

The Belle Told

"Dizzy Duo" Yarn

By Joe Archibald



Snooty and Scoop, those Beantown newshounds, scented something strange about that landlady's rub-out. But before they could nose out the culprit's trail, their old menace, Iron Jaw, put the bite on them.

ME AND Snooty Piper come home one night from a trying day's work at the Boston *Evening Star* and find our landlady waiting in the hall. Mrs. Fragnagle says she is sorry but our rent will be three dollars more every week for each of us, beginning as of now.

"You should be sittin' on a horse an' wearin' a mask and holdin' two horse pistols," Snooty protests. "We won't pay it and will see the mayor,"

"If he's got an extra room, go ahead," the old babe says. "I have got eleven applications since an hour ago for your room. And more coming."

"And I bet each one has a dozen legs,"

Snooty sniffs. "This flea trap has enough wild life in it already. We have to sleep crosswise of the bed, as it is listed to port, and the wall paper is peelin' like a doll who has spent three weeks on Revere Beach. Of all the lousy dumps—"

I step on Snooty's foot and thrust him aside. "We'll be glad to pay, Mrs. Fragnagle," I says sweetly. "We wouldn't think of goin' no place else,"

"You're tellin' me?"

"Come on, Snooty," I hiss at him, and pull him up the stairs quickly.

"It is a disgrace, Scoop, man's inhumanity to man," Snooty Piper says when we get to our hall room. "Nothin' good is comin' of the extortion goin'

around. It could lead to murder, an' I feel halfway to the hot squat right now. Mrs. Fragnagle has asthma, an' they say if one gits a good whiff of ammonia when they have it, it means a new obit in the journals."

"Git hold of yourself," I snap at Snooty.

"Huh, why am I actin' up like this, Scoop? Life can be beautiful," the crackpot says. "Here I almost forgot I had a date tonight with a mouse who works in a beauty saloon. Isolde McGah. An' she says if I got a friend she has, too."

"Here we go ag'in," I sigh, and look disconsolately about the room. "Snooty, tonight I am game for anythin'."

We meet the dolls in the grog shop of the Avery. I have had two beers, but wish it had been twice that many zombies. Snooty's babe is not bad when you look straight at her, but her profile is something else again. She has too much nose and not enough chin. There is enough red goo on her kisser to paint a birdhouse. But the mouse I am supposed to convoy—she has flat-heeled shoes and wears a pair of cheaters with tortoise-shell rims, and she wears a Sunday school attendance button. Her name is Priscilla.

"What'll we do?" Isolde chirps after a healthy snort.

"My plans are quite complete," Priscilla says, after draining a hefty glass of root beer. "I have tickets to a lecture where a Harvard professor is to talk about the anatomical structure of the praying mantis and its nocturnal habits. I know Mr. Binney will love it. He seems to be the intellectual type."

I am trapped. I clutch at my throat and gasp for breath. "S-Snooty, quick—the digitalis. It is my ticker again. Oh-h-h, I've overdone ag'in. Snooty—!"

"Wait here," Snooty Piper says to the mice. "Scoop, I'll have a stiff on my hands

yet." He leads me to a drugstore. "Awright, scram, Scoop. I don't blame you this time."

I run up Tremont and duck into the Greek's, near Scollay Square. Nick's eyes pop. "Now what does it happen, Binney, hah?" he asks.

"I met Priscilla. Is John Alden's credit good here?" I pant.

AFTER some nerve stimulant I trudge to a movie, and after that I go back to Mrs. Fragnagle's and hit the sack. Snooty comes in around two A. M. and wakes me up.

"You look like you got hit with a pail of red lead," I sniff.

"She was quite a smoocher," Snooty says, and wipes off his pan. "Why do they go for me, Scoop?"

Sometimes you do not bother to answer Snooty Piper.

It is just seven in the A. M. when there comes a lusty hammering at our door. I shake the cobwebs out of my noggin and get up and slip on my robe and stagger to the shaking portal. The landlady says Snooty is wanted on the phone.

"I'll take it," I mumble. "By the time he is conscious, you will be equipped with radar."

