

# The Con Is Green

*"Dizzy Duo" Yarn*



*By Joe Archibald*

*Though Snooty Piper, the Beantown crimehound, usually spots the hot-seat evidence first, this time he's only got spots before his eyes. Yet that wacky reporter can even find a way to line up those visual aberrations to put a killer on the spot.*

FOR many moons the Boston cops have wondered why Snooty Piper finds out about murders the same time they do. If you know the crackpot, there is nothing mysterious about it. It seems that Snooty has something on most newspaper reporters—little things like two-timing the little woman or playing poker when they should have been to a lodge. So it is not surprising to me that Snooty gets the news that a character named Bosco the Blimp gets knocked off hardly before the remains begin to cool.

The Blimp left quite a record behind him as he was mixed up in more rackets than a tennis player. The gendarmes suspected him of being engaged in the business of retailing hot auto tires only a few minutes before a rough person laid him away for keeps.

We are in the Greek's when the word of the assassination reaches Snooty Piper. He rushes out of the phone booth and yelps that he knows where there is a murder. Ten minutes later we are in an alley not far from the North Station, watching the appraiser of the violently departed brief the shell of Bosco the Blimp. Someone has bashed Bosco with something more than a swizzle stick. Rigor mortis is not far away.

"It was nice of you to phone me," Snooty says to a rather lumpy character.

"Oh, yeah?" the citizen replies. "Someday something will happen to you, fishface, even worst than what you see here."

"That I hope to see," I snap. The irate one is a cop. He was on his way home and was taking a shortcut via an alley when he fell over the stiff. "If you throw the party

and charge two bucks admission you will clean up five grand, Snooty is that popular.”

“What goes on here?” a voice booms out. It is Iron Jaw O’Shaughnessy, who puts down he is a detective on questionnaires. We are all quite sure in Boston that Iron Jaw’s forebears, and not so far back, used to pick up peanuts with their trunks. One of his shoes would make a nice cowboy saddle, and you could easily get four quarts of fish chowder in his derby.

“Nothing that should interest you,” Snooty says. “Somebody got killed, and the murderer was absent-minded.”

“It is you, hah?” Iron Jaw snaps. “How did you know he was?”

“He forget to leave you a clue,” Snooty needles.

Iron Jaw whips off his derby and bangs Snooty just over the right eye.

“You should keep your tongue in your head,” I says without much sympathy.

“Then who would lick my stamps?” the halfwit counters. I ignore him and go back to looking at what is left of Bosco the Blimp. The cops do not find any pieces of crystal from a broken watch and no footprints. It looks like the killer-diller had planned the rubout with much mental toil.

“Nothin’ to go on,” Iron Jaw gripes. “I wish for oncet I could have a murder like in the movies. Piper, have you spotted anythin’, huh? You tell me, or I will tear off your arm and wrap it around your tonsils.”

“If I give you the murderer’s fingerprint, you would find that there was another character in the world with the same Bertillon smudges, you are that far back of the eight ball,” Snooty opines.

“Leave him alone, Snooty,” I says. “You would torment a moose caught in a cranberry bog. I do not see as we can be of much help here. Bosco goes to the city icebox. The John Laws will promise an arrest within twenty-four hours, and Iron Jaw will pinch somebody who was eighty

miles away at the time. This is like a movie where I came in.”

Even Snooty Piper does not pick up a clue, so the M.D. orders Bosco to be filed away in the stiff warehouse.

“Let’s go to the Greek’s,” Snooty says.

**W**HEN we get to our favorite tavern and order two beers, Snooty shows me a slip of paper. “I been learnin’ sleight-of-hand out of a book, nights, Scoop,” he explains, blinking like an owl caught suddenly in a night-club spotlight.

“I have been noticing of late,” I remark, “that you are having a little trouble with your glimmers, Snooty. You should see a mortician.”

“I must admit the old peepers are not up to snuff,” Snooty says. “There are spots in front of them and not ten spots. Maybe I need tri-focals.”

“It is from ogling every dame until a she is out of sight,” I tell him.

