

Flies on the Ceiling

A Dan Grogan Story



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*Dan Grogan takes personal charge of the Police Commissioner's pet case
and uncovers a clever little racket*

INSPECTOR "Andy" Williams was a most unhappy man. For the second time within a month the chief was giving him an urgent assignment that would take him into "Big Dan" Grogan's Italian district, which was about the same as giving a man a smiling invitation to stick his head into the open jaws of a raging lion. Williams leaned against the desk and became almost tearful.

"Listen, chief," he said earnestly, "have a heart! Why pick on me for this job? You know Dan Grogan—he'll eat me alive if he finds me snooping around in his district! And my being an old friend of his only makes it worse, because he thinks I should know better. Give it to Cassidy, or Tompkins—a taste of Grogan's tongue will do them good, anyway!"

For the first time in headquarters experience, Williams was treated to the startling spectacle of the chief becoming almost human. He leaned forward over the high desk, his expression actually one of friendly sympathy.

"I'm sorry, Andy," he said, "but it's because you *are* an old friend of Grogan's that I'm sticking you with the job. You can handle him. You see, we don't want this business to get to the newspapers, and if I sent Cassidy or Tompkins, Grogan would warm their pants so loud the thing would make the front page of papers in Japan, China, and the Red Sea, let alone New York! Hop to it, Andy, and take your medicine!"

Williams swore, and straightened his tall, erect figure. He looked more like a polo player than a detective. "All right," he said, "but this is

the last time I'm going to take on any job like this! But look here—what's the idea of keeping the thing out of the papers? Why isn't it already all over the papers? These rich dames who have fifty thousand worth of ice stolen generally want the whole world to know it. Chorus girls haven't anything on some of these society dames when it comes to grabbing off the publicity."

Again the chief leaned close, with a hush, hush expression.

"Listen, Andy," he said. "You and the rest of the master minds around here better get it through your heads quick that this new commissioner is different, damn different. He's one of these society guys himself. Don't you read the papers at all? He'll get over it, of course, but he's still got one foot in the police department, and the other in the middle of the Four Hundred. Any time Mrs. Million-bucks of Park Avenue loses her pet dog, she can get the commish on his private phone and he drops everything to hunt for the mutt personally. I never heard of this Mrs. J. Preston Hax, but for some reason she don't run true to form, and has told the commish that she doesn't want any publicity. Get busy, Andy—and you better turn up something within twenty-four hours."

"Meaning," Williams groaned, after swearing some more, "that this is another of the commissioner's pet cases, eh? All right, I'll be the goat."

Twenty minutes later, feeling like the man who went to his own funeral, he climbed up the worn, uncarpeted stairs that led to the old-fashioned, top-floor tenement apartment where Dan Grogan had lived on alone for fifteen years after the death of his mother and father. "Big Dan," Irish boss of an Italian East Side district, could have moved to better quarters long ago, for he was a political czar, and the Grogan Trucking Company was now a prosperous concern, but whenever anybody who didn't know any better hinted that he move, a cloud would descend on Grogan's big, strong face, he would glare, and retort: "The place was good enough for me mother—an' I guess it's good enough for me!"

And that, precisely, was Big Dan, a born leader of men, a power, loved and feared by his "damn wops." Long since the word had been given out from the "Hall"—"Give Dan Grogan

anything he wants—and leave him alone." Mayors and police commissioners were nothing in his life. He was a lonely man by choice, taciturn, sharp-tongued, but—as many a poor Italian knew—with a heart as big as all New York. He was gifted with an uncanny understanding of the Italian mind, and he took care of his wops like a mother does her children. Long ago the police had learned that if they wanted to live long and enjoy life, they had better not interfere with anybody in Big Dan's district without first consulting him!

IT WAS exactly five minutes to seven, and, as usual, Grogan was finishing his supper in the kitchen of the flat. He was alone, except for Maggie, the old woman who cleaned up the place for him, got his supper, and disappeared. Maggie was deaf as a post, but once in a while, by roaring at the top of his powerful lungs, Dan made her hear something he said. Usually he roared at her all through his meal—just doing his thinking out loud and not caring whether Maggie heard him or not.

Drinking gallons of hot tea was a pet hobby of Dan's, and he was drinking the last of his fourth cup when the doorbell rang.

"Whoever it is," he roared at Maggie, "tell 'em I ain't seein' anybody if it is the Pope himself! I'm goin' to the fights!"

But Andy Williams had heard the roar—and at once opened the door himself and walked in. They were old boyhood friends, these two, though at times one would not suspect it. In fact, if it hadn't been for Dan, Williams might still have been pounding the pavements.

"Hello, Dan—thought you might be in," the inspector greeted, striving to speak casually. "Just finishing your supper?"

"No," Dan growled, pushing back from the table and lighting a cigar. "I'm playin' golf in the East River. What brings you here, Andy? Has the new commissioner lost his collar button, and is some four-year-old child in my district supposed to have swallowed it? You look kind as if you'd swallowed a collar button yourself, Andy. Come in on front till I have a look at you."