I hello the citizen on the other end and right away a very excited voice yelps, "Piper, this is Willie Repp. Now look, I said I'd give you somethin' for coverin' that fire for me the night I got boiled. There is a murder out here—a cop called me into this house on Commonwealth as I was passin' by. Number 1476-12, Snooty. I bet I ain't a legman much longer after this. See you there, Snooty."

"Thanks," I says. I hang up and run back upstairs. "It is murder, Snooty! Get up!"

The crackpot leaves the sack like a carnival character leaving a cannon.

“Where?” he yips, and grabs his pants at the same time.

Twenty minutes later we leave a cab in front of a rooming house on Commonwealth, and there is a police jalopy already at the curb and helping get pulled clear of it by two husky gees is Iron Jaw O’Shaughnessy.

“Wait, I’ll get a tow car,” Snooty calls out. “The city should provide a bus for that big slob!”

Iron Jaw is on the payroll the taxpayers have to ante up as a detective, although he could not trace a drawing made by a six-year-old. If he fell into a blast furnace, he would have to look around for quite some time to see what was burning. Right now he really is burning, and he stands and slays Snooty with the dirtiest look I ever saw, including ones I’ve seen in coal mines.

“You! How in the aitch you get wise to this one? I’m beginnin’ to think—”

“Anythin’ I will believe but that,” Snooty cracks. “How did I know? The wind was just right. Why, hello, Willie! A fine bad-weather friend you are. Was holdin’ out on me, huh? Awright for you—”

“He called me, Snooty,” I says. “I just didn’t have the time to tell you. Let’s go in, shall we?”

Iron Jaw tries to exclude us, but Snooty reminds him of a big war that was fought to preserve the four freedoms and says he will report the outrage to the UN and all veterans’ organizations, so the big mental shortage relents.

The victim is reclining in a back parlor on the ground floor, and she is an old doll named Deborah Flabish. A cop says an early riser named Keech found the remains when he knocked on her door to pay her some scratch. The door swung in and he got a gander at her.

“I said it would happen to a landlady someday,” Snooty says, and rubs the palms of his hands together.

“Have a little respect for the departed,” I sniff.

“Do landlords when they evict citizens?”

“Now everybody git out of my way,” Iron Jaw trumpets. “I want lots of room to work in.”

“Better ask the rates first,” Snooty keeps needling.

THE roomer named Keech is still sitting on a chair out in the hall. He is a timid-looking character who looks like he’d been born poring over a ledger, and he keeps clacking his store teeth. Iron Jaw yells for him to come in.

“I didn’t kill her!” Keech squeaks.

“Now where have I heard that before?” Iron Jaw sneers. “Why was you up so early?”

“I work in a produce market,” Keech says. “I start in at eight. I—”

A fat citizen arrives, carrying a black bag, and he is not there to read the gas meter, but to see how long Deborah’s ticker has ceased to function. He examines the cadaver and then looks up at the cops. “Been dead at least seven hours. Hit on the head by a blunt instrument. *Rigor mortis* already’s set in. Okay, O’Shaughnessy, you can have her.” He snaps his bag shut.

“Okay, take some pitchers, boys!” Iron Jaw orders like he was a flatfoot in a B movie. “Dust everythin’ for prints and look for the murder weapon.”

“Can I go?” Keech asks humbly.

“Yeah,” Iron Jaw roars. “But don’t you leave town!”

We look at what is left of Deborah Flabish. She was not a bad-looking tomato for her age, and it is apparent that she recently had a fashionable hair-do.

“Was all dressed up like she was goin’ out or expected a visitor,” Snooty observes.

Iron Jaw and the cops go through everything in the room like flour going through a sieve, and one flatfoot howls suddenly, “The drawers of this desk have been ransacked. It was robbery!”

Then another gendarme comes up with a foot-high cast-iron model of the Empire State Building in New York. “Found it behind this wastebasket, O’Shaughnessy. It could of killed her.”

“I would hate to of got hit by the Empire State Buildin’ myself,” Snooty sniffs. “Now we’re gettin’ somewhere. Of course the assassin’s prints are on it.”

