

When Snooty and Scoop were doled out a couple of murder chores, their errand of evil fitted them for

Strait Jackets for Two



“Dizzy Duo” Yarn

By Joe Archibald

ONE fine morning me and Snooty Piper arrive at Mr. Guppy’s *Evening Star* to find the city room running quite a temperature. Dogface Woolsey, the city editor, is the most jittery customer we ever saw outside of a strait jacket.

“What is the big story?” Snooty asks. “Let me guess. Hess flew back to Germany or Adolf slipped on the Steppes of the Kremlin and broke his neck.”

“Don’t bother me,” Dogface says and pushes the paste-pot stick into his mouth and drops a cigar into the paste jar. “I have all the brushes I want and am loaded down with insurance—er—oh, it is you two creeps. Well, get busy at somethin’.

Nobody is safe in Boston. For ten bucks you can get any citizen you want killed. Oh, it is awful.”

“No wonder you worry,” Snooty says. “Now I can afford to murder you, Dogface. But we still don’t get it.”

“Look,” Dogface yelps. “There have been a lot of unsolved murders in Boston the last six months and the citizens are calling for the scalps and toupees of the mayor and police commissioner. The cops picked up a crook last night more dead than not and took him to a hospital. Somebody beat the daylights out of him and he won’t ever be able to see even at night again. Before he croaked he told how he got in wrong with a rub-out ring and how there is

an organization in Boston called Associated Assassins. Think of it, Piper!"

"Like the characters in Brooklyn who thought up Murder, Inc., huh?" Snooty sniffs. "Nobody should copy anything the Brooklyns do, should they? Where is their clubhouse?"

"How should I know?" Dogface says very loudly. "You would of died laughing at Dunkirk. Everybody must be serious about this thing as even now the criminals might be plotting a bargain day for rub-outs. Maybe even a dollar day. This crook they picked up was from out of town. He said the chief of the killers hires out-of-town crooks so that Boston cops can't tag them quick. There is going to be a conference at the City Hall this afternoon and all the newspaper publishers, presidents of womens' clubs and just everybody will be there."

"Maybe these dishonest characters had something to do with the Sludge killing that was never solved," Snooty says.

"Of course not," Dogface counters.

"Associated Assassins have only been in business for six months, the guy who was knocked off said. Anyway, don't you dare bring that up. Let's forget it or the public will play it up again. Everybody must volunteer for this crusade so you two go out and look around places where the dishonest element hangs out. We can't have another Boston Massacre."

"Come on, Scoop," Snooty says.

"I shouldn't."

We go over to the Greek's to get a beer and our bearings. Snooty pulls a lot of old letters, cards, pawn tickets, etc., out of his pockets and spreads them out on the table. He singles out a dog-eared, faded snapshot of a swell doll in a bathing suit and looks at it, sighing. He has carried it with him ever since the Sludge liquidation.

"If we could have found out who this cupcake was," Snooty said, "we might

have solved that crime Scoop. I remember one of the characters in the case. He had mumps and Iron Jaw tried to make him talk."

IT WAS about eighteen months ago that John Q. Sludge was knocked off near his home in Brookline. Sludge was a member of the brokerage firm of Sludge, Murkle and Sludge of Milk Street. The cops found no more clues on or near the citizen than there is scales on a hoot owl, and they could not find a motive. Snooty Piper got the snapshot of the doll from the undertaker who primped Sludge. Snooty never told me how.

"This was not Sludge's wife," Snooty goes on, "unless it was snapped forty years ago. And how could it have been, as they did not allow dames to wear such daring suits? I bet Sludge was a philanderer."

"Anybody is entitled to go to any church they feel like," I sniff. "Anyway, that case is ancient history."

"I hate to think of an unsolved crime," the crackpot says. "Even I couldn't get nowhere with it. Oh well, it is over and done with. What will we do about Associated Assassins, Scoop?"

"The same thing we should do if a Bengal tiger with rabies charged us right now," I says flatly. "Run like hell!"

"What would it matter if two ordinary citizens like us perished if we could save a city, huh?" Snooty asks. "In the occupied countries of Europe, they do not think of themselves when they rub out a Nazi."

"I won't listen to you," I says. "You could talk me into anything."