The big fellow got up and led the way into what had once been the sacred front parlor of the flat, but which Dan now used as his sitting room and "office." He plumped himself down in his old

armchair in the corner. Across from this, in the centre of the room, was another armchair. It was Dan's official visitor's chair, and in the privacy of this room, with no one but Big Dan to hear, many a wretched story had been sobbed out in that chair; many a gangster had sat there—and been told that he had twelve hours in which to get out of the district. A mayor or two had sat in that chair—and been told what to do, and where to get off. Inspector Williams had squirmed there for many a bad half hour, and now he sat down gingerly. Grogan seemed to be in a good humor—but he had a way of fooling you.

Dan had brought his evening paper from the kitchen, but now he dropped it on the floor. "I been straightenin' out trouble all week, Andy," he remarked, "an' I guess I take a night off. Glad you dropped in. I got tickets for the fights—you better come along with me."

The inspector squirmed—nothing could be worse than this! "I sure would like to, Dan," he replied, nervously lighting a cigar of his own, "but—well, the truth is, I'm on a job that looks mighty puzzling, and I thought I better come up here and see you about it—"

"I thought there was a collar button in it!" Grogan blared, taking a savage pull at his cigar. "I can see now I might as well go an give them fight tickets to Maggie. Well—out with it, Andy! What new parrot disease is headquarters sufferin' from now?"

"It's really a serious and very mysterious case, Dan," Williams replied, ignoring the sarcasm and trying to look impressive. "And as it seems to be a pet case of the commissioner's—"

"If that feller keeps on goin' the way he is," Dan growled, "one of these days he's goin' to wind up in the hospital with a pet case of lead poisonin'. I was sayin' to a feller only last night that this city is gettin' large enough now to have a police department, with uniformed patrolmen, detectives, traffic cops, an' inspectors, just like they got now in many smaller cities, like Hoboken, Troy, an'—"

"Oh, shut up, Dan, and listen!" the inspector flared in sudden desperation. Grogan dearly loved to get his old friend's goat—and always succeeded. Williams gave the brim of his Panama hat a tug and leaned forward: "This thing is a two-hundred thousand dollar jewel robbery, man—and

if you want to know just why I'm here, it's because the only clue we've got leads right to this district!"

GROGAN'S eyes flickered. "I been readin' the evenin' paper, an' I don't seem to remember seein' anythin' about—"

"The papers haven't got it," said Williams quickly, "and I'm supposed to see that they *don't* get it. It's another of these society cases that we're supposed to clean up without any fuss or noise."

"Which naturally makes it very hard for you broadcastin' dicks to operate," Grogan remarked, with an inward chuckle, "because puttin' a muzzle on headquarters an' askin' them to do somethin' without fuss an' noise is like askin' a rooster to lay a egg without crowin'. You're gettin' good as a talkie comedy, Andy—go on an' let's hear what this social collar button sounds like."

"There's a rich dame who is living out at her country place at Eastmere, Long Island," Andy Williams went on, striving to control himself. "Her husband is a Wall Street broker, and one of these birds who is so high-hat and exclusive that nobody can get near him—wouldn't talk to anybody less than the police commissioner himself."

"Well, last night they went to some extra ritzy formal dinner at some neighbor's out there. The dame wanted her extra special junk that she usually wears only to the opera and big affairs in town in the winter. On his way home yesterday afternoon, Hax stopped at the bank and got the stuff from a safe-deposit box. They didn't stay long at the blowout, because Hax had to be at his office early this morning. He intended to bring the stuff to town with him and put it back in the safe-deposit box, but he left in a hurry and forgot it. When he got to his office, however, he suddenly remembered, and got into an awful stew, I guess, thinking of that two-hundred-thousand dollars worth of junk lying loose out there in that country house."

"The dame, you see, is one of these useless young things without much sense—he's twenty years older than she is, and something of a grouch, they tell me. Well, he phones her, wakes her out of her beauty sleep, and tells her to hop in the car the moment the chauffeur gets back to Eastmere, and bring that stuff right to the office."

Well—”

“Andy,” Grogan interrupted, pulling at his cigar impatiently, “you ain’t goin’ to tell me that them jewels was stolen by a feller wearin’ a summer suit an’ a straw hat, are you? I’m thinkin’ I’ll go to them fights, after all! What has this bedtime story got to do with me an’ my district—or are you just askin’ me to wind up your brains for you?”

“I’m coming to that right now, Dan,” Williams hurried on. “I hopped out there this afternoon and had a talk with the dame. She’s one of these little blond babies. She was having a nervous breakdown, with a maid giving her smelling salts and a shot of pre-war rye every now and then, and nobody allowed to see her. From her chatter I was able to get what happened. It seems she’d just locked up the stuff in a bureau drawer when they got home last night. When Hax phoned her this morning, she got right up, dressed in a hurry, put the stuff in the leather carrying case especially made for the purpose, and was all ready when the chauffeur showed up with the car.

