

Mink Rap

"Dizzy Duo" Yarn



By Joe Archibald

Snooty Piper's ordinary shenanigans left Boston crooks' hair standing on end. So when that batty newshound set out to trap a pack of mink-coat snatchers, the Beantown crimeland fur was sure to fly.

ONE morning after Dogface Woolsey, city editor of Mr. Guppy's *Boston Evening Star*, has scanned the front page of the first edition, he observes, "Every once in awhile it looks like crooks change their modus operandi. It says here—"

Snooty Piper tears himself away from a sob sister's desk. "They like to be clean like anybody else, don't they?" he asks.

Dogface makes a wry face, paws at it with both hands, and continues, "I mean the way they operate. Now they are jumpin' limousines and taxis, takin' mink coats away from dames. One crook, last night, left a doll out in zero temperature with just a strapless evenin' gown on."

"When she got home I bet her ball an'

chain got a cold shoulder," Snooty quips. "How fur have the cops got?"

"You'd better hide," the sob sister snickers.

Dogface reaches into his pocket for his high blood pressure pills, and I got nearer the exit. "We'd better go, Snooty," I suggest.

Dogface's phone rings quite insistently. The editor answers it. At first he only listens. Then, "Say that again, Miss Hepplethwaite. What? They did? Why, the dirty—! It was! No! Did you get a look at 'em? They did? Why—"

"It is Abigail on the wire, Scoop," Snooty says, all agog. "I wish Dogface would—"

"You haven't had the cops yet!"

Dogface asks. "Oh, I see what you mean. Especially that O'Shaughnessy, yeah, but don't quote me. You want—?"

"Is she askin' for me?" Snooty wants to know and gets a grip on the telephone.

"Get off that phone, you lemonhead, 'fore I—not you, Miss Hepp—Piper, I'm the boss around here!"

"She sounds desperate," Snooty says. "Let's not waste time over trifles. I—"

"She hung up," Dogface growls. "Awright, they knocked off her mink coat last night, Piper!"

"Was she in it?"

"No, Junior," Dogface screeches. "She had it spread over a bird bath out in the garden so's the water wouldn't freeze and the little birds wouldn't slip on the ice and break their legs. Oh, you get to her house and I mean fast! That mink benny was worth six grand. They stuck a Betsy into Abigail's pan, and tossed her and her chauffeur out of the limousine on the banks of the river. Later they found the jalopy three blocks from the hoosegow over in Waltham."

WE HURRY to Abigail's residence in a cab. She is an eccentric old doll anywhere between thirty and ninety years old. She has as many five dollar bills as there are hairs on all the fur-bearing animals in the world.

When we arrive at Abigail's cottage which only has forty-four rooms and nineteen baths, we are quickly ushered upstairs to her boudoir by a tricky looking new maid. Snooty ogles the wren, who says she is Czech and has a husband with the UN who once majored in Judo.

"Veto what I just said to you, then," Snooty says to the doll.

Abigail is in a bed that would have pleased the Queen of Sheba. She is wrapped up in three quilted robes and has a hot water bottle tied to her noggin,

"Well," she says, "just as if I wa'n't feelin' lousy enough, you git here."

"The same old card," Snooty chuckles. "Any idea who skinned you, Ah—er—Miss Hepplethwaite?"

"I asked him who he was an' where he lived but he was most insultin'," Abigail snorts. "Won't you ever get any brighter, Piper?"

"I hope you wa'n't wearin' a bare midriff," I says.

"When they tossed me out in the cold, Binney, I had a frock on that wouldn't of dressed up three Christmas dollies. Oh, wouldn't I like to get my mitts on the punks! But it could've been worse. Hand me that racing form, Piper."

"Huh?"

"I could have been wearin' my chinchilla which cost me twelve grand," Abigail says. "Of course, I lost a brooch worth eight C's, but I got a box full of them. That coat had sentimental value as I got it with the dough I won on a twelve to one shot at Narragansett last summer."

"I see what you mean," I sigh.

"I have got an idea, Scoop," Snooty says.

"There are plenty aspirins on the table," Abigail says.

"It is like duck hunting," Snooty Piper explains. "We will use a decoy. How many chinchilla coats are in captivity? I mean—"

"I bet there isn't two in Boston," Abigail says proudly.

