”

“Yeah,” I says fast. “I guess my room is eleven hundred an’ eight like I thought all the time, an’ not eleven hun’red an’ six.”

“This is eleven hun’red an’ two,” the gee in the camel’s hair says. “Let’s cut out kiddin’ around. How much you know?”

“Not a thing,” I says, my teeth chattering. “I do not know from nothin’.”

“Git over against the wall,” John Q. Smith says. “Put your hands up.”

I AM beginning to thinks of things that scare me when the gee comes up with my press badge. “Thought so. You two punks started addin’ two an’ two after that brawl I had with the photogs, huh? You cased this joint pretty, yeah? You wanted to see if I wasn’t a Smith.”

“Why, I never heard the like, Scoop,” Snooty says, not very convincing. “See what you can get into through nothin’ at all? The next time you fergit your room number, I hope it’ll be a lesson you won’t never fergit.”

“There won’t be no next time,” the character with the smoked glasses says. “So a couple of lemonheads like you thought you would grab Boo Boo Benson, huh?”

I almost swoon. “S-Snooty, you hear what the m-man said? The man said he w-was—”

“He is wh-wh-who I w-was afraid he was, Scoop,” Snooty stutters. “Th-that bag

h-has—”

“Eighty grand in it,” Boo Boo snarls. “Ever see a cyanide bomb they exterminate rats from ships with? I got one in the satchel, pals. That bathroom can be made airtight. Sometime tomorrer they might break down the door. They’ll find two Smiths ready for the bye-bye boxes. A suicide pact, huh? I sure hate to louse up this convention. What a lousy break I almost got by not usin’ the names of Jones instead.”

This is the way things happen next. When Boo Boo takes off his smoked glasses, .he puts them on the dresser. As Snooty comes away from the wall, he sees that the cheaters were just balanced on the edge. So he nudges the article of furniture with his hip. The smoked specks drop to the rug and he steps on them.

Boo Boo Benson lets out a cry of alarm. Of course, his first thought is to prevent them from getting busted up, as without them he is sitting on a powder keg. So he automatically lunges forward and shoves Snooty, just as the cheaters drop to the floor.

I do not stop to think of Lana Russell and how seductive she looked in her last picture. I go in at Boo Boo, charging as nicely as a well-coached Army lineman.

Boo Boo crash lands and shoots off the Roscoe. A light bulb in the bathroom disappears. The public enemy is as agile as a puma loaded with vitamins A, B, and C. He bounces up like an india rubber man, his miniature Skoda spitting pellets. One of them burns along the crease in the top of Snooty’s green hat. Another chugs into a Gideon Bible reposing on the dresser.

Snooty charges and so does Boo Boo. Their heads meet and they make a sound like two bowling balls meeting in mid-alley. Boo Boo bounces back and sits down

on the seat of his pants. I can only see the whites of his eyes. Snooty ends up jack-knifed just inside the bathroom. His hat is still spinning a foot from the ceiling.

Boo Boo Benson is not quite human. Before I can get my bellows filled after witnessing the head-on collision, he is unlimbering a second Betsy. I hit him with the telephone directory before he can get a good bead on me, and his breath whooshes out. Then I throw his black satchel at him. He stops it with the middle part of his face and goes down once more. I am hitting him over the head with a shoe when the door crashes in.

The house dick aims a gun at me and I point to Boo Boo before I faint.

SNOOTY is fanning me with his hat when I open my eyes. “Go ‘way, I gulp. “You’re dead. Nobody’s dome, not even Iron Jaw’s, could stand up under that—who is everybody?”

“It is okay, Scoop,” Snooty says, and strokes me like I am a cat. “It is people come to take Boo Boo away.”

The manager is sitting in a chair tearing up his carnation. The house dick is sitting on Boo Boo while two cops pry open the satchel.

“Aw, don’t knock yourselves out,” Boo Boo mutters. “It’s in there, the dough I got from that Punxatawney job. Smith I have to use when there was a million other names. Of all the lousy breaks a guy ever got. A convention they hold of all the Smiths and I have to be the first one to register. If you read that in a book—”

“I am thinkin’ about Iron Jaw, Snooty,” I says. “Just when he is ridin’ the gravy train. You could git thrown into a Pittsburgh blast furnace, you fathead, an’ you would emerge intact, carryin’ a peach parfait in each hand.”