“But what do you think that dumb Mabel did, Dan? When the car hit Manhattan, it suddenly occurred to her peanut mind that she’d like to stop a minute and telephone a friend to have lunch with her. She told the chauffeur to stop at a hotel and wait while she phoned. Before getting out of the car, however, she hands that leather case to the chauffeur, a man who hadn’t been with them a month—tells him what it contains, and that she is afraid to carry it into the hotel, and to hold it tight for her until she gets through phoning and comes back! Well, she phoned her friend, came out and got into the car again, and the chauffeur handed her back the case. In front of Hax’s office building she got out, telling the chauffeur she’d be down in a few minutes.

“When she entered Hax’s private office and put the case on his desk, he grabbed it and unlocked it at once—it seems he kept the key of it. The dame admitted that he was cussing—said he is always growling about how careless she is—and he wanted to make sure she hadn’t left some of the stuff behind. Well, Dan, when he opened the case, it was worse than that. The case was empty!”

WILLIAMS paused dramatically. Grogan eyed him for a moment—and then grinned. “This dame didn’t have her pet dog along, did she, Andy?”

“What the hell—!”

“Because,” Dan persisted, his eyes twinkling, “the dog might have opened that case in the car an’ swallowed all them diamonds an’ pearls. My father had a dog what had the bad habit of swallowin’ the kitchen alarm clock, an’ he used to go off every mornin’ at five-thirty an’—”

Williams swore. Good fellow though Andy was, he wasn’t naturally overburdened with a sense of humor, and just now he wasn’t in any mood for laughing. His job was at stake. He had twenty-four hours in which to solve a pet case of the commissioner’s, and failure surely would mean either demotion or transfer to the sticks.

“Maybe in a minute you won’t think it so funny, Dan,” he said, biting his cigar. “Here’s the rest of it: Hax, of course, goes haywire on finding the case empty. He pretty near jumps down his fool wife’s throat. She blubbers and assures him that she put the stuff in the case with her own hands—but in ten seconds he gets out of her that little incident of phoning a friend and leaving the case with the chauffeur. Telling her to sit there and keep her mouth shut—and not waiting to knock her block off, as I bet he felt like doing!—he dashed for the elevator and the street. The car is gone, of course—and we haven’t got trace of it since. It was a clean getaway—so far.

“And now—listen: That chauffeur is a wop named Angelo Scotti. He’s been living out there, of course, in a room over the garage. I searched that room, Dan—only got back from there about an hour ago and in a coat pocket I found this letter!”

With a certain gleam of satisfaction that he could not quite hide, the inspector handed over an unsealed envelope. He took out the letter and read it. Both envelope and letter were the stationery of the Grogan Trucking Company. The letter was addressed “To Whom It May Concern,” and consisted of the usual brief line, stating that one, Angelo Scotti, was a young man of good character, known to the undersigned, and a qualified and capable chauffeur. The signature was Dan’s own heavy scrawl!

Grogan put the letter back in the envelope,

handed it back, took a puff of his cigar, and gazed up at the ceiling. But he said nothing.

"Well?" Williams asked. "I guess maybe you can help me now—seeing that it was no less a person than yourself who recommended this crook."

BUT GROGAN continued to look at the ceiling. Finally he spoke. "I got to tell Maggie," he remarked, "to get busy an' wash the ceilin' of this room. The flies has sure got it all specked up, an' if there's one thing I hates to see about a house it's fly-specks. How they gets in so thick is—"

"To hell with your fly-specks!" Andy Williams yelled, nearly beside himself. "Listen, Dan—I've got twenty-four hours to—"

"All right, Andy, all right," said Grogan. Suddenly his face became grim, and a dangerous glint showed in his eyes. The whole police department knew that glint, knew what it meant. Dan Grogan was going into battle for one of his brood—one of his "damned wops." Not that he would hesitate to turn the man in if he proved guilty—Dan tolerated no crooks in his district—but the investigation now was out of the hands of the police. Grogan would go after the man personally, and if found guilty, Dan Grogan would turn the man in *himself*. He glared at the inspector.

"Andy," he said, "maybe I know this Angelo Scotti, an' maybe I don't. Of course, if I had the keen brains an' sharp memory of you master minds down to headquarters, I'd remember instantly all about every one of the dozens of them letters what I have wrote for people, but I got only average intelligence—an' maybe, too, I'm gettin' old. But this feller Hax, now—seems to me I do recall some feller of that name callin' me up to confirm a letter. Say, what'd he do when he don't find no chauffeur?"