“I am a little scared,” he says. “I whistled to one last night, Scoop, and did not find out she was a grandma until I was orderin’ her a snort in a bistro near Tremont. I must see an optimist. But read what I gave you.”

I do. It is a piece of paper torn out of a ruled notebook. It says Bosco the Blimp acknowledges payment for three dozen doughnuts. It looks quite fishy to me as whoever paid forty-seven fifty per for a dozen sinkers?

“It is quite evident Bosco was mixed up in that hot tire business, Scoop,” Snooty says. “Wouldn’t it be a caution if we could break up that black market? We would also know who cleaned out the warehouse in Chelsea that night, which is more than the cops know at the moment. Some gee who was in with Bosco found out the rough boy was getting more than his cut, huh? Remind me to buy some eyewash tonight, Scoop.”

“I would suggest you change the color

of your clothes,” I sniff. “These awful bilious green suits are murdering your eyesight. They would give a hawk astigmatism.”

“I’ll thank you to keep your opinions to yourself, Scoop Binney,” he says in quite a huff. “I know taste in clothes.”

“You must always have the taste of limes in your mouth, then,” I says.

We are still in the Greek’s listening to a carny radio comic, when a fellow traveler, who works on the *Boston Morning Call*, arrives. This legman says Iron Jaw has arrested a citizen known as Sniggy Welp for the unlawful extermination of Bosco the Blimp, and has a witness to help send Sniggy off to the state rotisserie.

“Well, you guys will have to admit the big slob had a break comin’,” the legman says, thanking us for a beer we didn’t order for him. “It seems O’Shaughnessy found this character, Dinsmore Smooch, sitting on the steps of the precinct house on Columbus not more than an hour ago. He tells the gland case that he was sleeping off a nifty hangover in that alley, when he wakes up and sees Sniggy conk Bosco with a tire iron. He gets a gander at the character just as he passes by a lighted window in the alley. He takes a look at the cadaver, gets scared and runs home. Then he comes back to tell the police.”

“It is amazing detecting on the big beast’s part, isn’t it, Scoop?” Snooty snorts. “I have an idea Sniggy has pals. Iron Jaw better call out some veterans of Saipan and Okinawa to escort this Smooch person about the Hub.”

“The D.A. knows about such things,” I sniff. “Let’s go to the clink and listen to the big mental deficit crow.”

Iron Jaw is in the back room passing out nickel cigars when we arrive. “Sure, boys,” O’Shaughnessy says. “You stick aroun’ this police work as long as me, an’ you’ll git

so’s you can smell a murderer out in five minutes. Nothin’ but elemental is all an’—”

“Congratulations,” Snooty says to the massive citizen. “It is a good thing we have stewpots in Boston, huh? Supposin’ Smooch had decided to lick the D. T.’s on the Common instead? If you ever arrested somebody by just usin’ your own brain, then the Nazis took Stalingrad and are putting dynamite under the Charles River Bridge.”

We find out that Bosco the Blimp was about to go straight when Sniggy removed him from the voting list. For who comes in while we are there but a doll who looks more than vaguely familiar to us. Sure enough, she identifies herself as Mamie Slognecker, alias Maggie the Claw. Mamie’s title as champion shoplifter of the Hub has never been challenged. There are cops that say Mamie once stole an electric icebox out of Graymond’s in broad daylight. She is very weepy over Bosco’s departure.

“We was both goin’ to reform, yeah,” Mamie sniffles. “Bosco tol’ Sniggy an’ the other punks about it. Me an’ Bosco fell in love bad an’ was gittin’ ready to lam out an’ start legit in some other town. Anyways we was goin’ to give it a try. Jus’ let me git me hooks on that Sniggy. He’ll look like he spent a night in a eagle’s nest where the eagle just had young.

“Cripes, jus’ when I wanted to git to be a honest dame. The only break I’ll ever git will be in my clavicle. Yeah, Bosco was in the tire-snitchin’ business, but he never told me who was in with him. Bosco was a honorable gee an’ had scruples. He said after we was married an’ was far away, he would give me the lowdown on the racket. I ain’t talkin’.”

