

# Satan's Heir

*Hollywood Mystery Novelette*

*By James Perley Hughes*



*Ted Bosworth was press agent for Edythe Shirley, lovable child actress. His job was to arrange interviews for the little star. But, for once, Ted Bosworth was reluctant to do his job. For he had a strange horror hunch that Edythe Shirley's interview would be with—death.*

**A** MOIST eyed throng pressed against the glass walls dividing the stage upon which little Edythe Shirley was appearing and the crowd of visitors to the Cosmos Studios. The transparent partitions withheld all noise from the sensitive microphones on the set, but loudspeakers brought the child's words distinctly to those who watched.

"You ain't going away, are you, Daddy, and leave me and Mumzy all alone?"

Rich and mellow, yet filled with childish appeal, little Edythe's voice deepened the tears in many eyes. Men, as well as women,

reacted to the universal appeal that had made Edythe Shirley famous before she had reached school age. At the Cosmos Studios her stage was always the center of attraction. Famous sirens and Don Juans of world repute played to an audience of directors, cameramen and technicians when little Edythe was on the set. Known and loved around the world, she had stolen into hearts of all races and religions.

"Please, Daddy—Mumzy and I love you—please don't go," she pleaded.

"Of course, darling," the man in whose lap she sat murmured in broken tones. "Nothing could make me leave you—and Mumzy."

The child leaped from the man's lap and ran across the room to take a woman by the hand.

"Daddy's going to stay—Daddy's going to stay," she caroled.

The woman took the child's hand and moved slowly toward the man. Tears were in the eyes of both, yet they smiled through them. Behind the glass partition, the spectators cleared their throats or dabbed their eyes with moist handkerchiefs. Little Edythe was bringing estranged parents together, her innocent childish love triumphing over everything.

"Okay—cut," Stephen Delange's voice was slightly husky.

Although he had been a director for a decade and had handled the last four of Edythe Shirley's films, the child had a grip that swelled a lump in his throat whenever he directed her emotional scenes. Others attached to the little girl's company were similarly affected. Her winning smile, dancing eyes and halo of curly hair endeared her to them and they echoed both her laughter and her tears.

"She sure can jerk the water from my eyes—and I don't mean perhaps or sometimes," muttered Ted Bosworth of the publicity department, whose task was to look after little Edythe Shirley's contacts with the outside world.

Bosworth blew his nose violently and looked around. His gaze rested on a tall, wide-shouldered man. The tall man's blue eyes were fixed intensely on the child actress, now going over the next scene with her director. The man's face was cold, almost calculating. Bosworth noted with a start that he was apparently the only one in the crowd of spectators, who had not been affected by Edythe's portrayal of a child fighting with innocent art to protect her home from disruption. The press agent had once been a hard-boiled police reporter, but for all his heart-armoring experiences in the world of crime, he was vulnerable to the child's rare

appeal.

A strange uneasiness came over him as he continued to stare at the visitor, whose flintlike face was unstained by the emotion that had brought tears to the others. A certain resentment came to Bosworth. He made his way through the crowd to where the man was standing. As he neared, the stranger turned and their eyes met.

"Pardon me," the man smiled as he spoke, "are you by any chance Mr. Bosworth—in charge of Miss Shirley's publicity?"

The press agent said: "By the luckiest of chances."

"I'm Carter Thompson—of the Movie Mirror. I thought I'd see if I couldn't do a special on the little lady." He nodded toward Edythe Shirley, who had taken her place on the set ready for the next scene.

Ted Bosworth inclined his head in agreement. It was his business to spread the name and fame of the famous child to the four corners of the earth. Writers from the newspapers and fan magazines always applied to him for permission to interview the little star. Usually he greeted them with enthusiasm and labored to get exactly the material their editors desired. Now, for the first time in his life, Bosworth shrank from an obvious duty. There was something about Carter Thompson that made the hair at the back of his neck stiffen. He could not define it, but it was there.

"What do you want in particular?" he asked guardedly.

"I thought I'd write a little interview on what she does—when off stage." The man brought an envelope from his pocket. "Here are my credentials."

**T**ED BOSWORTH glanced at several sheets of paper. Ninety-nine times out of a hundred he paid no attention to letters of introduction. Writers appeared, stated the object of their visit and he sprang to aid them. He did not question their identity. He had been a scribe long enough to know a brother or a

sister when he saw one. But Carter Thompson was different. He lacked the enthusiasm, a verve of the writing folk. He was cold, self-contained, without enthusiasm. Bosworth looked over the letters and handed them back.

"I'll be glad to do anything I can to help you," he said with formal politeness.

"Fine," replied Carter Thompson. "I'd like to talk to the little lady about what she does—when the show is over."

Bosworth flicked a glance at Thompson's perfectly controlled features. Even his talk was unprofessional. There was something wrong, somewhere.

The press agent could not place his finger on it, but he sensed a touch of the sinister, like the shadow a dark hand reaching out.

"Okay," he agreed. "I'll take you to her—just as soon as she gets through with this scene."