“Handle that careful!” Iron Jaw yelps. He rushes at the cop holding the souvenir and grazes Snooty Piper, and that is like Snooty was sideswiped by a B-29. The crackpot lands on his face and skids into a corner and whangs his pate against a baseboard. He stays there for a while.

“It was robbery an’ no mistake,” Iron Jaw yips. “Wa’n’t done by no professional killer as he would of never left the weapon. This killer was the nervous type, suffered remorse from his awful crime, an’ his only thought was to git away from the scene of the cr—”

“Yeah, an’ her handbag was open an’ the stuff in it all mixed up,” a cop says.

Snooty gets to his hands and knees. “I was just stand in’ there, mindin’ my own business,” he raves. “The movin’ van must of had two wheels up on the curb an’—”

Iron Jaw looks at Snooty and laughs. I rush over to my pal when he falls prone once more. “It’s awright, Scoop,” he whispers as I bend over him. “I am only playin’ possum.”

“You can tell the boys out there they can remove the corpse,” Iron Jaw says. “Soon as we git prints off the souvenir,

we’ll check up on every tenant in this joint.”

WHEN they have taken Deborah Flabish to the edifice of no return, Snooty gets to his feet and massages his skull. All but one gendarme evacuates the rooming house, and he says, “If you lugs have took all your notes, beat it!”

We do. A few minutes later we are in the Greek’s and discussing Mrs. Flabish’s demise, pro and con.

“Some citizen’s way back in his rent,” I offer. “What better place to get the moola than off the old doll, Snooty.”

“That is too pat,” Snooty mutters. “That is the first thing anybody would think of. Ha, imagine the guilty character leaving prints behind. Iron Jaw should write his memories and call them Gullible’s Travels. Ha-a-ah!”

“Nobody can be wrong all the time,” I asserts.

“Iron Jaw has for many years, and he only has about thirty or forty left,” Snooty counters. “As long as he dodges atomic bombs, he could stay on forever.”

“We’ll find out in a couple of hours,” I says. “Nobody can be as lucky as you all the time, neither.”

We arrive at headquarters an hour before lunchtime and loiter outside the police lab, and soon who comes out with a lab technician but Iron Jaw. The monstrosity is grinning like Gargantua sitting in a freight car full of bananas.

“Well,” he says, espying us, “you will be the first to know! There was some nice prints on the model of the Empire State, Piper! They wasn’t made by the old babe as we checked to make sure. I am even invitin’ you to sit in when we brief all the roomers in that joint.”

Snooty looks at me. “He just can’t be right, Scoop.”

At eight o'clock that night we are once more in the back parlor of the late Deborah Flabish's rooming house. Every tenant is accounted for, and they file in one by one, and get their prints taken. This goes on until a little babe of about sixty years, trying to look half that age and getting nowhere, drops a present right in Iron Jaw's lap.

"There was one person threatened Mrs. Flabish," the tenant says. "I heard him do it. I come down to pay my rent about a week ago an' waited outside. She had a nice big room on the second floor front vacant, an' this man wanted it, only Mrs. Flabish wouldn't let him have it an' the dog he had with him, too. He carried on somethin' awful, an' you know how desperate people are who are without a roof these days!

"Why, he said he had a good mind to kill her, an' poor Mrs. Flabish screamed. Then the man come runnin' out. He was of medium height and wore a dark double-breasted suit, is all I remember. Oh, wait, Mrs. Flabish showed me a card he left on her table. It must be around somewheres."

The cops find a little basket half filled with cards. "Just case the ones on top," Iron Jaw says.

"I would remember the name," the little babe says, "if I heard it. Mrs. Flabish told me about him an'—"

Iron Jaw reels off some names. "J. Roy Smeary. . . Alfred S. Schneck. . . Vernon F. Wattleby . . . Miss Chloe Younce. . . Egerton Dinsmore Feditch . . . Roland B. Spurge. Miss Iola—"

The tenant yelps, "That was it. Roland Spurge!"