"Look," Snooty says. "I have got a new doll who could pass off for a movie actress anywheres. We will doll her up and let her wear the chinchilla coat. I will get our amusement columnist to spread some mullarkey in Mr. Guppy's paper. We will, in short, plant a decoy in front of the El Peadillo. The dame will use one of your jalopies for the evening, an' Scoop Binney here will be a liveried chauffeur. There

will be four cops in a car watchin' every minute."

Abigail seems to get a relapse and I grab up a bottle of smelling salts and hold it under her nose.

"Where were we?" Abigail chokes out. "Oh, yeah, Piper was listenin' to the radio an'—it is the craziest idea I ever heard, even from you Snooty. But knowin' you of old, they are the only kind you have an' most of them work. Start the ball rollin', an' let me know when you're ready."

"Ah—er—I will need a few shekels to make the dame look like Hollywood, Miss Hepplethwaite," Snooty says.

"Binney, reach under my pillow and get my reticule," Abigail says. "I'm a little short but—"

Short, she says. The bag is crammed with lettuce and she hauls out three C notes and gives them to Snooty Piper. I ask her doesn't she think she should have her temperature taken.

"That will have to do, Piper," the rich old babe says. "The chinchilla is in the closet. Tanya will get it. Oh, Tanya-a-a!"

The maid prances in and does Abigail's bidding. She wraps the chinchilla up in a big paper box and hands it to Snooty.

"Somewan ees crazee!" Tanya sniffs. "Weeth that co't, I would go to Paris an' buy the hol' place, jus' like zat!" She snaps her fingers.

"Well, leave everythin' to me," Snooty says.

Abigail snickers. "I ain't dead yet, Piper. After I've taken care of all my no-good relatives and twenty hospitals and other institutions, I'll maybe have two bucks for you. This better work!"

"Will Purity be tickled, Scoop!" Snooty says as we take leave of the old babe.

"What was that name again?"

"Purity Rugg, Scoop. She is a model in

Philene's basement. Of course all ramekins have to work their way up. This will make the doll! It will put me in solid an' catch criminals at the same time."

"I have got a feelin'," I says. "It is in my bones, Snooty, change your mind."

"You should stop eatin' so much milk toast," Snooty Piper snaps. "What kind of flunky suit do you prefer? A nice green or a cocoa brown?"

"One with a bulletproof vest," I says. "I will not be no decoy for buckshot, Snooty. Nells bells, she hands over a twelve grand chinchilla like it was a pair of earmuffs. She should get a checkup."

"She has to trust in me, Scoop."

"That's what I meant."

A BIG citizen comes in as we get out of Abigail's pueblo. Iron Jaw O'Shaughnessy is a two hundred and ninety-eight pound detective and a good portion of his weight is in his dome. Crooks are quite fond of him as they manage to keep away from him very nicely.

"There is no use to go in there, Iron Jaw," Snooty sniffs. "Did you come here by way of Cape Cod? Mrs. Hepplethwaite and me have already laid some plans. Headquarters will be acquainted with them before sundown. Scoop, we shall drive the first nail this aft."

"I'll have you locked up for fifty years some day, you big hunk of green cheese!" O'Shaughnessy howls.

"Let's not argue with ignorance, Scoop," Snooty says.

At five P.M. we are standing outside the employees' entrance to Philene's. In due time Purity Rugg appears and she is no more than I expected. She has pulchritude in a glorified sort of way, as long as she don't smile too broadly and show a gap in her lower shelf of crockery. She is almost a head taller than either of us

and her locks are the color of tangerines. We take her to a nearby tavern. Snooty gives her the lowdown and shows her the three C notes. Purity splashes red paste all over Snooty's left cheek and ear. With her kisser she could do well paintin' fire trucks.

"I think I will leave you here," I says.

"You think we can bear up under it, Sugar," Purity says to Snooty. "Show me the chinchilla coat."

I do not see Snooty Piper until the next A. M., and he tosses the first edition of the *Evening Star* at me. "Read Winch Walter's column, Scoop."

I scan the stint carefully. Mr. Guppy's saloon-journalist really goes to town with the window dressing. A gorgeous Hungarian actress is in the Hub, and her name is Valeska Slovodka. She was once chased all over Europe by the Nazis and finally took refuge in a casbah in Morocco. She prizes a chinchilla coat which was a present from a Chilean breeder of the precious rodents. Her favorite night spot in Boston is the El Peadillo. Slovodka hives up at the Copley-Vendome.