Me and Snooty get back to the city room about 4 P. M. Dogface says we should go right into Mr. Guppy's office and it is urgent.

We do. Mr. Guppy smiles and shakes hands with us and I am quite sure something smells of haddock. Two big

smartly dressed citizens are with Guppy. They look me and Snooty over like we were exhibits A & B at a murder trial or two samples of prize porkers at a county fair.

“Sit down, boys,” the boss says. “This is the new police commissioner, Mr. Twitchell, and with him is Mr. Brandywine, president of the board of aldermen. We have been talking over a desperate plan as the situation is desperate and calls for drastic action. You have heard of Associated Assassins, of course?”

“Uh-huh.” Snooty says. “I wouldn’t take any stock in it. If—”

“H’mph,” Guppy says, swallows hard, and goes on. “The methods of this gang of killers are unorthodox, to say the least. Their chief hires characters who look like anything but killers. Puts the police off guard with such psychology, yes. It is fantastic, incredible, boys.”

“It is not good,” I admit.

“Commissioner,” Mr. Guppy says to Twitchell, “did you ever see two citizens who looked less like assassins?”

“I have never, Guppy. They are just the men for the job. Shall we tell them?”

“Snooty,” I hisses, “I could swear they mean us.”

“You can say that again, Scoop.”

“We have talked over a daring plan,” Twitchell says to us. “We have one chance in a million that we have found a very important lead, a clue we found on the dead gunman. A card he carried has the name of a South End florist on it—Rocco Pastrami. Now in the big house over at Charlestown we have just locked up a criminal named Itsy Bitzel from Toledo.

“He is beginning a stretch of five to ten. He once ran the Violet Gang in Toledo, but happened to crack a crib here in Boston while visiting friends. We have talked to Itsy and promised him we would knock a year or two off his rap if he would help us

out against Associated Assassins. He agrees to help by giving us local color in Toledo. Givin’ us names of crooks there.

“The idea is that when you two go to the South End and ask around for a citizen who doles out murder chores, you will be able to talk with the big shot about Toledo like you always worked there. You will both pack gats and act like killers. Change your appearances a little—”

“Why bother?” I gulp and try to keep my teeth from rattling loose and scattering all over Mr. Guppy’s rug. “They will do that for us, so our relatives won’t recognize us. Come on, Snooty.”

“I want to hear more,” Snooty says.

“Mr. Guppy and all the rest of us know of the marvelous work you have done with criminal cases,” Twitchell says. “We are sure you can help break up Associated Assassins. Will you try?”

“No—period!” I says and reach for my Truly-Horner.

“Oh, don’t be a coward,” Snooty sniffs. “Someone must risk his life. When do we start?”

“I said ‘no’, you crackpot!” I snap. “Nobody will make me. This is one time you do not hypnotize me. Hah!”

THE next morning me and Snooty Piper are at headquarters getting our pans and things changed around a bit. A flatfoot cuts off most of my locks and covers one of my front teeth with gold leaf. I look over at Snooty. His hair is cropped close and his dome is the shape of a glass eye.

“Ha!” I says. “His ears look twice as big and stand out like lily pads. We will call him Ears. Ears Spumoni.”

“Not bad,” a cop says and Snooty agrees. The flatfoot slaps a mustache over my upper lip. It is a little black one with the ends pointed and waxed.

“Lippy DiLeo,” Snooty says. “I wouldn’t know you, Scoop. Ha ha!”

They make Snooty peel off his green suit and put a flashy plaid one on him.

“That is all the disguise he needed,” I toss out. “Without green burlap on him, he is a total stranger to anybody.”

I get a pin stripe suit that is even louder and funnier. When we are all set with shoulder holsters and fillings, we walk out of the laboratory and are on our way to chat with Itsy Bitzel. We meet Iron Jaw O’Shaughnessy out in the corridor. Iron Jaw is listed as a detective in Boston. The big grampus could not locate a wheat field in the Ukraine. We get close to him and suddenly rush him and push him against the wall.

“Make a move, pal,” Snooty says, “and we will air-condition your front porch. Git his watch, Lippy!”

I do, then start running. Snooty is right behind me. We turn a corner just as Iron Jaw pulls out a roscoe and starts shooting. We get into a washroom and hide.