"H'm-m," Iron Jaw reflects, then ogles the card. "Says here he is president of the Spurge Automatic Zipper Company, South Boston. Go get him boys! This is some detective work, if you ask me."

"Nobody did," Snooty scoffs.

"Don't be a poor loser," I throw at him.

"Everybody here can go," O'Shaughnessy says, puffing up like a pigeon loaded with poisoned oats. "Only don't none of you leave this house, see?"

Iron Jaw's mood at the moment is quite as expansive as his bulk. "You can go along to headquarters with me, Piper. You too, Binney."

WE DO. We wait there for about an hour, and then two big flatfeet arrive with Roland Spurge in between them. Roland is quite indignant until they get his prints and match them with the smears they took off the miniature Empire State Building. They were made by one and the same citizen, Roland Spurge.

"There's your murderer!" Iron Jaw says to the D. A.

"I can explain," Spurge sputters.

"I admit threatening the old bag. She refuses to let me have a roof over my head because I own a great Dane. You would think a dog wa'n't man's best friend. Yeah, I got a temper. I picked up that thing you got the prints off, but changed my mind quick an' tossed it away. Then I scrambled."

"Who has been sleepin' in my bed, says the middle-sized bear," Iron Jaw jeers in an affected voice. "Awright let's stop kiddin', Spurge. Where was you at the time Deborah Flabish was rubbed out, between the hours of eleven P.M. and one A.M.?"

I was—er—it is none of your business," Roland Spurge yips.

"Okay," Iron Jaw says triumphantly. "Lock him up, boys. What he says will be used against him. We got the motive. We got the murder weapon with this punk's prints on it. It is just as good as havin' the corpse brought back so's she could talk. How am I doin', Piper?"

Snooty shakes his head. "No comment. I am astounded, Iron Jaw."

"Nobody can say I ain't a sport," I says and offer Iron Jaw my hand, which was a mistake. Feeling comes back into the flipper by the time we reach the city room of Mr. Guppy's *Evening Star*. Snooty sits down and bangs out the story thus far, and I look over his shoulder and see where he has labeled the rub-out: *The Calling Card Murder Case*.

"I still say he didn't do it, Scoop," he says. "My heart isn't in this stint."

Dogface Woolsey, the city editor, sneaks up behind us. "Neither is your brains, Piper. That's the lousiest lead I ever saw. 'Refusing sanctuary to a man and his faithful dog, Mrs. Deborah Flabish paid with her life late last night. The alleged slayer, Roland Spurge, was apprehended shortly before noon today and held for the grand jury. It was in the cards that he should not go free for the heinous crime—'"

"I better finish it," I says. "You are not yourself, Snooty."

"The trouble is he is," Dogface snaps. "I want that copy in just three minutes, Binney."

"I have something to do at a drugstore," Snooty says. "See you later, Scoop."

"There is nothin' I can do about it," I retort.

That night in our room I suddenly think of something. "Snooty, what did you mean yesterday when you said you was playin' possum?"

"Huh? Oh, I just found somethin' on the floor when Iron Jaw knocked me there, Scoop. It could be somethin' or nothin'."

"That makes it clear to me, Snooty," I snap at him.

"It will be developed by ten in the mornin', Scoop. I wish you didn't have such a negative personality."

NATURALLY I go to the drugstore on Portland Street with Snooty at ten A.M. A clerk hands Snooty a yellow envelope and collects thirty-five cents and then we go to the Greek's. After a beer, Snooty takes two small prints from the envelope and peers at them closely. He gasps and clutches at his throat. His eyes bug out as if his thyroid had suddenly become superactive.

"It can't be. I'm imaginin' things, Scoop."

"How can I tell if you don't show me?" I says irritably.

He tosses the prints my way. The paper of both is mostly white. There is part of a photograph on each. It is a dame, and even to me she looks too familiar. I could swear that it was a profile of Isolde McGah.

"Snooty, it looks just like—"

"It is her, Scoop," the crackpot chokes out. "I found a piece of a negative on the floor near the baseboard. I wondered why it wasn't a whole one so sneaked it into my pocket. What was a thing like that doin' in that roomin' house? Is she a relation of the late Mrs. Flabish? This is fantastic!"