That night when I get to the rooming house, there is a big box on the table in the hall, and it has Snooty Piper's name on it. "Another new green suit or overcoat, huh? You are dishonest spendin' Abigail's dough for—"

"It is your livery," the crackpot says. "A mauve color with a visored cap like Rommel's; Purity is still in a beauty parlor on Boylston, Scoop. She has spent over two C's on a dress and a hat. Tomorrow night is the zero hour. You will drive Slovodka to the EI Peadillo. She is to leave the joint at eleven P.M. flat. You will drive her toward her hotel. Not far behind you will be a jalopy filled with cops, Iron Jaw, and yours truly. The D.A. complimented me on the ruse."

"There must be somebody left in this town who is sane," I gulp.

Upstairs I try on the monkey suit. I look like a Mex aviator without wings. "Where is the steel vest, you fair-weather friend?" I ask icily.

"You will not have to put up no fight, Scoop. You look just like a flunky and have the face to go with one."

I groan deep.

"You will pick up Abigail's light green limousine at nine, go to the hotel, and get Slovodka. I guess them crooks won't snap at the bait, huh?"

"As long as they don't shoot at it," I says, and wish I was on Iwo Jima.

DOGFACE WOOLSEY has given me and Snooty Piper the next day off so we can operate with clear noggins. Purity calls Snooty at two P.M. and says she is on the mark and only waiting for the gun. She is relaxing on a chaise lounge at the Copley-Vendome and has an orchid in the icebox. All day she has been stroking the chinchilla and is purring like a cat.

I go to Abigail's at eight. She lets me put on the monkey suit there and also gives me a snort I need quite badly. I drive away on schedule and pick up Slovodka at the swanky inn. I almost blow a gasket as Abigail's three C's and her chinchilla coat have taken all the Philene's basement out of Purity. The wolves gape and howl as I open the car door for the babe.

"El Peadillo, Romney," she says.

"Huh? My name's—"

"Remember not to forget yourself, jerk," the doll says under her breath which is garnished with martini fumes.

I drive her to the night spot, then take a ride for myself until it is time to pick her up. I go to a beanery out in Woburn and kill an hour. I come back to the Hub by way of Marblehead and Saugus and pull up in front of the El Peadillo at five to

eleven.

I wait for ten minutes and Slovodka fails to show. I squirm on the upholstery for another ten minutes. Then I go into the bistro and ask for Slovodka. A character in a tux shows me to the table where she was sitting.

“Maybe she is in the powder room, pal,” the night spot citizen says.

“Powder? Oh, no! No! I won’t think of it even. I—er—well, I’ll wait for a couple more minutes.”

I wait fifteen. Then I hear Snooty Piper’s voice, and Iron Jaw’s. “Come on, Scoop,” Snooty says in a voice that needs oil. “Somethin’ awful has happened.”

“Huh? Look, Snooty, the doll—”

“I know. Me and Iron Jaw come in ten minutes ago. A character came running out yelling for cops. He says the boss is upstairs just outside his office and has been murdered. Come on!”

WE GO upstairs on rubber legs. A swarthy restauranteur is quite inanimate on the thick carpet. He is Nino Pellegra, a jittery helper tells us. Snooty points to a sign that say, *Ladies*. “Maybe that is where Slovodka is and maybe she heard the shot, huh? Knock on the door, Iron Jaw.”

Iron Jaw does. There is no answer. After awhile we open up and go in. There is a compact on a primping table and it bears the initials P. R.

“It ain’t Slovodka’s,” O’Shaughnessy growls. “It is a cheap item an’ them ain’t her initials. But if she ain’t in here, where is she?”

“Don’t ask me,” I says as weak as a kitten. “I am afraid you wouldn’t like my answer. The window there is open, and outside is a fire escape. That’s all I’ll tell you.”

Snooty drops into a chair and bites his nails. Sweat beads pop off his pan like fat

from a fire. “I might as well confess,” he says, “Slovodka is really Purity Rugg. She has took a powder with the twelve grand chinchilla!”