He nodded toward the stage where the felt enclosed cameras silently were grinding out their film. The words of the child again sounded in the loudspeaker outside the glassed-in set. Once more the spectators stared at the little girl, but this time they were laughing, chuckling and nodding their heads. Little Edythe was playing with her make-believe father and mother. The breach had been healed by her appeal to both their hearts.

But Ted Bosworth did not pause to watch this part of the action. He hurried to his office, a frown digging its way between his bushy brows. His instinctive dislike of Carter Thompson prompted precautions he seldom took. His first act was to call up the Hollywood bureau of *Movie Mirror*, a fan magazine of world-wide circulation.

"Did you guys send out a gink by the name of Carter Thompson to the Edythe Shirley set?" was his pointed inquiry.

"Yeah. He's out from New York. One of the brows," the bureau chief answered. "Do what you can for him, will you, Ted?"

"Okay, for your sake—not his," Bosworth retorted. "Personally, I think he's a fish."

"New York is always sending out some dish of tripe and we take 'em in our stride. Thanks, Ted, for the cooperation. I'll be seeing you."

"Make it soon, old-timer."

Armed with this assurance, he returned to the set where little Edythe was finishing her day's work. Still sparkling, she left the stage to run into her real mother's waiting arms. A little later she was answering a deluge of questions from Carter Thompson, questions that shrewdly unveiled every moment of the child's life from the time she left her home in the morning until she went to bed at night.

Ted Bosworth listened, the frown returning to his brow. He studied the man's face. It was familiar, but he was sure he had never seen it before. But he had seen faces like it, faces that were cold, immobile, without feeling. He flayed his memory but no answer came. The interview finally ended. Little Edythe entered the colorful limousine her art had bought and was whisked away to dolls and kittens, deep in the Beverly Hills. Carter Thompson murmured his thanks and selected numerous "stills" of the child actress.

"Here's some of our press department releases on Edythe." Bosworth held out some mimeographed sheets. "Perhaps they'll help."

He had been giving Thompson everything he could think of, trying to delay him, trying to find out something an inward sentinel had warned he must uncover. But the visitor only smiled and shook his head. He had all the material he wanted.

"Thanks a lot, old man," he said a moment later. "I don't know what I would have done if it hadn't been for you."

"That's okay. By the way, where are you stopping? The publicity department is giving a studio luncheon Thursday—"

"Sorry, I'll be on my way back to the big town then," the visitor broke in. "Thanks again."

He turned and left the press agent's office. Ted Bosworth stared after him. He fingered

his chin, trying to place the man in some category other than that which he had assumed. The feeling of menace crept over him and he could not shake it off.

"Gee—" he muttered, "if anything happened to that kid—we'd all go nuts. The whole hot-damned world!"

A LITTLE group of hard-eyed men were gathered about a dining table in a hunting lodge more than a hundred miles from Hollywood. They had come there during the night several days before and had not appeared since their arrival. Seated at table was one whom the others addressed in respectful tones, even while quarreling among themselves.

Kurt Novak had something about him that made men cower. His square, pale face was deeply lined and the marks were not the footprints of laughter. High cheek bones with hollows beneath and outjutting lower jaw gave evidence of indomitable strength, but fear was bred by the small flinty eyes that peered coldly from beneath sparse, straw-colored brows. Icy gray, utterly devoid of emotion, those eyes sent chills down the spines of men hardened to violence and sudden death.

The mouth was no less cruel than the eyes. Thin to the verge of lipless-ness, it spoke words of doom with scarcely a perceptible movement. The long, flat upper lip once had worn a moustache. Now it was smooth shaven and apparently paler than the rest of an almost bloodless visage.

Master of men, he enforced unquestioning obedience. Those who crossed him never boasted of their revolt. On the other hand, they disappeared and were never seen or heard of afterward. Cold, cruel and iron-willed, the man mastered the most predatory in the world of crime and by sheer ruthlessness awed them to submission.

"'Bout time Finger French showed up, isn't it?" one of the party asked.

Novak nodded, but did not turn his head.

He was studying a road map that showed the highways radiating from Hollywood. His aids had checked each one, both for distance and condition for high speed. He had every detail at his finger tips. Novak's success in crime had been the result of infinite pains. He left nothing to chance.

"If he's not the devil, he's Satan's heir," one of the gang muttered to his companion, as they watched Kurt Novak again turn to the road maps and his penciled notes. "Nothing seems to—"

The man's words came to an abrupt end when the sound of an airplane filtered into the room. The roar died as the motor was cut and several of the party rushed to the windows.

"It's Finger French," one announced.

"I don't care if it's the King of Egypt. Keep away from those windows," Novak rasped without looking up.

The men slunk away.

A step sounded outside and the door opened. A man entered and the group started toward him. Then they glanced at Kurt Novak and hung back. Finger French had arrived. Twenty-four hours before, he had posed as Carter Thompson, a staff writer out of the New York office of *Movie Mirror*. Now he was himself again, reporting to his chief.