"He hustles right up to his office again," the inspector replied, with almost pathetic eagerness, "packs the dame off home in a taxi with orders to keep her mouth shut, and then, through some friend of his who is a friend of the commish's, he gets the commish on the wire personally. The commish, smelling the social status over the wire, tells the damn High-hat not to worry—that everything will be handled quietly, and that the

crook hasn't a chance in the world and will be nabbed within twenty-four hours. Just like that, Dan! He relays the thing personally to the chief—and the chief makes me the goat."

Grogan threw the butt of his cigar into a cuspidor, took out another, and lighted it.

"I see," he commented, nodding. "But what I don't see, is—"

The ringing of the phone, on an old table in a corner, interrupted him. He got up and answered it. "It's headquarters—for you," he said, plumping the instrument down and going back to his chair.

Williams hurried across the room, picked up the phone and listened for a moment. "All right, chief," he said finally. "No—I'm talking to him now. I'll call you a little later."

"The car's been found, Dan!" he exclaimed, going back to his chair. "They found it parked—or, rather, abandoned way up on West Seventy-ninth Street. Evidently left there very early in the day. But no clue to Scotti."

Oddly enough, Grogan chuckled. "You mugs sure do make fast progress," he said. "Half of your twenty-four hours is gone, an' by accident some traffic cop, havin' nothin' special on his mind, finds a abandoned car—which by accident turns out to be the one a million dicks is doin' nothin' but look for! Honest, Andy, I think I'll go to them fights after all. It ain't no use—an' you don't look so good. A little rest-up in the sticks'll build up your health an'—"

Williams, red in the face, jumped to his feet—evidently this was more than human flesh and blood could stand.

"You can go to hell, Dan Grogan!" he cried. "I'm through. I'm going right back to headquarters and resign!"

He was actually halfway out of the room before Grogan, who was never the man to carry a joke too far with anybody, much less with an old friend, bellowed at him to come back and sit down.

"You're the same baby you was at twelve years old, Andy," he said, with a smile, "when I used to pull you out of trouble by the seat of your pants. Now, maybe we can do somethin' about this business." He got up suddenly, a light of action in his eyes, and picked up his plain straw hat from the top of the covered-up piano—another of the dilapidated antiques with which the flat was

crowded. Though Dan didn't know it, bets often were made by visitors to the effect that the piano hadn't been played in twenty years. They didn't know the half of it; that old piano had never been played at all!

"Come on, Mr. Inspector," he said. "We're goin' visitin'."

WITHOUT reply Williams followed him out of the flat and down to the street. Grogan led the way, silently, down to Avenue B, and then stalked into a big tenement down one of the teeming side streets. Climbing to the third floor, he knocked at the door of a rear flat. The door was opened by a withered old Italian woman, who threw it wide open with a welcoming smile as she recognized Grogan.

Dan did not return the smile, however. He stalked into the kitchen, Williams close at his heels. The inspector saw that the old woman and a pretty young girl, evidently her daughter, were in the midst of their supper.

"Mrs. Scotti," said Grogan, in a tone that wiped the smile from the old woman's face and took the color from the girl's cheeks, "you ain't seen or heard from Angelo today, have you?"

The old woman quailed, and looked sharply from one man to the other, her quick, native instinct telling her that something was wrong, very wrong. "Angelo?" she breathed. "No—no, Mist' Grogan. Angelo, he have not been here since las' week. Oh, Mist' Grogan! My Angelo, he is not—"

"He's disappeared from that swell job what I got him, Mother Scotti," Dan cut her off bluntly. "The bulls is lookin' for him, an' if you an' Camella knows anthin', you better come across at once, mother, or I won't do nothin' to help him."

With a helpless moan, the old woman sank down in a chair. It was the girl, her eyes bright with quick intelligence, who spoke.

"Mother is telling the truth, Mr. Grogan! We haven't seen or heard of Angelo since he dropped in after supper last week, on his day off! And he was so happy! Telling all about his wonderful job! Oh, it can't be—"

"Maybe not," Grogan said. "All right, Camella—that's what I wanted to be sure about. You're a bright girl, Camella—I ain't any time to waste now answerin' questions—not if I'm to

help Angelo. He's in bad, kid. Looks like your brother Angelo has gone back on me. Now—has that feller what I warned him against, and warned you against, been around here lately?"

The old woman started to mumble, and raised a protesting hand, but the girl brushed her impatiently aside.

"Yes, he has, Mr. Grogan!" she replied. "Mother was afraid to let you know—because you might think things. He's been around twice in the last two weeks. He tries to get me to influence Angelo. If *he* has anything to do with this, I'll kill him, Mr. Grogan! He hasn't fooled me—I just *knew* he has some special reason for wanting to get hold of Angelo! Mr. Grogan—"

"Just you leave everythin' to me, Camella," Grogan broke in on her, his tone now more kindly. "And here's what you do. Not a word about me an' this man comin' here. See? You don't know nothin'. I'll be around again sometime tomorrow, if I ain't here sooner. Come on, Andy!"