"I wonder," I sigh. "Don't forget you found it."

"Yeah. That back parlor never got cleaned too often, Scoop. I guess you noticed, too. So if the model of the Empire State got tossed behind that basket, there is no sayin' what day it was done, huh?"

I take a more complete gander at the fraction of a snapshot. Part of Isolde's shoulders show and looks like she wore a negligee. There is something close to her kisser that could be the reproduction of a man's ear. I mention all that to Snooty Piper.

"Yeah, it looks like somebody got snapped with her, Scoop," Snooty bridles. "The two-timer! Well, we will go and call

on that babe and make her sing.” He drains his beer glass, then hops to the Greek’s phone booth. He calls the dame.

When he comes back, he says Isolde can’t see him until around ten o’clock that night. She has three permanents and a henna pack to take care of between that hour and dinnertime.

“She lives at an apartment hotel on Newbury Street, Scoop. Do beauticianists make that kind of scratch?”

When we eat lunch sometime later in a grab-as-you-go beanery on School Street, we peruse the journals. We find that Roland Purge remains adamant as far as giving an alibi is concerned, even if he has one. Iron Jaw comes in for some praise on the editorial page of a tabloid, and on the photo page they use up four columns showing the readers a halftone of what he looks like. Even then all of Iron Jaw doesn’t show.

“I think we’re bein’ silly,” I says. “Spurge did it. Isolde could have a double as everybody has accordin’ to—”

“There are not two schnozzes like hers in all the world, Scoop,” Snooty insists, and I feel inclined to believe him. “Huh, I think I know where the connection might be.”

He goes to the booth near the cashier’s cage and riffles the pages of the directory. He finally drops a nickel. He comes back five minutes later in a sweat.

“I called that beauty parlor ag’in, and got Madam LeFleur, the proprietor, Scoop. I ast her was Deborah Flabish a client, an’ she said she was. Catch on?”

“Then the babe knew the old doll,” I says.

“Scoop, I can’t wait.”

AT EXACTLY ten P.M. we ring the dame’s bell, and she opens the door and lets us in. She wears a very alluring house coat which exhibits more curves

than you’ll see of an afternoon in Fenway Park when Joe Dobson is pitching. She has perfume on that never came in big bottles, and she has drinks ready.

“This is a wonderful surprise, Snooty,” she says and waves us to a divan.

“Quite a snugger here,” Snooty exclaims and accepts a Martini. “I wish this was all the way a social call, sugar.”

Isolde lifts a clipped eyebrow. “What else could it be?”

“You better take another belt,” Snooty advises, and Isolde needs very little coaxing.

“You heard about an old babe named Flabish gettin’ the permanent, huh?” Snooty asks Isolde.

“Of course. I read the papers. They have picked up the guilty man.”

“Maybe,” Snooty says. He produces the reproductions of the fragments of a negative and hands them to the babe.

She looks at them quick, bats both eyes, and steadies herself with the back of a chair. “Where did you get that?”

“On the floor in the Flabish pueblo, sugar,” Snooty says. “You knew that old dame. Why would I find a piece of a photo negative there?”

Isolde pours one out of a bottle and takes it neat. Then she gapes at Snooty Piper. Suddenly she snaps her fingers. “Well, I’m a monkey’s niece!” she says. “Have I been a dumb broad!”

She goes into her boudoir, and we hear her rummaging around. A drawer bangs shut, and out she comes. She has a snapshot about four by three and hands it to Snooty. He looks at it like a starving Greek would at a club sandwich with olives on the side. He can’t believe it, so I lean over to see if I can. Brother!

It is a picture of Isolde in a lounging wrapper, and she is sitting on a middle-aged citizen’s lap and seems to be promoting at least a diamond tiara. The

goggle-eyed male's features are very plain.

"One day Mrs. Flabish calls me to her house to do a job on her," Isolde starts in. "She makes me a proposition, Snooty. There is five C notes in it. It seems her rooming house had a mortgage on it a derrick couldn't lift. Only the big boy you see there. She was way back on her interest and this guy, Smew, got a court order of some kind that let him grab the rents here.