HE glanced at Kurt Novak. The man's head was still bent over the road maps. Finally cold gray eyes looked up to the newcomer's. French started to speak, but a gesture checked him. Novak's glassy gaze traveled around the circle of trigger men and desperadoes who followed his orders. He issued no command, but all started for the door, as though in answer to spoken words.

Novak waited until the last of the footsteps had died away. Then he looked at Finger French.

"I got the full dope, chief," the man began. "Every minute from the time she gets up—until she goes to bed. Now we can work the snatch best when she—"

"I'll decide that," was the cold interruption.

"Okay, boss. Here it is all written out like you ordered. Hour by hour."

He laid three closely typewritten sheets upon the table. Kurt Novak studied them closely. The final paragraph claimed his most concentrated attention. He read it thrice before he again looked up.

"You say here that Bosworth, the child's publicity agent, acted suspiciously. What do you mean by that?"

"He didn't cotton to me. I caught it in his manner. As soon as I left the studio, I called up the Hollywood bureau of Movie Mirror and they told me he'd been checking up—on Carter Thompson."

Novak nodded and took a cigarette from a finely chased case.

"After or before you talked to the child?"

"Before, chief."

"Then his suspicions were laid—otherwise you wouldn't have gotten to her."

"Well—mebbe. He acted funny after the interview."

"Perhaps you acted funny during it. You said you knew this stuff. If your manner gave you away, then—"

"Hold on, chief, I didn't say—" He paused as Novak lifted his hand.

"If your manner gave you away and you spoiled this operation before it has really started," Satan's Heir went on, "I'm afraid your usefulness will be at an end."

In spite of his own cold self-sufficiency, Finger French felt a shudder wiggle down his spine. Kurt Novak had told other men that their usefulness was over. It had foreshadowed the end of their lives. They had disappeared as though into a void. No eye had seen them afterward, no ear had heard their voices. They had ceased to exist.

"I haven't spoiled anything," French kept his tone level.

Novak made no reply. His eyes were again on the report of Edythe Shirley's daily routine.

It varied little from day to day. Work, study, play, alternating with meals, rest and sleeping hours. The Finger had learned everything.

"You'll hop for Glendale immediately," the man announced, after laying the paper aside, "and board the New York plane that leaves at ten o'clock. Wire on your arrival in New York to the usual cover address."

"But, boss—"

"You may go now." Novak touched a button that brought a Japanese servant into the room.

He waited until Finger French had departed before he spoke to the Oriental. The sound of an airplane taking off filtered into the room and the crime chief raised his expressionless eyes.

"Tell the gentlemen in the billiard room I want to speak to them," he ordered.

He bent over the papers on the table to scribble first on one sheet, then another. By the time the five men who had been in the room when Finger French arrived had taken their places before him, he had written out instructions for each.

"You, Casoni, will handle the ten-ton sand truck that will back into El Dorado Boulevard at eight-three o'clock tomorrow morning. That's all you need to do, except work with your engine until Brahm appears. Then you will return the truck to the pit. That's all."

"Okay, boss." A short, dark little man saluted and left the room.

"Brahm, you and Mahony will make the snatch. Whipple will drive. You switch cars at J-4 marked on this map. Mrs. Guzman will be waiting for you. From there you go to K-5 and transfer to the black limousine. Keep your radio cut in. If you get the danger signal, go to L-4 where a plane will be waiting. If you get the XX flash— cut her throat and beat it for Mexico."

"But, boss, that kid—"

Brahm's lips snapped shut as the cold, gray eyes of Satan's Heir met his. He saluted awkwardly and turned toward the door. Only

one man remained. The others had been trigger-men, hard fighting, desperate fellows ready for anything, but George Sartain was of a different stripe. He was cool, oily and soft of speech. Once a lawyer, he had taken one too many chances and had been disbarred. This made him all the more valuable to Kurt Novak. He was the Voice of the ring.

He would make contact, not with Edythe Shirley's distracted parents, but with Morris Hart, the multi-millionaire president of Cosmos Studios. Not only would Hart be able to pay an extravagant ransom, but he would have business reasons for advancing the money.

"The picture she's working on is almost finished," Sartain pointed out. "And Hart has nearly a million invested in it."

Novak nodded.

"And Edythe's contract is the most valuable piece of paper in Hollywood," the lawyer went on.

The chief's almost lashless lids lowered.

"Then the family is good for two hundred and fifty grand."

"How about the public?" Novak's glassy eyes fastened on the lawyer's.

"I hadn't thought of that. On a public sympathy plea, millions could be raised. I'd never dreamed that—"

"I have, and my dreams come true."

A few curt words of final instruction and George Sartain prepared to return to Los Angeles to carry out his part of the program. Every detail had been worked out. Only the wildest freak of chance could save little Edythe Shirley from the kidnapers' hands.

"Supposing something happens—some one slips up?" Sartain asked, just before his departure.

"Don't worry, judge. There'll be no witnesses."