WITHOUT further word, or even a nod, he stalked out of the flat precisely as he had stalked in. Unless you had been told, you never would have suspected that the iron-gray gentleman who followed meekly and silently at his heels was no less a person than Inspector Andrew Williams, of Headquarters. And Inspector Williams did not feel so hot himself. He was the kind of man who, deep down in his heart, is honest with himself, and out of it on the street, where Big Dan received respectful greetings on all sides, greetings that a king might envy. Andy Williams cursed himself, his own limited abilities, and found himself wondering if some day he might be able to handle a job without having to go yelling for help to this big, powerful, shrewd man who had stuck by him since boyhood.

"Andy," said Grogan, suddenly coming to an abrupt stop on a crowded street corner, and calmly ignoring the fact that half the street could overhear him if it wanted to listen in, "I got a hunch. I guess you kind of suspect now that them wimmen I was talkin' to are Angelo Scotti's mother an' sister?"

"No!" snapped Williams, aggravation giving him a sudden flash of humor of his own. "I thought they were two Chinese women having tea at the Ritz!"

"Really now, Andy," Grogan chuckled, "I didn't expect it—there *is* some hope for you! You make me feel better. Well," and his tone became grim again, "I guess you also gathered that I been keepin' a eye on Angelo. You see, gettin' a young feller a good job often keeps him from goin' up the river. But you never can tell, as the man said when he found out his new wife had buried three husbands. Say, Andy did you ever hear of a bird named Tuxedo Joe?"

"Sure," Williams replied, looking at Grogan quickly. "One of this new swell racketeer crowd. The chief was talking about him only the other day. We don't seem to be able to tie anythin' on him. Say, what's he got to do with this, Dan?"

"I didn't say he had anythin' to do with it," Grogan retorted, frowning and chewing on his cigar. "If you mugs downtown wouldn't go jumpin' at conclusions like you do, maybe fellers like Tuxedo Joe wouldn't be eatin' in swell night clubs an' enjoyin' life, while phony dicks come to me for advice. But now, Andy, I'm sure worried about Angelo Scotti. We got to find out where that damn wop is got to, an' what he's doin'."

"Maybe," the inspector suggested, hesitantly, "maybe that wop girl was—was holding out on you. I sure would like to search that flat!"

"Which statement, Andy," Grogan remarked, with a chuckle, "is just another reason why you are a dick instead of president of the Woolworth Building." He stood for a moment, chewing his cigar. "I said I had a hunch, Andy. You game to play a hunch?"

"I'm damn ready to do anything," Andy Williams replied, almost dancing with impatience, "that will get my hands on that crook of a chauffeur and that stuff he got away with!"

"Well," said Grogan, suddenly hailing a taxi, "let's take little ride out to Eastmere."

"Eastmere!" Williams exclaimed, as the taxi drew up to the curb.

"Sure," Dan replied, grinning, and literally pushing and shoving the bewildered inspector into the cab, and looked at him curiously. It was a strange address for an Avenue B fare to give!

"But you don't think, Dan, that Scotti—"

"I just got a feelin' I'd like to meet this J. Preston Hax," said Grogan, an odd note in his voice, "an' this dame—maybe she'll give me a shot of that pre-war rye you said she was sniffin'."

Besides, I'm kinder curious to have a look at a dame what is so dumb as to let her new chauffeur hold two-hundred-thousand dollars worth of social glassware while she passes the mornin' scandal with another skirt over the phone."

"But look here, Dan—"

"Shut up, Andy," Grogan cut him off, with a grin, while he pulled out a fresh cigar. "I want to do some thinkin'—an' listenin' to you ain't goin' to help. All you got to do from now on, Mr. Inspector, is to introduce me to this here Eastmere society—an' then be seen an' not heard."

IN ABOUT forty minutes the cab turned into a driveway and stopped before the steps of the Hax country house. A maid ushered them into the drawing room, and in a moment a tall, flabby, bald-headed man, with a distinctly high-hat manner and disagreeable eyes, came in. Andy introduced himself, while Big Dan, still puffing his cigar, stood meekly waiting.

"Ah," said J. Preston Hax. "So you are the man the commissioner has put on the case. You had an interview with Mrs. Hax. You have come to report that the scoundrel has been arrested? And the jewels found?"

"Well—not exactly," Andy replied, feeling like kicking both Hax and Dan Grogan. "The fact is, I came—er—at the request of this gentleman, here. I want you to meet Mr. Grogan—he is the man who wrote the letter of recommendation for your chauffeur."

Hax had been looking at Dan with a frown of disapproval.

"Mr. Grogan?" he said, the same disapproval in his tone.

"To get down to business, Mr. Hax," said Dan, treating the broker to a glare that somehow made that gentleman take a slight step backwards, "this Angelo Scotti comes from my district, an' I'm takin' a personal interest in the case. In fact, I'm in charge of it—an' I suggest, Mr. Hax, that you take us into your den, or library, or somewheres where we can sit down an' talk without bein' interrupted."