“An’ the Marines ain’t fightin’,” Snooty says. “Let me guess, Babe. Sniggy did not want Bosco to go legit, knowin’ as much as he did. He figured Bosco would whisper

things in your ears, hah?"

"Who is this funny mug?" Mamie asks. "I never seen a worse thing while I was spiffed."

"Very funny," Snooty says. "The cops had better furnish this Dinsmore Smooch with a Sherman tank and eight squad cars if we want to see justice done. Is there some boric acid in the joint? My eyes feel like there was hives on them. Let's go to a drug store, Scoop."

IT IS all in the papers the next day about Iron Jaw producing a star witness for the state. Snooty is very nettled, and not just in the eyes. He washes his peepers out with some sort of pale green liquid he bought in a drugstore. It is a safe bet that if he ever wore a diamond, it would be green. I am very startled, to say the least, when he suddenly takes out a pair of cheaters and adjusts them. They are a dirty yellow color.

"That does not make sense, any more than if I'd just seen a big bull lie down and purr at the sight of a suit of red flannels," I say, aghast.

"The optimist says it must be from my looking at green so much, Scoop. He says if my eyes ain't cured to try an' wear mustard-colored suits. I will die first."

"Let's go down and see if we are still employed," I suggest. "We work at the *Evening Star*, remember?"

"I guess we must," Snooty sighs. "You know, Scoop, if Dogface ever gave blood they used it to marinate herrings. Oh, I forgot to tell you. I stopped by at the office and learned that we was fired Oh, boy, now we can go back to bed. It is lucky I remembered, huh?"

Three days later we run into Dinsmore Smooch making some purchases in Graymond's. There is a very bulky plainclothes man with him. We recognize him as Gumshoe Gratz, a very solid citizen who makes a living conveying citizens who

are needed by the law.

"How does it feel to be famous, Mr. Smooch?" Snooty asks.

"Scram, you goon," Gratz snaps. "I ain't lettin' even me own mother git within ten feet of this baby. He's hot as a ten-cent pistol that nobody knew was loaded."

"Yep, I feel pretty important," Smooch says, and bites the end off a cigar. "I might git out my memoirs after."

"Stick with Gratz," I cuts in. "Or a memory won't do you no good."

"Yep, boys, my bodyguard calls for me every mornin' an' I lock myself in when he leaves me at night an'—"

"I don't never leave him," Gratz snaps. "I sleep right under his winder. That Sniggy ain't goin' to beat this rap."

"Well," Snooty says, and that is all he says. There are two disagreeable sounds like slapping a leather glove against a riding boot. The derby on Gratz's noggin spins around. Something whisks a cigarette right out of my kisser, just as if rationing was not bad enough.

Gratz starts shooting. Me and Snooty dive into the back of a moving van which is at the curb. As we ride away, we see that Gumshoe is sitting on Dinsmore and emptying his Roscoe.

"Going places with you," I snap at Snooty, "is very healthy, like bathing in a leper's pool. If a shooting star should fall tonight, I hope you are two miles away from me. Let's go into a subway where it is safe."

It happens two days later. We get the tip-off that Dinsmore Smooch is in an empty lot in Natick, Mass., near a heap of defunct pre-war jalopies. Gumshoe Gratz is taken to the healing hacienda with a lump on his pate as big as Iron Jaw's fist.

We hurry over to the mortuary where the mortal remains of Smooch will repose until the final rites. Some characters have put two lead slugs into Smooch's vital organs. It looks very much as if Iron Jaw

O'Shaughnessy has got to go back and prove things against Sniggy from scratch.

"Everything happens to that big lout," Snooty says. "I catch myself feeling so sorry for him at times. Shall we go over and console him?"

"No thanks," I says flatly. "I would rather go over to the Franklin Park Zoo and ask a keeper could I help feed the cobras this aft. Well, well, we have two assassinations and hardly a smidge of evidence. You are slippin', Snooty. It is your peepers failing you."

"I'll get back on the beam," Snooty says.

We find out later how they got to Dinsmore Smooch. It seems that Sniggy has some very astute pals. They waylaid Gumshoe Gratz on his way to pick up Dinsmore. They slugged Gumshoe, took his clothes and draped them over a rough boy who looked a lot like the bodyguard. This gee picked up Dinsmore on schedule and took him for a ride.