Kurt Novak's colorless lips thinned into a smile that sent a shiver down the spine of the disbarred attorney. Satan's Heir, the man reflected, made the devil pale into a kindly

philanthropist by comparison.

TED BOSWORTH went to his home in one of Hollywood's many bungalow courts after posting the daily releases on Edythe Shirley's new film, "Curly Locks." He had been attending to such details for months and they had become routine, so that night found both mind and body far from the studio. That evening, however, Bosworth kept thinking of the day's happenings. The image of Carter Thompson's cold eyes kept coming before him. There was something in that expressionless visage that reminded him of faces he had seen before he ever entered the dazzling realm of motion pictures.

"Where did I see a phiz like that?" he asked himself again and again. "If I only had a personal and private rogues' gallery—"

His thoughts stopped suddenly on the words "rogues' gallery." In his day as a police reporter he had gone to the galleries many times seeking portraits of criminals in the news. He had never seen Carter Thompson's picture in those guarded files, but there had been many like him—cold, collected faces that defied even the camera to show more than a mask.

Instead of ending his worries, the memory added to them. He began to vision little Edythe the victim of a criminal conspiracy. His mind toyed with the thought. It obsessed him until he could not sleep.

He had only the masklike face of a studio visitor upon which to base his worries, but they mounted as the night waxed. Ted Bosworth had played "hunches" in his days as a police reporter. Many of them had turned out spectacularly correct and he had forgotten the failures.

"Kidnap Edythe Shirley!" he laughed at himself for the thought. "They couldn't take her anywhere. Her face is better known than the president's. They'll kidnap him before they do her."

But the thought would not down. It kept

reasserting itself and sleep fled from his bed. He smoked a score of cigarettes and paced the floor. Finally, he slept a restless hour or more and then got up. Dawn was breaking when he took a quick shave and shower. Then he drove up into Beverly Hills to the home of Edythe's parents. The house was asleep when he passed it the first time. He smiled grimly to himself at the joke his imagination had played upon him, but he continued circling the grounds as the early sunlight brightened.

Motion picture folk arise early and are at the studios long before the average office worker. It is a relic of the days when they depended upon the sunlight for photographing, but it still endures. Quarter to eight saw a long, dark limousine leave the Shirley garages and stop beneath the porte cochere. Bosworth turned his roadster into the graveled drive leading to the house.

"Hello, Ted. On your way home from a party?" a tall man in white flannels called.

It was John Shirley, the little star's father. He looked after her business affairs and was making her one of the richest youngsters in the world. Bosworth smiled wryly at the thrust.

"I guess you'll think I'm nuts," he said, "but I dreamed last night that some one tried to kidnap the kid. I couldn't go back to sleep."

He couldn't tell the father that he had basis for his "hunch." It might bring panic, and he really had nothing tangible. He had checked on Carter Thompson, and the Hollywood bureau of Movie Mirror had sponsored the visitor. After all, it had been a hunch, nothing more.

"Eat lobster, or crab a la Newburg?" John Shirley laughed.

Bosworth flushed, then grinned. "No, but you know how we all love the kid. Honestly—"

"Sure, I know, Ted. Thanks for the kind thoughts. Mrs. Shirley and I appreciate them. So does Edythe. S-s-s-h-h-h. Here they come. Don't say anything."

"Of course not." Ted's smiling eyes turned to the little actress and her mother.

"Oh, Mumzy, it's Mr. Bosworth. He's come to ride to the studio with us." The little girl ran toward her publicity agent with outstretched hands.

He caught her up into his arms and kissed each dimpled cheek. The little girl clung to him, as though he were an older brother.

"Morning, Ted." Then Mrs. Shirley smiled accusingly. "Are you up awfully early—or terribly late?"

"Early—that's all. Took the bug out for a workout." He nodded to his little coupe that looked like an insect beside the long black limousine.

"But you're coming with us, aren't you?" The curly head was thrown back so laughing, hazel eyes could stare up into the young man's face.

"How about my heap—how is it going to get home?" he asked, nodding toward the coupe again.

"One of our men will deliver it to the studio," John Shirley put in. "Come on, Ted, the Princess commands."

"You bet I do," the little girl firmly grasped Bosworth's hand. "Come—you're going to sit in back with me."

"Okay, boss—here you go." He handed her in, taking a place between Edythe and her mother.

**A** MOMENT later the big limousine was rolling down the gravel driveway into the winding road that led up the hill to the Shirley home. Next they were sweeping around the steep curves and Bosworth forgot the fears of the night's dark hours in the spontaneous laughter of the child beside him. With keen sense of humor she told of the many foolish questions visiting fans asked her. Then came a smile-bringing incident at the breakfast table. Toodles, her kitten, had shared her mush and milk, when her mother was not looking.

"Honest, Mr. Bosworth," the little star

giggled, "you should have seen Mumzy when she looked up and saw Toodles—"

"Hey! Look out there! What the—"

John Shirley yelled as he stuck his head out the window.