Hax tried to eye Dan with cold indignation—but fell down on the job. Instead, he led the way to a small library in the rear of the house, shut the door, and waved them to seats.

"But I don't understand this at all, inspector,"

he said, sitting down in the chair behind the big desk in the centre of the room. "I am not accustomed to—"

"You'll get used to it," said Dan shortly. "Andy, get on that phone an' get the commissioner—if he ain't at his summer house in Westchester, headquarters'll get him."

While Hax waited in frowning astonishment, Williams picked up the phone that stood on the desk. In four or five minutes he had the commissioner on the wire—and instantly Grogan took the instrument.

"This is Dan Grogan, commissioner," he growled. "Fine! How are you? Listen—I'm out here at Mr. Hax's place—that wop chauffeur case, you know. Yeh. Mr. Hax don't seem to understand why I'm runnin' the show. Wise him up—I'll put him on the wire."

The broker took the phone with a puzzled expression on his red, flabby face. The commissioner seemed to do all the talking, and in a moment J. Preston Hax hung up. He looked at Dan in a dazed way.

"I—er—I'm very glad to meet you, Mr. Grogan," he spluttered. "I'm afraid I did *not* understand." He leaned back in his chair and tried to summon a flabby smile. "You see—er—I know very little of politics—that sort of thing. Well, I suppose you have come to see what I know about this young crook. Unfortunately, I'm afraid I can tell you little. You see—"

"I didn't come to ask about the chauffeur," Grogan interrupted, taking a pull at his cigar. "I'd like to have a little talk with your wife, Mr. Hax. Would you please ask her if she'll just step in here for a few minutes? An' to save time, you can tell her whatever the commissioner told you."

Mr. J. Preston Hax stared, and flushed more red than nature made him. "I really cannot consent to that, Mr. Grogan!" he replied. "It's out of the question. Inspector Williams heard Mrs. Hax's story today, and that should be enough. She is very near a breakdown—"

"I guess she is," said Grogan, fixing the broker with a glare. "But if you want to avoid some mighty unpleasant developments in this case, Mr. Hax, you take my advice an' bring Mrs. Hax in here at once. Your forgettin' that you're mixed up in a police case, Mr. Hax."

The broker gasped. He spluttered—and then

got flabbily to his feet and left the room.

"Say, look here, Dan," Andy Williams protested nervously, "what in the name of hell are you—"

"You just shut up until I ask you somethin'! Dan growled. "A nervous breakdown. Huh!"

IN A FEW minutes Hax threw open the door, stood aside, and a small, blond woman of not more than twenty-four or five came into the room with a quick, nervous step. She stopped abruptly beside the desk, and stood eyeing Grogan. He could see that despite her child's haircut and baby-blue eyes, she was no infant. There was a hard look behind the baby stare—and a look of desperate trouble. She was clutching a pack of cigarettes and a folder of matches—and now there was a distinct odor of pre-war rye in the room. Both Grogan and Andy had risen.

"Please sit down," she said, in a soft but oddly excited voice. "No—I'll stand—I've been sitting down all day. Mr. Grogan, I believe? Mr. Hax has explained—it was foolish of him not to summon me at once. What is it you want to ask me?"

Mr. Hax was fairly dancing behind her. It was quite plain that his young wife had small patience with his formality and pomposity. She snatched a cigarette from the pack and lighted it. "Is there something I failed to make clear to Inspector Williams this afternoon?"

Grogan eyed her for a moment. This tense little dame wasn't the flighty, tearful baby Andy had described. A few hours had made a startling change in her. But you never could tell about a woman—and it might just be the pre-war rye.

"I just want to ask you a few questions, Mrs. Hax," he said, trying to speak gently. Dan had a soft heart for all women, and hated these cases in which a woman was involved. But he had a hunch and was going to play it. "You see, this Angelo was kind of a ward of mine—all them poor wop boys are, an' it knocks me all of a heap to find that he's a crook. But outside of that, Mrs. Hax—I'm wonderin' if you ever met a feller named Footner, Edward J. Footner?"

The girl started, gasped, and then managed to get control of herself. "Footner? No—no. Of course not! Why do you ask such a question, Mr. Grogan?"

"I thought maybe you knew him," said Dan, while something electric seemed to shoot through the room. "He's a tall, slim, handsome young feller—nice black hair an' eyes. Regular society guy, too. You sure you ain't met him, Mrs. Hax? But maybe you ain't. Few people knows it, but he runs a couple of these swell card clubs for rich dames to play bridge in. Some well-known society wimmen plays in them clubs on the quiet, an' there's thousands of dollars changes hands. They say Footner has a way of gettin' rich wimmen in debt an' do all sorts of things to pay up—but I'm forgettin' about Angelo. Funny, but I seen this feller talkin' to Angelo a couple of times. I'm worried about Angelo, Mrs. Hax. In fact," and here Grogan leaned forward, pointing his cigar at her, "I got a feelin' he's in grave danger—I wouldn't be surprised, Mrs. Hax, if Angelo Scotti was found dead tomorrow mornin', *murdered!*"

"Here!" cried Hax, stepping forward, quivering all over. "I won't have it! I don't care who or what you are, Grogan! How dare you come in here and talk to my wife like this! I'll have you—"

BUT suddenly a queer cry came from the blond girl-wife. She had gone dead white, her big blue eyes staring at Grogan with an expression of fear, horror. Now something seemed to crack within her, and a crazy, excited, stark energy possessed her. She threw out an arm and fairly knocked her husband aside.