“Yeah, that’s what I said,” we hear Iron Jaw complaining to somebody. “Right here in headquarters I am stuck up an’ they took my watch. Oh, if the papers hear of this. Imagine it, right here in—”

We slip out unobserved, quite pleased with our disguises. We go over to the big pokey in Charlestown and have quite a chinning with Itsy Bitzel. After that we journey to the Greek’s and get a pickup or two. It is dark when we arrive in the South End. We finally locate Pastrami’s flower shop on Dover Street; hie to a grog shop near-by. It is full of customers and a lot of them are tough looking to say the least. Undaunted, we push our way to the bar and name our poison.

“Itsy ain’t lookin’ so good, Ears,” I says. “Stir disagrees with him, huh?”

“Soft pedal, Lippy,” Snooty says. “Wonder if Pauline will come an’ see him. Maybe she will ditch him and carry the torch for Louis the Lamb. This boig ain’t

Toledo, Lippy. A guy can’t make a buck.” Snooty whispers then. “Keep shakin’, Scoop. Act like you needed a shot.”

“I am shakin’,” I says. “I ain’t actin’. Ah—er—let’s scam out of this sleepy dump, Ears. They was kiddin’ about employment here.” I reach for my drink and pick it up. My hand shakes very fast and I spill rye all over the rompers of a customer next to me.

“Listen, Sloppy,” the bar fly says quite nasty. “I think I will slug you in the kisser, see?”

“Go ahead, pal,” Snooty says and reaches for his armpit. “Try! My pal here is a little noivous, is all. He needs a shot—”

“A snowbird, hah?” the tough guy says sickly. “Sorry I opened me mout’. So long—I am not thirsty no more.”

We keep talking about Itsy and a doll named Pauline, and citizens of Toledo named Benny Buffo and Al the Ape. I keep tugging at my collar and shrugging my shoulders, and Snooty says we had better go somewhere and sniff some joy talcum.

“Come on, Lippy,” he says. “Else you’ll blow your top, hah?”

“You can say that ag’in, Ears.”

WE GO into the washroom and I take a little transparent envelope from my pocket and slit the top off it. I am swallowing the powder when a very innocent and inoffensive little character enters the place. He looks like a file clerk out slumming.

“I heard you talkin’ in there,” he says, “about Toledo an’ some reg’lars there. I am Willie the Whisp, How about meetin’ a pal of mine? You could use some scratch, huh?”

“Only all the time.” I says.

“I noticed the artillery,” Willie says. “Maybe you’ve heard of me, yeah? I was picked up twicet for murder.”

“I wouldn’t know,” Snooty yawns.

"You want employment, yeah?" Willie says. "I can show you some, pals. Couple of guys stepped out of line and there is room for two big shots like you. Let's go an' see him anyways."

"Yeah. Maybe this ain't a one-horse boig!" Snooty says. "Got enough snow, Lippy?"

"Plenty," I come back. "I could tear the wisdom teeth out of a wolf right now. Say, how do we know this is not a dick who followed us from Toledo, Ears? Let's give this bum the breeze."

"Gimmie a chance to show you I'm reg'lar, guys," Willie pleads. Won't hurt to talk wit' the boss, will it?"

"He's right, Lippy," Snooty snaps, "If things look screwy, we'll start blastin',"

"Come wit' me," Willie says.

We arrive at a flat over the flower shop. Just as we go in, a citizen walks out, his hat pulled down over his eyes. His chops are quite pale.

"Clients are more noivous than we are," Willie grins. "Hello, boss, meet a couple of right guys from Toledo," he tosses at a taxpayer who looks as harmless as a dove's first-born. Rocco Pastrami is a little shrimp with the streamlines of a cantaloupe and his pan is like Pierre Laval's.

"I see a customer go out," Willie the Whisp says as Pastrami gives us the optical brush-off. "How much?"

"Just a hundred," Pastrami says. "Only wanted a rich aunt poisoned. Well, punks?"

Snooty goes for his gat and I nearly faint. Willie hangs onto Snooty as Snooty howls, "We didn't come to this boig to git insulted, Pastrami. Big shot, huh?"

Pastrami grins, then comes over and shakes hands. "If Willie says you are oke, it is oke with me, guys. Wait, there's the buzzer again. Another client maybe. Take them into the next room, Willie."