Ted Bosworth felt himself thrown forward as the chauffeur kicked on the brakes. He grasped little Edythe to keep her from being hurled against the front seat. Then he stared ahead to see a truck loaded with sand back into the road. Instinctively, he looked at his wrist watch. It was exactly 8:03 o'clock.

"Get out of the way there! What's the matter with you?" John Shirley shouted.

The truck driver had descended from his cabin and was looking under the engine hood. He paid no attention to the man's words.

"Just a minute, sir," the chauffeur muttered. "I'll see what's up, sir."

"All right, Henry. Hurry."

"Yes, sir."

Cutting off his engine, the man stepped out and approached the truck. Ted Bosworth stared at him with fascinated eyes. His brows had gathered into a knotty frown. He heard little Edythe make a laughing remark, but he paid no heed.

Suddenly, the chauffeur's arms shot into the air. He had stopped in his tracks and stood transfixed. From around the corner of the truck came two men, each armed with a sub-calibered machine gun. Their deadly muzzles were raised to menace the limousine's passengers.

"Oh, Mumzy, look! Where's the camera and the mike?" little Edythe shrilled. "Why didn't you tell me—"

"S-s-h-h-h," the woman whispered tensely.

Ted Bosworth stared with unbelieving eyes. He had a sensation of utter confusion. He reached for a weapon he did not have, then stared around the limousine for something with which he could fight. He found nothing. Then his hand shot toward the door catch and he prepared to spring out.

"Hold on there, buddy. You ain't going anywhere," a voice called.

A blast from the machine gun shattered the glass door. A stream of bullets tore into the roof of the car.

"Mumzy—Mumzy—tell Mr. Delange they're—"

"Mr. Delange isn't here, dear. This is—is—real."

One of the bandits advanced rapidly, while the other covered with his machine gun. John Shirley fumbled with the steering wheel and kicked down on the self starter. He was trying to back away for the truck barred the road ahead.

"Lay off there." The nearer bandit shot a burst that crashed the windshield.

**T**ED BOSWORTH crouched, ready to spring as soon as the kidnapers opened the door. He knew their object and he had formed a plan that would balk them, if he had just a break of luck. If he could get his hands on the man approaching the car, a swift twist would give him possession of the machine gun. Then he would shoot it out with the second gangster.

"Put the kid out on the running board," was the crisp order.

The first bandit had stopped ten feet from the limousine.

"No—no. Take these—any amount of money," Mrs. Shirley tore her rings from her fingers, "but leave my little girl alone."

"This ain't no stick up. It's a snatch," growled the man.

"They'll hang you for this," John Shirley threatened.

"Put that kid out and shut up."

"I'll see you in hell first." Ted Bosworth lunged toward the door, but another crash of machine-gun bullets sent the glass flying.

"Hurry, Hans—we ain't got all day," the second bandit shouted. "Make it snappy. Blast 'em if they don't give up the kid."

"Don't, mister—I'm coming. Don't hurt

my Mumzy and Daddy—and Mister Bosworth.”

Little Edythe leaped from the car before her mother's frantic hand could stay her.

“Darling—darling,” Mrs. Shirley shrilled. “Come back—that man will—”

“He won't hurt me, Mumzy, and he might hurt you.”

Ted Bosworth leaped from the limousine as the kidnaper took the child up in his arms. Here was his chance. He surged forward, unmindful of the second bandit and the weapon in his hand. All he knew was that Edythe Shirley was in the hands of kidnapers. In some manner, he felt himself to blame.

“Hey—drop that kid,” he shouted. “Put her down or—”

The sub-machine gun in the second bandit's hand crackled. Ted Bosworth felt a hot iron drawn across his head. The world turned dark. He stumbled, plunged into a bottomless chasm of inky blackness.

**P**ANIC gripped the great Cosmos Studios from the office of Morris Hart, its president, down to the lowest paid messenger and file clerk. Little Edythe Shirley was in the hands of kidnapers. A pall hung over the studio. Stars and extras discussed the tragedy in low tones. Reports from the Shirley home said the mother was prostrated. John Shirley haunted the studios, his face gray, his eyes glassy.

Ted Bosworth appeared, his head turbaned with bandages. Although knocked unconscious by the machine-gun bullets, his wound was not serious. While others were stunned by the catastrophe, Bosworth was tingling with energy. His years as a police reporter had given him a background of experience in running down criminals and he had already started his inquiry, when summoned into the office of Morris Hart.

“I tell you, boss, it was a perfectly organized snatch,” he told the studio president.

“I know.”

City detectives, private operatives and G-men, hurried to Hollywood by the government, ringed the great table at which Morris Hart sat.

“Yeah?” drawled one of the city sleuths. “Mebbe you'll tell us all you know about that.”

“Sure I will,” Bosworth shot back, “and it'll be news to you. You won't get a stool to tip you off on this. These guys are big leaguers. They had a finger out here, who posed as a magazine writer by the name of Carter Thompson. He fooled me—some.”