"I can't stand it a moment longer!" she cried, her eyes flashing now with a reckless light. "Oh, it was wrong, wrong—I knew it. I can't go through with it! I can't get that poor Italian boy out of my mind." She faced Grogan. "It's true, Mr. Grogan—what your eyes are saying about me. I'm just that—a dirty little coward and liar!"

Again Hax tried to speak. "Jessie—what are you saying! My God—"

"An' that story you told Williams, Mrs. Hax," said Grogan, his eyes glinting, "was that—"

"Lies, all lies!" she cried, facing the three men. "I'll tell the truth now—and I don't care if the whole world hears it—and you must find that poor boy at once! And *you*, Press—you've got to hear it, now! If you'd given me the pocket money our wealth and position entitles me to, this never would have happened! Yes, I know Footner, and

I've been gambling in his clubs. I won at first—but yesterday I owed forty-thousand dollars, that had to be paid at once, somehow. I dared not go to my husband.

"But this morning, when he forgot my jewels and phoned for me to bring them, the idea came to me. Footner has been suggesting for some time that I let him lend me money on my jewels. But my husband keeps them under lock and key—what fools some men are! I phoned to Footner that I had my jewels here, and asked him if he couldn't think of something, as I must have fifty-thousand dollars at once. He told me to bring them right to his apartment—that he had a scheme that would work like a charm."

"Jessie!" Hax gasped.

"You shut up!" roared Grogan, while Andy Williams sat with his eyes starting from his head. "Go on, Mrs. Hax—an' trust me!"

"Something tells me I can, Mr. Grogan!" the girl said. "Well, I gave Angelo the address and went there. Footner had a packet of bills, fifty thousand, on the table when I went in. He asked me at once did I have the same Italian chauffeur with me. I was puzzled—but then he told me his scheme—the story I told Inspector Williams. I must have been crazy with worry, for I listened to that scheme. He said everything would be all right. Just to leave the chauffeur to him. All these Italians are the same, he said. He'd give, the boy five hundred dollars and spirit him out of town for a few weeks, until the thing blew over. In a few weeks, he said, beyond a doubt I would be able to redeem the jewels. A week later, the jewels would be mysteriously delivered to my husband's office and the whole thing would be forgotten.

"As I said, I must have been quite mad, for I agreed. He gave me the money, and with the empty case, I went down to the car. As Footner had instructed me, I told Angelo that I would go downtown in a taxi—and meantime I wanted him to go right upstairs to apartment 6B and get some packages a man up there had for me. He was to put them in the car and drive home. Press—take this key, go to my desk, and bring me my handbag! That's all I know, Mr. Grogan. And now—Oh, I know now I was a fool, a mad fool—and that poor boy, Angelo—"

"Don't say a word more, Mrs. Hax," said Grogan getting to his feet. "Leave the rest to me,

an'—"

He broke off as Hax came running in with the handbag. All the pomposity had gone from him now. He was like a flabby blubber. The girl opened the bag and handed Grogan a packet of bills, which Dan calmly put in his pocket.

"My God!" blubbered Hax. "The scandal—we'd better drop—"

"You shut up!" Grogan roared. "If my hunch holds, there ain't goin' to be no scandal—except maybe for Tuxedo Joe. You've been took over by a slick racketeer, little lady. Thank God you've come through like a game little sport. Now, get your cloak—we're all goin' visitin' in a hurry. Andy, you got a plainclothes dick around here somewheres, ain't you? Get him! We all got to get into that taxi, somehow! God help that crook if he's done anything to Angelo Scotti!"

A LITTLE less than an hour later, in response to a ring, the door of apartment 6-B, in a walk-up in the West Sixties, was opened cautiously by a pasty-faced youth. At sight of the revolver in Andy Williams' hand, the youth opened the door wider, raised his hands, and suppressed the warning whistle he had been about to give. He backed silently into the little foyer hall, and into the living room beyond. The plainclothes man's gun was now in evidence, too.

Two other young men were seated at a table strewn with cards and poker chips. The hands of these young men reached for the ceiling. It was evident that such a visit was totally unexpected. But the tall, handsome, immaculately attired young man known to the underworld as Tuxedo Joe, and to society ladies with a yen for gambling as Edward J. Footner, always was equal to the unexpected. He smiled pleasantly, while being frisked for weapons.