"You shouldn't trust nobody nowadays," Snooty says. "It is too bad Smooch was a little nearsighted or he might still be a mortal the same as you and me, Scoop. I hope these specks cure my trouble as anything could happen to me."

Well, it is like lightning striking in the same place twice, as what happens? There is also a witness to the rubout of Dinsmore Smooch. This citizen immediately gets in touch with the cops.

"Yeah," the witness says at headquarters with me and Snooty Piper taking notes. "I didn't git a look at the baby who picked him up, but he was drivin' a green sedan, the dirtiest lookin' green I ever saw. I bet it was a hot car and was sprayed. No auto painter ever thought up such a color. I saw Smooch git in an' then draw back like he wasn't sure. The guy yanked him in and belted him over the pate. I run to help, but it was too late. I ain't geared up to a six-cylinder job."

"Ahh nuts!" Iron Jaw says and slams down his derby so the windows rattle. "I have a conviction in my pocket, and that lemonhead, Gratz, loses the works. Is it no wonder I can't git to amount to nothin'?"

"You practice a lot on bein' able to go nowhere," Snooty says. Iron Jaw is about to paste the heckler when I intervene. "Don't forget Iron Jaw," I admonish, "there is quite a stiff fine for belting a citizen with blinders on."

Iron Jaw pulls his punch. Snooty is quite pleased. "I think I'll wear them all the time," he says.

"Send out the alarm," Iron Jaw trumpets. "Start the teletypes goin'. Call all gas stations an' everythin'. Look for a green car—the worst lookin' one anybody ever saw. Git busy, you dumb crumbs. Before the criminal sprays it over ag'in."

"There is no use of us botherin', Scoop," Snooty says. "If that car is of a peculiar shade of green, I'll spot it quick when I see it."

QUITE early the next A.M. I am walking along Washington Street and pick up a copy of the *Morning Post Mail*. It carries a story on the third page, about five sticks, about an arrest made by Iron Jaw O'Shaughnessy. Iron Jaw has picked up a green sedan on Commonwealth Avenue and plucked the driver from the same. Iron Jaw has locked the citizen up as a suspect in the Smooch rubout. I run to a drug store and call Snooty Piper. Twenty minutes elapse before I wake up the zany.

"Look," I says. "Git your rompers on. Iron Jaw has pinched a citizen named Humbert Prawn who admits knowing Smooch and having threatened the deceased in front of witnesses. It seems this Prawn found out Smooch was smooching with his wife while he was in the Army. Hurry, Snooty!"

"Stay where you are. I'll be right over!"

The crackpot hangs up before I can tell him where I am. I finally have to run to the Greek's where he can really find me. When we meet, we decide to take a chance Iron Jaw has not heard we have been cut loose from the *Evening Star*. We crash headquarters and are told Iron Jaw has Prawn on the grill.

"We will wait," Snooty says. "I bet Iron Jaw will lose the most gravy in the argument. He has never made nobody confess yet."

Iron Jaw emerges in due time. He looks like he has taken a shower without bothering to remove his clothes. He is saying things that stevedores would blush at.

"That punk!" the big lunkhead snaps. "I'll make his talk yet. Innercent, he says! He claims he was with his wife at breakfast when Smooch was snuffed. I called his ball and chain. She said he wasn't and anyway a wife couldn't testerfy against a husband an' to go jump in a millpond. Why do they make laws to help criminals an' murderers?"

"Also detectives," Snooty says. "You generally manage to put crime detection farther back than Adam. Look, the citizen threatened Smooch. He drove a green car, and he ain't got an alibi. What more you want to go on? There was traces of gore in the murder buggy?"

"Why—er—" Iron Jaw says. "I didn't figure—I mean any smart criminal would think of that an'—I better look."

"Oh, Scoop," Snooty sighs. "He is employed, while the likes of me is thawed out of a job that should be frozen in these times. Let's sit here and wait. This is more fun."