I keep shaking and no fooling. My teeth rattle so I take another shot of bicarb.

"Gimme one, too, Lippy," Snooty says.

"You guys are gettin' high," Willie the Whisp grins. "Boss, if you get a tough job, give it to my pals here. Right now they would walk into the mayor's house an' knock him off."

"I said take 'em in the next room, Willie."

We go into the next room and Willie says to make ourselves comfortable while he goes out to buy a quart or two.

"Let's make it through the window, Snooty," I gulp when we are left alone. "I never was so scairt in my life."

"Just when we clicked so perfect?" Snooty scoffs. "Anyway we have got gats and can shoot our way out if trouble starts."

"Why, I never thought of that," If says. "Then everythin' is just fine. But things went too perfect to suit me, you fat-head! I am still scairt."

We wait a half hour and I wish the bicarb I am carrying is really cocaine. Willie suddenly opens the door and asks us to come out.

"GOT a job for you," Pastrami says. "It'll prove if you guys have moxey. You each get a C note for the stint. You don't need to be told who the victim is goin' to be, as he will be in bed when you let him have it. Imagine it, guys? That bozo came to hire us to kill *him!*"

"Huh?" I choke out.

"Yeah. He's got an incurable disease, he says. Not fixed too good with the sugar so wants his wife to collect double from the insurance company. Violent death, see? So you git a soft job to start you off on the right foot. The victim knows you are going to rub him out so you don't even take a chance."

"He is a swell boss, ain't he, Sc—Lippy?" Snooty says.

"Y-yeah, he's aces," I says very, weak. I have to sit down before I fall down.

“He will be out in a cabin he has in a woods near Sudbury,” Pastrami goes on. “Only one bed in the cabin and he will be in it. Eleven o’clock you rub him out, see? Jus’ walk in, fill him full of holes, then walk out ag’in. It is like stealin’ money.”

“I never heard of a sweeter racket, Lippy,” Snooty tells me.

“Boy, I can’t wait,” I says and gobble up more bicarb.

“To show me you have moxey,” Pastrami says.

“Imagine Sc—Lippy,” Snooty says. “Moxey? An’ us knockin’ off thirty-one citizens in Toledo. Gimme some joy dust, Lippy. We will fill that client full of more holes than a nutmeg grater, won’t we?”

“I believe you would—er—sure, Ears,” I force out.

Me and Snooty found out later that Mrs. Pastrami never gave birth to no dopes. We should have tumbled sooner. Anyway, we drive a green sedan out to Sudbury which is not too far from Boston. We follow directions on a rough map and drive off the main road into another road that is as crooked as Pastrami. Soon we come to a cabin on the edge of a pond. Snooty looks at his watch. It is ten fifty-five.

“Why stop so far away from the cabin?” I ask. “The victim expects us, huh? Why stop anyway, as we couldn’t kill nobody? Or I couldn’t.”

“It does sound silly, doesn’t it, Scoop?” Snooty replies. “We are going to apprehend the character for attempting to defraud an insurance company as suicide is against the law. After we have him locked up, we will take him to the cops. Then we will raid Pastrami. It is the easiest case we was ever on, isn’t it?”

“Ask me later,” I groan.

We get to the cabin and take a gander through the window. Some coals still glow in the fireplace and they gives off light enough for us to see the citizen in the bed.

“Now, Scoop,” Snooty says. “Pastrami’s gorillas might have followed close enough to make sure we killed the victim, by hearing the gats go off, see? They made sure, maybe, that we was not cops. That is why I did not call up the police on the way. I will fire shots at the ceiling as we enter. Come on, Scoop.”

We walk in. Snooty lets the Betsy roar and pieces of plaster come off the ceiling.

“Wake up, you fakir!” Snooty yelps. “You are under arrest.”

“Somethin’ is wrong,” I gulp out. “He did not even jump, Snooty. Turn up that lamp there as I hear somethin’ leakin’ and it is not rainin’ outside.”

SNOOTY turns the lampwick up and then we look at the bed and embrace each other, we are so scared. The character in the bed is defunct and the sound I heard is not tomato juice dripping to the carpet.