"I didn't expect to see you so soon, Mrs. Hax," he remarked. "And you have brought Mr. Hax—and Dan Grogan, of all people! Well, I suppose—"

"Suppose you shut up, Tuxedo!" Grogan snapped. "We'll make this snappy. Where's Angelo Scotti?"

"If one of you will be kind enough to open that bedroom door," the racketeer replied, "you will find the damn fool in there. He's still tied up, I regret to say—he refused to listen to reason—

and I really didn't know just what to do with him."

It was characteristic of the man, evidently, not to ask foolish or useless questions. Tuxedo Joe had brains—and was using them, as Grogan knew very well. It was Dan who went into the bedroom. In a few moments he came out, followed by a scared-looking young Italian, rubbing his wrists. Angelo Scotti looked around the room in startled amazement.

"Everythin' is all right now, Angelo," said Grogan. "Now—what happened when you come up to get them packages?"

"I find the man up here is this devil, Joe!" Angelo said. "He have a gun. He say Mrs. Hax's jewels have been stole—an' I am suspect. He say he give me five-hundred dollar an' I better beat it out of New York quick! He say if not, the cops get me in a hour—an' will laugh at any story I try to tell them! I fight—try to get away—an' then they tie me up an' throw me in there to think it over, they say! I don't—"

"That's all from you, Angelo," said Grogan. He glared at the racketeer, then suddenly reached in his pocket and tossed the packet of bills on the table. "There's your damn money, you mutt!" he snapped. "Now—produce the stuff!"

Tuxedo Joe eyed him. "Suppose I don't know what you're talking about?" he said.

"Then you can tell it to the judge," said Grogan, lighting a fresh cigar. "We ain't much time to waste here, Joe."

"But," said the racketeer, "in that event, how about Mrs. Hax? Surely she would not want to be dragged through—"

"Mrs. Hax," said Dan, "is ready to go through with the whole works! Don't try to bluff me, Joe. But for the sake of this lady, I'll give you an out. Produce the stuff, keep your damn trap shut—an' I'll call it quits—this time."

"May I take my hands down?" Tuxedo asked, after eyeing Grogan for a moment. "Thanks."

He went to a safe in the corner of the room, opened it, took out a box, and emptied it on the table. "Perhaps Mr. and Mrs. Hax will be kind enough to check up—and see how honest I am!" he said, resuming his seat.

It was the flabby Hax who rushed forward and pounced on the glittering pile.

“Yes, yes—it’s all here—all here!” he cried, meanwhile eagerly stowing it away in several pockets. “Come, Jessie dear—let’s go home. I—er—I feel quite ill.” Mr. J. Preston Hax was indeed an absurd, pitiful sight.

Grogan glared at him. “You’ll feel better in the mornin’, Hax,” he said. “An’ when you do, you take this advice—you give this nice little wife of yours some spendin’ money! Get goin’, Mrs. Hax. Inspector Williams will see that one of his men rides home with you.”

“And I want Angelo to come along with us,”

said Mrs. Hax.

One of Big Dan’s rare smiles broke all over his face. “Good for you!” he said. Come on, Andy—I got a idea Tuxedo Joe’ll kinder lay quiet for awhile—maybe leave town for his health.”

A few minutes later Andy Williams and Grogan were riding downtown in a taxi.

“Why the hell didn’t you let me pinch that mutt anyway?” Andy asked.

Grogan chuckled. “Because, Andy—Tuxedo ain’t like you. He’s got brains—an’ might use ‘em!”

BAD BUSINESS TO RAZZ A COP

Traffic Policeman Orlowsky became peeved when a brand new coupe flashed by him at Broadway and 52d Street, its driver ignoring the lights and all traffic regulations. Orlowsky looked twice and saw a small boy at the wheel. Two other boys were on a back seat and giving other motorists the “razzberry.”

Orlowsky nearly blew his whistle to pieces, but the car went on with its load of “razzberries.” Orlowsky boarded a taxicab and gave chase. With the skill of a veteran the driver turned and went through 52d Street toward Seventh Avenue. Two more policemen joined the chase, which ended at Seventh Avenue, when the car crashed in the curb.

Before the three youngsters could pile out Orlowsky collared them. They were booked as James Lahey, eleven, of No. 429 West 16th Street, the driver; John Hills, thirteen, of No. 531 West 44th Street, and John Bolter, ten, of No. 501 West 49th Street, on charges of juvenile delinquency and sent to the shelter of the Children’s Society.

Police said the car was stolen a few minutes after the owner, Louis Pearlman of No. 27 West 74th Street, parked it at 48th Street and Ninth Avenue. Lahey drove Hills and Bolter around the neighborhood for half an hour before he finally started up Broadway, it was said.

“Aw, gee, we didn’t do nothing,” was the only reply the boys made to questions of detectives at the West 47th Street Station.