“Must have been slick,” the detective rapped. “Think of a guy who could fool you—some.”

Ted Bosworth flushed. Then he turned to Morris Hart and the G-men. He was no longer a press agent in charge of Edythe Shirley's publicity, but a seasoned police reporter hot on the trail of a good story and the rescue of a child he had grown to love.

“I've got that guy's fingerprints and his photo,” he announced.

“Holding out on us, huh?” a city detective said.

“Shut up, flatfoot,” Ted snapped, then to the G-men, “but you've got to declare me in on this or I'm working on my own.”

“Sure—you're declaring us in,” the government agent retorted.

A nod from Morris Hart and Bosworth led the G-men to his office. He showed them photographs of Edythe Shirley, which the man calling himself Carter Thompson had handled when selecting pictures for his purported article on the little star. They were covered with fingerprints. Then the publicity camera department produced a still in which Thompson was shown talking to Edythe.

“Surprised he stood for that,” the G-men muttered.

“Didn't know it was being taken. We shoot all interviewers as a matter of routine,” the press agent explained.

THE G-men studied the face of the man who had visited little Edythe Shirley. Like Ted Bosworth, they saw something familiar in it, yet could make no identification. They turned to the finger prints and rapidly classified them. Next inquiries were telegraphed to Washington where almost a million prints are on file.

"They'll find him if he's ever been pinched," the government men told Bosworth. "We ought to hear something in a day or two."

"Day or two!"

The words burst from the publicity man's lips like an exploding bomb. Little Edythe had been in the kidnapers' hands for twenty-four hours. The nation was aroused. The world stirred with outrage. She might be killed if the gang lost heart and realized that they could not hold her indefinitely.

"Yeah—mebbe longer."

Ted Bosworth made no answer. He could not wait for the slow grinding of the wheels of justice. "Damned if I'm going to stand around and wait," he muttered.

He hurried back to the office of the Cosmos president to find Morris Hart pacing up and down his room.

"The poor kiddy. It's just like as if she was mine—my own little girl."

"That's the way I feel," Ted Bosworth broke in.

"Then why the hell don't you do something?"

"Why don't you?" the press agent shot back.

For a long moment the head of Cosmos Studios stared at the man before him. He was not used to being thus addressed by underlings. Yes-men circled him and his will was hailed a divine revelation. His face hardened and he bit savagely at his cigar. Then he slumped into a chair and buried his head in his hands.

"You're right, Bosworth, I should do something. I love that little lady. Besides, she

has made millions for me."

"Then spend some of it," the publicity man shouted. "Let's get after those devils. These dicks and private flatfeet are no good. Let Cosmos wage her own fight against these kid snatchers. If I had the money. I'd—"

"Just what would you do?" Morris Hart broke in.

"I'll tell you." Ted Bosworth threw himself into a chair and faced his chief. "First I'd send out a mob that doesn't scream flatfoot every time their shoes squeak. I'd trace those cars from the time the truck stopped us—until they stopped. I'd try to identify every man who's been in this vicinity for the last two weeks and start looking for the missing ones. The gang isn't here. They're hiding out."

"But where?" Morris Hart demanded.

"You give enough money and I'll find out," Bosworth shot back. "Dough will do wonders and I've been behind the scenes at headquarters long enough to know where it will do the most good."

The head of Cosmos Studios reached into a drawer and brought out a large book. His pen raced across the blank paper and he tore out a check and handed it to Ted Bosworth.

"Okay," he said. "Shoot the works."

The young man stared at the paper in his hand. "You forgot to fill in the amount, boss."

"No I didn't. That's up to you. Go as far as you like and don't come squawking around me until after the first million's spent."

THUS was launched a manhunt that for sheer speed and intensity has few equals in the annals of crime. Given carte blanche by the Cosmos Studios, Ted Bosworth took Morris Hart at his word. Before leaving the president's office, he coolly wrote in the words "One Million Dollars" and showed the check to his chief.

"I wasn't kidding you," the famous executive muttered. "But get results. I love that kid."

From that moment on, Bosworth lived a

life that was frenzied with speed and mad with accomplishment. He struck with a fury that left the city and private detectives dizzy with surprise. Even the famous G-men watched his dazzling steps with astonishment. They had the government behind them, but little ready cash. They were forced to go through routine and unravel red tape, but Ted Bosworth cut through every obstacle with the power of cash. Within twenty-four hours after receiving Morris Hart's check, he had identified the sand truck and Casoni, its driver. Scores of men had been enlisted under Bosworth's banner the second day of his search. The Cosmos Studios formed the clearing house for information and Ted Bosworth kept in constant touch with them. He, himself, followed the main leads as soon as they were uncovered.

The second day resulted in the discovery of the hunting lodge. He loaded three cars with armed men and raced up the winding grade. Disappointment greeted him, but he found one thing that set his pulses throbbing. Chained to a post in the lodge's shallow basement was the half-starved wreck of a man, who moaned piteously.