Iron Jaw swears and glares at Snooty. Then he starts laughing. He leans against the wall and goes into stitches. “Better git to the airport, Piper! When Abigail finds out her—”

“Look,” I says. “Somebody slew a character, or did you forget?”

We go out and look at the remains once more. A cop says, “Nino, huh? Well, well. Wasn’t he a pal once of a citizen, now extinct, named Big Bertie Goff? Goff was the gambler that was caught fixin’ the football game between Chelsea Bulldozers and the East Boston Grizzlies, and was bumped off ‘fore he could squeal on other characters.”

“You are right, Fagin,” Iron Jaw says. “There was another gee questioned regarding the rub-out of Big Bertie. Who was that?”

“I forget,” the cops says.

“Well, we will take the compact an’ see if there’s prints on it,” Iron Jaws yells. “I knew this babe was a fake, now we got to find out if Purity Rugg was. Piper, go an’ drop dead somewheres. You are a dead duck!”

They take the corpse away. Snooty asks how long it takes for a Constellation to get to Okinawa. “Don’t look at me like that, Scoop Binney! Nobody’s always right.”

“Twelve grand in skins,” I sigh.

“She would have it insured,” Snooty forces out.

“But where would she get another chinchilla, as they don’t grow on trees,” I says. “I heard it took about fifty thousand chinchillas to make a coat. Each rodent is only about eight inches long an’ only so many are born every year an’—”

“Stop!” Snooty says. “Help me get to

the airport.”

“What will you use for legal tender?”

“Let’s go to the Greek’s, Scoop. Maybe he will stake me to get rid of me! I am ruined. My career is over. The D.A. will murder me. Abigail will cut my throat, and Mr. Guppy—”

AT NINE A.M. the next day, Snooty Piper sneaks into the city room behind me to get his personal belongings; a pipe, a lighter, and half a quart of Man of Distinction. Dogface Woolsey comes out of Mr. Guppy’s office and spies him. “Well, if it ain’t Mr. Chan himself, boys! Read the early papers, Piper? Who do you think Slovodka really was?”

“Tokio Rose,” Snooty sighs, and takes a long pull at the bottle: “She was carryin’ atom bomb plans and the U.S. is sunk. I’ll wait here for the F.B.I.”

“Wrong again, Piper. The prints on the compact told the cops she is no other than Toledo Tilly Fry. The slug they took out of Nino Pellegra matches up with the one that eased off Big Bertie Goff. Toledo Tilly was once the moll of a character named Hughie McFitt who was questioned concerning the rub-out of Big Bertie. The cope are still adding up with paper and pencil.”

“Oh, my dome,” Snooty sighs and picks up the bottle again.

“Huh,” I says. “When the babe went up to the powder room, she had to pass Nino’s office. He happened to come out, got a gander at her, and recognized who she was even under the renovatin’ job. Most likely he ast her what the racket was. She saw quick where he could throw a monkey wrench, so let him have it. A dame like Toledo Tilly most always carries a Betsy, don’t you think? Birds of a feather got together by accident an’ the fur flew, twelve grand worth of it. Snooty, you couldn’t of arranged a worst rhubarb

if you’d been Iron Jaw.”

“I feel dizzy,” the crackpot gulps. “I’d better get to the airport, Scoop. Lend me what you got. The Greek give me five.”

“Toledo Tilly Fry,” Dogface says with relish. “She sure will. Also an accessory after certain facts by the name of Piper. Don’t you dare help a felon escape, Binney!”

“Dogface,” I says pleadingly. “He is my pal. We can plead insanity for him—”

“Oh, there you are, Piper!” a very strident voice come out of the lift. Snooty falls into his swivel chair and his hair stands up like somebody just touched off the national anthem. Abigail Hephlethwaite, wearing a very plain cloth coat with a scraggly fur collar, rushes into the busy city room, an umbrella clutched in her fist.

“Nice work, Piper! You bait a trap with a twelve grand chinchilla to git me back a six grand mink. How much cut did you get from that broad? Get out of the way, everybody, and watch me commit a perfect crime!”

Snooty asks Abigail to reconsider. “Look, it was insured, wa’n’t it?”

“So what, you green snake in the grass?” the old doll howls and keeps coming at Snooty. “Look at the rag I had to wear, Piper! It belongs to me cook! Put up your dukes!”