Soon Iron Jaw comes running in. "I got bloodstains!" he yelps quite triumphantly. "Now, I got him. Let me at that smart Alex! I told him I'd fix his wagon!"

Again Iron Jaw emerges. He is chewing his derby. "He had a nose bleed," he says. "Well, I'll prick him, git some blood an' prove it ain't his. Does that always work?"

"No," Snooty says. "Suppose two citizens have the same blood type like Smooch and Prawn?"

"That's right," Iron Jaw groans and bites off a thumbnail. "I wish scientific detective stories was real. Now, I am back where I started."

"Start swinging from your tail, then," Snooty quips. "Scoop, I can't stand no more of this."

"Neither can I," I says doubtfully. "Weren't you wrong about them blood types or were you? I would not put it past you to impede the course of justice just to spite Iron Jaw. I'll look it up an'—"

"If Iron Jaw arrested Prawn, Prawn didn't do it. That is logic. But I must rush and see my optimist, Scoop. I think my cheaters are doin' the trick all right. I wish I could git a lead on one or more of these slayings. All we know is Bosco was selling black market latex at quite a profit, a very disgraceful practice that Mr. Guppy would give his upper plate to know about. It is our only way to get employed again, Scoop, to apprise him of the facts in the case."

**I**T IS a rare feeling walking along the streets of Boston later with Snooty and not having somebody throw a shiv or a bullet where it will do a body the most good.

"Peaceful, ain't it, Snooty?" I remarks casually as we saunter down Huntington Ave. "Hear the birds sing, and see the babes wheeling the little squirts for a breath of air. It is good to be alive, huh?"

"Scoop! Look!" Snooty grabs me by the arm and points. I see only a jalopy pulling away from in front of a hotel. It is a very ducky shade of blue bordering on violet.

“So what?” I query. “I have heard that a few heaps are still in running order despite the war an’—what ails you?”

“Come on, Scoop!” Before I can stop the crackpot and have a chance to make up my own mind, he is legging it for a coupe that stands in front of a nifty beanery. I jump inside the jalopy. Snooty yelps, “What a break, Scoop! The owner left the keys in it. I’ll drive.”

“Look, flathead, this is not your car. I will not sit here an’ let you commit—”

“What did you say, Scoop?” Snooty yips as we turn a corner with shoes squealing like banshees with impacted wisdom teeth. “Somethin’ about not sittin’ there? You are at liberty to leave anytime you—”

“I can change my mind, huh?” I screech. “What are you chasin’ that boiler for? It is not green!”

“What ails your eyes?” Snooty counters. “Of course it is green!”

“It is blue,” I yelp.

“You are bein’ silly as usual,” Snooty tosses at me, then manages to miss a beverage truck only by the width of a drug store sandwich. “I wish people wouldn’t hog the road, Scoop. There is no pep in this jalopy. It runs like—”

“Only seventy-two you are goin’,” I says. “You have stolen an auto, and are bustin’ speed records with it. If you dast to cross a state line which I know you will, the Feds will get you.”

“You always was a pessimist, Scoop. I have a badge to prove. I am enforcin’ the law. I commanded the car which happens to lots of citizens as ask one who owns one. I’m catchin’ up with that criminal car, Scoop!”

“Listen to me, Snooty! It is a *blue* car! It might be driven by a minister or maybe by the mayor,” I howl. “What has got into you?”

“Ask me where I got the badge, Scoop?”

Snooty asks as he goes over the brow of a hill without letting the wheels touch for at least five hundred yards. “That crook must be burnin’ high oxtane. If he was innocent, would he be trying to get away?”

“Iron Jaw will not find his badge when he gits home tonight,” I answer. “Now for the second question—Look out!”

“I will not bother to take the curve,” Snooty says. “I will cut across this lawn.”

He sure does. We wash out a summer house, tear up a garden, and leave a fender and headlight near a big stone bird bath. We remove ten feet of very pretty privet hedge. When we are on a thoroughfare again, Snooty is very enthusiastic. “We gained half a block on the fiend, Scoop,” he howls, and removes a bit of a rose trellis from his collar.