"What is your name, buddy?" Bosworth asked.

Vacant eyes met his. The man sadly shook his head.

"Carter Thompson, isn't it?" A sudden eagerness came into Ted's voice.

"Yes, that's me. Kurt Novak got me—Kurt Novak's gang. They're—"

The man swayed. Brandy partially revived him, but his words were babbling and had little coherence. Bosworth loaded him into an automobile and they raced back to Hollywood. Ted Bosworth's mind whirled with the magnitude of the task before him. He had identified the leader of the gang, but the discovery added to his worries rather than bringing a sense of elation.

Bosworth's return dashed high hopes, but the discovery of the real Carter Thompson

fitted at least one mosaic into its place. Then a visit to Morris Hart's office revealed a fresh development.

"Look. They ask no money yet." Hart thrust a typewritten letter into the young man's hand.

One glance and the blood ebbed from Bosworth's face. He laid the paper upon the table and lighted a cigarette with trembling hand.

"And the hell of it is, they mean just that," he finally muttered.

**B**EFORE him was a letter threatening to kill little Edythe Shirley unless the closely pressed chase was called off immediately. Long hours, days, perhaps a week would be required to trace that letter. In the meantime, the child star might be slain.

"But they couldn't kill that kid!" Morris Hart chewed violently on his unlighted cigar. "Why she'd smile at them and they couldn't do it."

"The guy that snatches her could," the press agent answered.

Morris Hart strode up and down the room several times. Then he paused and shot an angry finger at his employee.

"Listen, Bosworth, you've got to keep them from it, if you have to kill the man who's got her."

"Give me a chance and I won't kid around about it. I'll crack his neck. He's somewhere around and—"

"Then find him—and kill him. Need any more money?"

"Not for that, boss. I'd tear his heart out and not charge you a cent. You see, I'm stuck on that kid myself."

Bosworth paused to take the threatening letter Morris Hart had just received. He had it photographed and within two hours, half a hundred men were examining virtually every typewriter in the vicinity of Los Angeles. By night the machine upon which the message had been written had been identified.

"Belongs to a guy in the real-estate business down in San Pedro," one of Bosworth's aids informed him.

"Get a line on him?"

"Yeah. And it's a cinch he's not the man who wrote it. But there's a guy they call 'judge' who hangs around the place a lot, the informant went on.

"Find him—by eight o'clock tonight," Bosworth broke in.

Two hours later the man telephoned he had located a Judge Sartain, who had borrowed the typewriter upon which the note had been written. Meantime Bosworth had consulted the G-men and had heard tales of a dozen acts of cruelty ascribed to Satan's Heir. Not long after, he drove toward San Pedro, accompanied by strong and willing aids.

"If that guy plays rough, I guess I can," he muttered.

**H**E found his agent awaiting him. The man clambered into the car and gestured up a side street.

"His name's George Sartain," the agent said in a low voice. "He used to be a lawyer—gets mail from Chola Vista, between San Diego and the border .... There's the house now. He just boards there."

Ted Bosworth slowed down his car. Then he turned to two burly men in the back seat, saying: "We're going in here and get a man. We're going to take him for a ride. Get me? He's one of the mob that snatched Edythe Shirley, but if your consciences are going to hurt you any, you'd better get out and beat it."

"We'll break him in two, if you say the word," one answered.

The other nodded grimly.

"Okay. Let's go."

Ted Bosworth led the way up the steps and rang the bell. A woman appeared, staring with frightened eyes through a slit in the partially opened door.

"Is Judge Sartain in?" Ted Bosworth asked.

"Why no—he—"

"Tell him I've got a message—from Kurt."

The woman nodded and disappeared. He pushed the door open with his foot. Then he whirled to the two men who had accompanied him.

"Run around to the back. He's beating it."

He lunged through the front door himself as a pistol shot crashed out. For an instant he caught a glimpse of cold, steel-gray eyes staring down a leveled barrel. He dodged and fired as a bullet shrieked over his head.

Ted rolled over, crossing the floor with astonishing speed. He reached out to jerk the man's feet from beneath him. Next he was grappling with a foe whose cold eyes stared into his with reptilian hatred.

The gray-eyed man wrenched his arm free. The barrel of his gun came down upon Bosworth's wounded head. The room seemed suddenly flooded with a white glare. Bosworth struggled desperately, but another blow came, driving him down into the depths. He groped through the darkness trying to lay his hands upon his enemy. Fresh blows came as he staggered to his feet, fighting blindly.

"Either you or me," he managed to gasp.

A short burst of grating laughter. He lunged at it, his arms outstretched. A click and the lights went off. Ted half settled to his knees. Then he heard shouts and lights returned once more.

"We got him!" a triumphant voice called.

A surge of relief swept through Ted Bosworth. With Kurt Novak captured, little Edythe Shirley would be saved. A life would be traded for a life.

"Bring him here!" he shouted.

A tramp of feet and his two aids appeared, dragging a man between them—one with graying hair, scraggy mustaches, and popping eyes filled with fright:

"That isn't the one I want!" Bosworth rapped.