"So the old doll hit on an idea to save her happy home, and that was for me to vamp the villain when she sent him to me personally to pick up the rent for a room I would only use for one night. It was a cinch. I turned on the woo, and he fell like a ton of bricks. The old babe got her a picture of the smooch."

"Blackmail!" Snooty yips.

"Sure. A couple of weeks after I said to myself, why don't I get some of that sucker's gold, too?" Isolde goes on. "So I go over to Mrs. Flabish's and demand one of the snaps. She gets a negative and is about to hand it to me when she changes her mind. I make a grab and only get a piece of it, and then I hear somebody coming so I take a powder. I toss the piece of negative away as I don't see what good it is. Snooty, you think that Smew—"

"Who else?" Snooty says while I remain atomized. "He can't grab the Flabish joint with that frame hanging over his dome. Most likely he is happily married an' got weak just once, and has a wife who wouldn't even read a magazine with 'a man of distinction' ad in it."

"I sure have been dumb," Isolde says ruefully. "Why, I could have even blackmailed that old babe. Sure, Smew knocked her off to get those prints and the negatives. He—"

THE doorbell rings. Isolde hurries to get the door and says she is expectin' a friend named Heloise. When she opens it up, she lets out a screech that lifts me and Snooty right off the divan. She backs into the room as a big character comes in, a Roscoe in his fist.

"Been outside the door, baby," he says icily. "Lucky I come to call. Sure I could have knocked off that old dame. Nobody is goin' to prove it on me. I says to myself, that trick that helped frame me might have a picture, and I better make sure I covered up all around. Who are these bimbos?"

"We are newspapermen," I says, trying to keep my knees from knocking out a tune. "We are just here on a social call an'—"

"Nuts," Smew snarls. "Back up against the wall. Babe, hand over that picture you showed these guys. The cops have got a candidate for the hot seat, and I aim to see they stay satisfied with what they got. I got too much at stake to bungle things up now. My reputation, an' the house that used to belong to the old dame."

The character is desperate all right. "You can't git away with it," Snooty says. "We know all about it, no matter what you do to the doll here."

Smew grins like a jackal looking over the best part of a heap of carrion. "Nothin' will happen only a double suicide and murder or vice versa, lemonhead." Isolde hands him the snapshot and then passes out.

"This is the way they'll figure it, boys," the real estate character says. "You two come here an' fought over the girl. One knocked her off in a fit of jealousy, killed her boy friend, then rubbed out himself. I read it in a detective story once. Sure, I'm a desperate man. I am Horace Smew of the real estate firm of Underhill and Smew. I am a civic leader in my community and a vestryman of the church.

I can't take chances anybody is left holding a negative or a finished snapshot. When I leave, this gun will be in the hand of one of you two guys. My prints won't be on it."

"You are a fiend," I gulp.

"No, just an astute business man, my boy," Smew says. "Just sit down because we must wait until one of those big planes fly over again. They make a lot of noise, huh?"

"You think of every thin', don't you?" Snooty says.

"I am a successful business man, if that is what you mean," Smew says, and waves Snooty into a chair.

The dame stirs and gets to her hands and knees and mumbles like a prospector caught in the desert without a hat. She looks up at Smew and is about to cut loose with a scream once more, and he points the Roscoe at her. She swoons an encore.

"Ha," Smew says. "They got the murder weapon at headquarters. I brought my own persuader, gentlemen, a nice sash weight, and it is now on the bottom the Charles River. Cops as dumb as we got should not worry anybody if he has brains."

I SWEAT ice cubes. I am sure I hear the faraway sound of a transport plane. I look at Snooty Piper beseechingly, but you would think the gland case was watching a strip act at the Old Howard. He is sitting on the edge of the divan next to the wall, tossing a quarter up and down in his hand. The coin falls to the carpet, and Snooty leans over to pick it up. Then he makes a quick grab at something else and yells, "Duck, Scoop!" as the room plunges into darkness.