“Scoop!” Snooty says. “On the dresser there. A picture of a doll. It is an enlargement of the snapshot I have got in my pocket. I can’t stand no more. Let’s get some police—”

“Hello, punks!”

We swing about. Rocco Pastrami is standing in front of a closet with a Betsy in each fist. I start to faint, but Snooty holds me up.

“So you are big shots from Toledo,” the greaseball snarls. “I heard enough. You are workin’ wit’ the cops. You was right, pals. I took no chances so I come out ahead of time to make sure of my client. I had Willie the Whisp follow along to see you got here, an’ didn’t stop to talk to the bulls. That you out there, Willie? Come right in an’ join the party. Let’s give ‘em the works!”

“Yeah,” Willie the Whisp says and goes over to look at the stiff. I tell Snooty what I will do to him across the river.

“An’ me only twenty-six,” I moan. “All them years ahead of me to git to see Lana

Turner in person. Oh, if I had time, I would give you two black eyes to take along—”

“Roc!” Willie yelps. “This is not our client. Somebody has— Look at this stiff!”

Rocco Pastrami jerks his head toward Willie. I dive at him and get him around the ankles. He goes down and hits his coco against the hearth of the fireplace. But he is very tough and he gets up and goes at me again. One of his cannons is still in his hands. I duck low and ram my noggin into Pastrami’s pantry.

The criminal character shoots backwards into the fireplace and sits down in the hot ashes. I grab the bellows and fan the ashes to flame. Pastrami yells something awful and tries to crawl up through the big stone chimney with his rompers on fire.

“How is everything, Scoop?” Snooty yelps. “Look what I’m doin’ Willie!”

Snooty has Willie’s head out the window and has brought the heavy sash down on the back of Willie’s neck. He keeps lifting the sash and letting it drop again.

“Look what I am doin’ to Pastrami,” I cry out. “Oh, no you don’t, you cold-blooded assassin!” I grab Pastrami’s legs and pull him down again and he sits in the coals and screeches like a Piute with an abscessed molar.

“That is just a taste of the hot squat,” I yelp triumphant. “If you was a marshmaller, Pastrami, you would be ready to eat now.” Then I pull him out on the floor and hang a beaut on his chin. Snooty drags Willie away from the window, measures him and stretches him out on the floor close to Pastrami. We find rope and tie them up like northern artery traffic on Sunday afternoon.

“Look, there is a phone here, Scoop,” Snooty says. “There would be in such a spiffy hideout joint. I will call the cops in Boston, Marlboro, Maynard, and Sudbury.

Oh, what a mess—the picture of the doll here—the wrong client. Hello—hello. Give me police headquarters. Hurry—”

While we wait for gendarmes, we inspect the corpse. It is quite illegal as we know, but we are that curious after everything we had been through. There is no identification on the unfortunate citizen. But Snooty finds a pocketbook crammed with scratch to the tune of eleven hundred.

“IT DOES not add up,” Snooty says. “His clothes are quite plain and shiny; but he packs heavy night spot ammunition. That picture of the doll there, Scoop. It ties up with Sludge. Get it? A character, such as the victim here, would not carry all that sugar unless he won a sweepstake or was dishonest. Pastrami did not know he packed the shekels or he would’ve— Scoop, I got a hunch.”

“I hope it is malignant,” I sigh.

Three carloads of cops arrive. A stiff expert appraises the victim. Then Pastrami groans, and opens his peepers.

“What goes on?” a cop says.

“Wait,” says Snooty and leans over Pastrami. “What did the real client look like, Pastrami? The jig’s up as you confessed to killing this gent.”

“He was a big guy,” the criminal says. “Wore glasses wit’ a ribbon on them. Had a black mustache and looked like—like—this Ant’ony Eden. Thin as a match—ow, I am burnin’.”

“We have got two birdies with one dornick, Scoop,” Snooty yelps. “We will pay a call on a certain character when I look him up in the phone book. No wonder I didn’t recognize the victim. He had mumps the last time I saw I him.”

“If you don’t mind,” a cop says, “what happened?”

“This is the president of Associated Assassins,” Snooty says, “and one of his board of directors. Take them into Boston

right away. Some of you follow us as we must pay a hurry-up call. We will clean up an unsolved crime. Oh, yeah, I am Snooty Piper and this is Scoop Binney. Both of the *Evening Star*. Let's all go."