“It is a blue auto, you lemonhead!” I says. “I still can’t understand why—”

*Bang! Zi-i-ing!*

“That was no tire blowout, or we’d be whistlin’ at an angel right now, Scoop. That hole in the windshield was not made by a moth. Who is wrong now? You should have your eyes examined. Look, we will sideswipe him and push him off the road.”

“You wouldn’t, Snooty! No! Y-yeah, you would—oh, if I can just live through this, I guarantee you won’t—”

**T**HERE are more shots. A slug burns my right ear. Then we are abreast of the blue boiler. Snooty Piper swings the wheel to the right. I shut my eyes and think up what I will say to the bony character who has the ferrying concession on the Styx. There comes a terrible weird sound. Both jalopies lock horns and slide down an embankment into a swamp.

By a miracle nobody is hurt bad enough not to start a fight. I see a very compactly built gee throw a Betsy at Snooty, then climb out of the wreck armed with a very ugly looking tire iron. Snooty is up to his

knees in water. His puppies are firmly set in gooey mud. Of course I will not stand by and see him killed in cold blood, although the temptation to do so is quite overwhelming.

“Help, Scoop! I am in quicksand!”

“Give me time,” I says, my noggin spinning from quite an argument with the dashboard. “First, I must find a weapon.”

I pick up a headlight and heave it, but miss. The rough boy climbs Snooty. He is quite a Judo expert and is making progress in breaking Snooty’s neck just as I tickle him in the shortribs. The ugly boy yelps and laughs like a hyena and begs me to stop. I make a mistake and do so, then the three of us are lacked in mortal combat. When it is over, Snooty has a different coat on. The criminal person has his head in the swamp like an ostrich ducking a process server.

I look at the wreck of the rough character’s car and yelp, “I must apologize, Snooty. It *is* a green car!”

“You are delirious, Scoop. It is blue,” Snooty says. “What are you doin’ with my cheaters on?”

It is just what happened. “What do you know?” I remarked, and take them off. “Snooty, now the boiler is a blue one.”

“Not now it ain’t, Scoop,” he says, getting his peepers back on. “Quick, ask me what day this is?”

“I am quite puzzled,” I says. “Let’s pull the bum out of the mud before he suffocates. After, we’ll sit down an’ figure this one out.”

When we get the rough boy to dry land and sit on him, Snooty suddenly snaps his fingers. “Scoop, I got it. It is amazing to say the least. Why, it wouldn’t happen ag’in in a million years. What color is made out of yellow and blue?”

“Green,” I says, then stare at Snooty Piper. “Them dirty yellow glasses! You

chase a blue car which looked green. Now I have seen everythin’! What couldn’t happen to you, outside of giving birth to triplets, huh?”

“Let’s take him in, Scoop.” About an hour later a native comes along in a car. We flag him. Snooty flashes a badge, says he is an F.B.I., and orders the character to drive us to Boston. Which he does. There we find out that the dishonest person is a gorilla and ex-con by the name of Half Ton Tripeski, a very bad boy from South Boston, who has more than a couple of times been suspected of having removed various individuals from circulation.

Half Ton is still wearing Gumshoe Gratz’s duds. Of course there is nothing left for him to do but take down his hair. He confesses all in the presence of the D.A., three assistant D.A.’s, Iron Jaw O’Shaughnessy, and many policemen.

“Yeah,” Half Ton admits, “I knocked off Smooch. Sniggy bumped Bosco The Blimp as he had five hundred more tires stashed in the warehouse. Sniggy wasn’t takin’ no chances Bosco would soften up as a married man. I still don’t see how this funny lookin’ haddock-puss figured I’d sprayed the green car blue. Aw, please tell me, huh?”

“Ask an optimist,” Snooty says.

Half Ton gives the crackpot fifty, as he says what good is a bank roll where he is going. Snooty explains. Iron Jaw O’Shaughnessy, gets up and walks out like he has poured three quarts of Six Roses into his big fat stomach. Half Ton is mumbling like a hermit. The D.A. says he thinks he will lock up early and go on home as he feels a stroke coming on.

“Let’s go to the Greek’s,” I sigh. “Then we will call at the *Evening Star*.”