“Now, Abbie,” I says, reaching for her. “You should let Sn—”

She hits me a glancing blow. I reel toward Dogface and he sidesteps. When I can see clearly once more, I am sitting in a wire wastebasket. Abigail makes a swipe at Snooty and crocks him just over the ear. The swivel chair goes into a spin and finally throws Snooty off like it is a bucking bronc. He slides into a corner right under the feet of the lonely hearts editor.

Mr. Guppy comes out of his office and

yells for everybody to stop such goings on that very minute. Abigail throws a paste jar at him and he dives back into his cubicle and locks himself in. Snooty Piper does four laps around the city room, bolts into the cartoonist's office and piles up the artist, his drawing board, ink and utensils, on his way to a fire escape. Abigail nearly gets Snooty with a piece of boilerplate before the crackpot makes his escape.

Abigail tosses a broken umbrella into a basket and brushes her hands together. "Try that one on your front page, Dogface!" she says to the city editor who is under his desk. "I am not finished with Piper yet. I know where there are some bloodhounds!"

Miss Abigail Hepplethwaite waddles out.

Dogface crawls out into the open and Mr. Guppy peeks out through a crack in his door. "She gone, Woolsey?" he squeaks.

"Yeah. Mr. Guppy. I bet an earthquake was recorded on the instruments at M.I.T.," Dogface wheezes. "It is an ill wind, etcetera. We won't see Piper no more."

"Thank Godfrey!" Mr. Guppy says.

"He should be on a Constellation by now," I says timidly.

"I hope it is Jupiter," Dogface snaps.

"All right, everybody lend a hand and clean up the joint."

LATE that afternoon I ran into Iron Jaw outside the law enforcement bureau on Columbus Avenue. The big gland case never looked happier in his whole frustrated life. "Ha, ha, where's Piper, Binney?"

"I don't know, Jumbo, and shut up!"

"Well, we're trailin' that gee, Hughie McFitt, Binney," Iron Jaw says. "We got a hunch Tilly an' him are still carryin' the torch. We got the tellytypes clackin' like a

convention of store-teeth wearers. For once that cluck won't make a Patsy out of me, ha!"

"He got a lousy break an' you know it, Iron Jaw."

"Not enough to suit me, Binney. That Hepplethwaite crow didn't even bust one of his legs. I wish that coat had belonged to a lady wrestler I know over in Dorchester. Just to show you I never really held nothin' against you, Binney, I'll tip you off when we are ready to pick up the babe."

"Thanks," I sniff. "Call me at the old men's home in Chelsea. Ask for the one that is a hundred an' forty years old."

"A comic, huh?" O'Shaughnessy roars. "Just for that maybe I won't let you in on nothin'."

Three days pass and there is no word from Snooty Piper. Even Dogface Woolsey appears wrought up. "It is like an airedale I had one time, Binney. It went off an' never come back. If I'd only known it never suffered—"

I am doing a rewrite later about an unidentified body they pulled out of a pond in Melrose and am quite terrified until I find out the defunct citizen wore a very plain gray suit and black overcoat. A cub reporter comes over and says I am wanted on the phone. I go to the booth and pick up a pencil.

"Awright, let's have it. Be brief an' to the point—oh, hello, Iron Jaw."

"Look, Binney, this is hush hush. We figure we've got the doll hived up in a joint near Field's Corner, Dorchester. You be in front of Innis Arms at ten P.M. I guess I ain't such a bad slob, huh?"

"You've been worse, O'Shaughnessy. Will I wear a gas mask?"

"Shh!" Iron Jaw warns. "Somebody might hear you. Well, I tipped you off."

"Thanks," I says. I wonder if Hughie McFitt is cornered at the same time as I go

back to the typewriter. I sigh when it occurs to me that O'Shaughnessy is seldom if ever on the right beam. But I need some laughs so I decided to show at the appointed hour.

I AM standing inside the lobby of the ritzy tenement when the cops arrive. The jalopy pulls up very quietly and out comes Iron Jaw and three of Boston's finest. O'Shaughnessy has a machine gun. I come out from behind a rubber plant just as Iron Jaw warns the clerk at the desk to keep his mitts off the switchboard.

"Stay here and cover the boy, Fagin," Iron Jaw says. "Oh, hello, Binney."

"Nice evenin'," I says.