We stop at a drug store in Newton while Snooty looks up an address. Then we are on our way again and finally stop in front of the Hotel Chargemoor, Back Bay.

"We will go upstairs," Snooty says. "You officers of the law follow close now."

Snooty stops at a door marked Apt. B-9, hammers his knuckles against it. We all hear a binge going on inside. In a few shakes, a little Nipponese character opens up and then tries to slam the door shut again. We all trample the sukiyaki addict and crash the party. A big skinny boy in soup and fish is leaning over a piano and is coaxing a swell redhead to give off with more of the sonata she has been working on. He snaps up his noggin and glares at us.

"Mr. Murkle," Snooty says, "you are under arrest for the murder of your partner, John Q. Sludge, for hiring one Rocco Pastrami to shoot you, only you sent Jipping, the Sludge butler, out to become the victim. We have Pastrami in the clink and all we have to do is take you down and confront him with you. It was a dastardly deed, Amos Murkle, you snake in a sheepskin I bet you got from the Harvards!"

"It is a lie," Murkle chokes.

MURKLE says he won't say a word until he sees his lawyer. But when we show him Rocco Pastrami, he doesn't need a lawyer and admits it.

"That's the big shot," Pastrami says. "He hired me to knock him off, but he didn't show up. Nobody can be trusted nowadays. What was the idea, you big stiff?"

"Answer that nine dollar question, Murkle," Snooty says. "You victimized

Pastrami!"

"I confess," Murkle gurgles. "The stock market hasn't been so hot, you all know that, don't you? There wasn't enough in the firm for both me an' Sludge. One of us had to go and he had the control. Jipping, his butler, saw me knock Sludge off in that dark lane that comes up to Sludge's house. Jipping figured he was set for life so kept his mouth shut. He had been blackmailin' me. Oh, you can't make crime pay, gentlemen, can you?"

"Well, I heard about Associated Assassins and finally found a way to contact the ringleader. I told Jipping to go out and fix up the cabin for the week end, and that I would arrive the morning after he got there. So he was there when the assassin arrived—"

"So were we," Snooty says. "We were the mugs hired to liquidate Jipping. Would you think by lookin' at me and Binney that we erased thirty-one citizens in Toledo?"

"Yeah," a cop said.

"Ha," Snooty counters. "You're a card, copper. It is a good thing Willie found out it was the wrong victim and yelled at Pastrami, Binney and me.

"Newspaper guys!" Pastrami howls. "Not even cops? That's enough. Git me a stenog and I'll rattle off every name on my payroll. When I walk to the hot seat, I don't want to feel lonesome."

"We wouldn't have tied up the victim with you, Murkle," I says, "if Snooty had not kept that picture of a bathin' beauty, and if Jipping hadn't carried so much hay."

"I don't get it," Amos Murkle says miserably.

"You will later," Snooty quips.

Just then, iron Jaw comes in, puffing like a slow freight going up the side of a mountain. "Oh, so you got them crooks!" he howls at everybody. "Git my watch off them! Say, I heard them two creeps from the *Evening Star* smashed the rub-out ring

and arrested the murderer of John Q. Sludge. All that couldn't happen in one night. Where is Binney and Piper?"

"Why these two," a cop says, pointing at us. "Murkle has confessed. Pastrami in that cell there, is the ex-president of Associated Assassins."

"You two are— How could I of recognized Piper without the green suit? Oh, cripes, what a nightmare. Well, gimme my watch."

"Oh, shush," Snooty says. "I got it here some place."

"I wouldn't ever think of losin' it," Iron Jaw says. "My gran'father in Ireland found it near the Blarney Stone."

"Here it is," Snooty tells him. "Oh, oh, it is all mashed in, an' half the works is fallin' out. When Willie kicked me in the slats durin' our fight, he must of—"

O'Shaughnessy gapes at the remains of the turnip for a second, then bellows something fierce. He grabs a fire extinguisher off the wall and I know he will fracture Snooty's skull so I get him from behind with a night stick. A lot of cops surround Iron Jaw and finally get him into a cell—the one Willie the Whisp occupies.

"Git this hippo outa here," Willie yelps. "He gives me claustrophobia!"