Smew fires. Something tugs at my ear, but it is not Isolde. The airplane is closer and making a lot of noise. I fall over something in the dark, and Isolde McGah

lets out a blood-curdling scream. Smew fires again and misses me not by much, and his mistake was forgetting Snooty. I hear him grunt with much distress as I slide headlong into Isolde's boudoir.

I get quite a lesson in astronomy when I come to a stop. When my dome clears, I hear sounds out in the living room like two water buffaloes were arguing over riparian rights. I get to my feet and weave my way out, a good-sized bottle of bath salts balanced in my hand.

"Hurry, Binney, he is killin' him," Isolde screeches.

"Who is—to who?" I says a little irrationally, then see a target and let it go.

Bath salts go all over the place just as the door bursts open and admits two big cops and a dozen frightened and outraged tenants. All have a weapon of some kind. The light from the hall comes in and plays on the upright figure of Horace Smew who has the Roscoe in his hand once more.

"It is not possible!" I choke out. "That bottle of stuff weighed ten pounds if it—"

"You ain't exaggeratin', Scoop!" Snooty says, just as a cop's billy club flattens the real estate market. "You conked *me!*" He staggers toward me minus one pant's leg and his necktie turned completely around and pulled as tight as it can go around his neck. His face is turning blue and when I grab at him, pieces of crockery come out of his corn-colored locks.

"Awright!" a big cop says when the lights are turned on. "Somebody better talk."

"First let us show you a snapshot," Snooty says. "It should be on the person of that citizen on the canvas. After that I'll tell you a long-after-bedtime story which should only happen on the radio. The culprit there is Horace Smew, and he knocked off a roominghouse keeper named Deborah Flabish."

The cops laughed sneeringly. “We know who done that already.”

“No kiddin’?” Isolde McGah says and frisks the person of the addled Horace Smew herself. “Take a squint at this, Buster.”

The cop does. “Why, that’s you,” he says to Isolde. *Tsk-tsk.*”

“And the party of the second part is what you crocked with the baby flagpole,” Isolde yelps. “I ought to know why Smew knocked off Mrs. Flabish as I helped her frame the— what am I sayin’?”

NOT being a habitual criminal, Mr. Smew does not know all the angles or the whereabouts of loopholes, and when he is lifted to his feet he is a very scared realtor and admits right away he eased the old dame off. He is very contrite over it all and even weeps, but needless to say me and Snooty Piper are not touched.

After the D.A. has heard all he needs to know and a stenog closes up her book, we go out in the corridor where Iron Jaw O’Shaughnessy is counting his fingers. “A negative—I was so positive—Piper has a doll—she knew Mrs. Flabish an’ Smew wanted to foreclose on the Empire State B—no, I’ll start over. The man had a dog—man’s best fr—”

“I’d leave him be,” Snooty suggests compassionately. “Look, there is Roland Spurge with his lawyer.”

We hurry after the released suspect. “I—er—beg your pardon, Mr. Spurge,” Snooty says. “I am only the gent who saved you from a scorchin’. Tell me—why didn’t you give an alibi if you had one, huh? I’ll never sleep nights ag’in if I don’t find out.”

Spurge scowls. “Awright, but if you breathe a word, I’ll hunt you down an’ kill you slow with a knife. The time Mrs. Flabish was murdered, I am dickerin’ with a guy who will soon give up an apartment—as soon as he divorces his wife. If that got out, a hundred guys besides me would nail him and most likely offer him twice what I could pay. What would you have done, huh?”

“I see what you mean,” Snooty says. “Isn’t this housing situation gettin’ critical, Scoop?”

“Someday somebody will do somethin’ about it, even a senator or the equivalent,” I says. “It is too bad about Isolde, though. She could get quite a stretch, Snooty.”

“Never waste no sympathy on criminals of any shape or kind, Scoop,” the mental deficient tells me. “They should expect to pay for breakin’ the law. I got no sympathy with that mouse. If she’d been smart she could of hooked Smew for a hundred grand and what lawyer couldn’t of got her off for half of it.”

Sometimes I do not believe Snooty Piper has a soul.