"What's the number of Hughie McFitt's apartment, huh?" Iron Jaw asks the scared desk man.

"12 G," the character says.

"Funny," I gulp. "Just what that chinchilla cost."

"Let's go, men," O'Shaughnessy says like Bogart. "Binney, keep out of the way and don't git hurt. We got this whole joint surrounded. If we need gas bombs, we got them, too."

"To think Snooty is missin' this," I says ruefully. "Especially if it turns out to be a turkey."

We got up to the twelfth floor, sneak along the corridor and are near our objective when we hear sounds of a rhubarb. Something crashes against the wall. It is not just a fur muff. A gun goes off. There is a noise like somebody has gone through a window. Somebody yells, "Get that punk, Tilly! Leave him have the knife!"

"They are fightin' amongst themselves," Iron Jaw roars. "All together, men! Here we go at the door!"

Iron Jaw gets set and we are right behind him. When Iron Jaw throws himself at anything, even a switch-engine,

something gives, but not Iron Jaw. He hits the door marked 12 G. It flies off like it is only held in place by Scotch tape. It slams into a redheaded doll where dolls like to reduce the most. She goes for the divan like Bobby Doerr of the Red Sox goes for home plate.

I catch sight of a beefy citizen with mean eyes who proceeds to shoot Iron Jaw's derby off.

"Awright, Hughie," O'Shaughnessy howls. "If you want to play!" He ruins the rug at the gee's feet with a handful of slugs. Hughie yells uncle and tosses his Roscoe toward the ceiling. It comes down on the pate of a character clad in a Western Union suit. The guy spins around twice, then drops to all fours.

"That's all, boys!" Iron Jaw yelps out the window as cops pin Hughie. "No use for the weepin' grenades!"

THERE is a shiny handle protruding from the padded shoulder of the W. U. character and I yank at it. No blood is on the blade so I throw the shiv to the divan where Purity Rugg, alias Valeska Slovodka, alias Tillie Fry, grabs it up and comes at me.

"Oh, yeah?" a voice says that lifts my scalp. The redheaded chickadee goes right on her phizog and I see that the public utility hooper has her by the ankle. I almost faint. The gee's mustache is hanging by a spot of glue and his eyeglasses have fallen off. It is Snooty Piper!

"Hello, Scoop. In another half-hour they would've had the cement oxfords on me. She can throw a knife, that broad!"

I looked toward Iron Jaw. The flatfoot looks sicker than Hughie McFitt as he chokes out, "No! I don't believe it! I won't!"

"Please do." Snooty says. "You don't think I'd lam 'fore I'd cleaned up my good name? I was at the East Boston airport

this A. M. ready to fly to Little America when who steps off a crate but Hughie, whose picture I remembered once in Mr. Guppy's sheet. So I trail him here, then got me a messenger boy suit an' a false lip fringe and cheaters. When I get in here, there was the chinchilla coat starin' me in the face. Hughie was on the phone talkin' price with a fence an'—"

"Let me sit down," I says. The redheaded twist has state jewelry around her wrists now. All she can do is kick at me as I pass her on my way to a chair.

"Where's the rest of the fur coats?" Snooty asks Hughie.

"We wasn't in on the other jobs," the citizen says.

"Hold that Roscoe tight, Iron Jaw," Snooty says. "If the slugs out of it match the ones out of Big Bertie Goff an' Nino Pellegra, then he lent it to Slovodka. I guess we got two rub-outs and a fur coat larceny figured all at one time. You will git promoted, Iron Jaw."

"You think so, Piper?" The big moose looks quite happy all of a sudden.

We are in with the D. A. half an hour later. He shakes Snooty's hand and won't let go. Iron Jaw keeps saying, "It was like this, D. A. Here was how I worked it—"

"Wonderful piece of work, Piper. Gettin' that moll to wear that coat. Led us to solvin' that Goff rub-out. Piper, you're a wonder. You're—"

"It was like this, D. A.," Iron Jaw insists. "Here is how I—"

"Go away, O'Shaughnessy," the D. A. says. "You bother me."

I feel sorry for the big stiff. He paws at his face, sees the light, then gets up and feels his way out like a sleepwalker.

I am convinced now. Snooty could blow up an atom bomb plant and the law would find the corpses of a score of foreign spies in the ruins. The only difference between him and Superman is a cape.