"He says he's the judge."

"But that other fellow—Kurt Novak. Big fellow with glassy eyes and—square, putty-colored face."

A chuckle came from the prisoner. "You'll never get him," he shrilled, suddenly brave.

"No?" Bosworth's voice became dangerously soft. "Well that's going to be just too bad—for you." He turned his back on the man, and left the room.

A THOROUGH search of the Sartain house disclosed no trace of Kurt Novak. He had disappeared as completely as though he had taken wings from the house top. Ted Bosworth's rage grew. He had had his hands on Edythe's captor and had let him get away. The child's life was more in danger than ever. Novak would know that his identity could no longer be hidden.

Bosworth's face was bleak, as he supervised the loading of their prisoner into his automobile. Delegating one of his aids to drive, he got in the back seat with his captive. His first act was to bind the man's eyes. Then he began talking.

"So your mob beat us to the snatch, huh?" he demanded, simulating the rough manner of a gangster, "Well, judge, that's gonna be tough on you."

"You aren't going to take me—for a ride, are you?" the judge quavered. He flinched from physical pain. His was a dark and devious mind that played with the abstract. The concrete made him shrink and now he was facing a situation in which his own body might be the object of violent action.

"You guessed it the first time, judge," Bosworth growled. "Either give us the kid or—"

"But I haven't got her. I don't know where she is. Kurt never tells anyone anything."

"Yeah? Well, we aim to find out—soon. You'd better start thinking hard. Mebbe you'll suddenly remember where the hideout is. Mebbe it'll come to you all of a sudden."

"You might as well kill me—as have Kurt

do it." But the lawyer shuddered at the thought.

"Okay. Have it your own way."

Bosworth did not push his questions. He was not ready. A fantastic plan was beginning to blossom in his mind. He signaled to the driver to make for the Cosmos Studios. Within a few blocks of the lot, he stopped at a drugstore and bought a quantity of cotton and adhesive tape. With these he sealed George Sartain's eyes, lips, and ears.

Although the night was deepening, lights were burning in the Cosmos executive offices. Leaving his aids to guard their prisoner, Bosworth hurried to Morris Hart. With him he found a score of detectives, city, state and national. They had done nothing.

"But look, gentlemen, look. She asks me to save her!" Morris Hart was pacing up and down the room, waving a letter that had come scarcely an hour before.

"What is it, chief?" Bosworth asked.

"From the kid—herself—see—"

He handed the letter to the publicity man. Ted felt a lump swelling in his throat as he glanced at the irregular, childish scrawl. His eyes dimmed as they went from line to line, reading:

Dear Mr. Hart:

Pleaz send me one million dollars rite away. Mama can take it out of my dime saving bank and pay back tomorrow. I want to get back and finish the picshure so Daddy will take me fishing like he promised. Plez, Mister Heart, make it in little, teeny bills cause the man here says big ones are not so good. He says if you say Okay over the radio when they talk about me, he will tell you how to send the money.

Give my love to Daddy and Mumzy and Mrs. Hart and Mr. Bosworth and Mr. Delange, my directore, and tell them I'm tired of staying here and want to finish the picshure.

Kisses for you all,  
Edythe.

P.S.—He says if you don't send the money something turribal is going to happen to me, but I ain't afraid.

Bosworth's eyes were smarting when he

returned the letter to Morris Hart's moist hand. Then his thoughts returned to his prisoner. His face hardened.

"Listen, chief," he said in a low whisper, "don't send a cent—don't do anything until you hear from me."

"But Edythe—I love her as if she were my own child. A million dollars! She is worth much more to me and—"

"That bird would kill her after he got the money, if he thought it would help him get away," Bosworth broke in.

"That's what they say," Hart nodded to the G-men, "but what am I going to do? Listen, Bosworth, if anything happens to that little lady I'll—"

"Nothing's going to happen to her if I can get a break. Say, is that Inquisition set still standing on Stage Five?"

HART stared at his publicity man in amazement. Stage sets were the last of his thoughts. He was struggling to save pretty little Edythe Shirley from death or mutilation. For a moment he thought Ted Bosworth had cracked and gone mad.

"Say—this is no time for monkey business!"

"It isn't monkey business, chief. Listen, if I can use that set for half an hour, I may be able to crack this case wide open. But I've got to work on the quiet. I've got to pull a fast one and in a way that Novak won't suspect. Are you on?"

"I'm on anything that'll save the kid," the magnate replied. "I told you to shoot the works for a million. I'll go for another. But nothing must happen to—"

"There won't, chief. Not if I can help it." Bosworth spun and started for the door.

Outside, he signaled to his aids to take George Sartain to the Inquisition set on Stage Five. There he had watched the filming of a story showing the torments inflicted during the Middle Ages. The director had assembled replicas of every hellish device known to the

executioners of that brutal era. The setting was perfect.

Lights were burning dimly. Bosworth's aids stood shrouded in cowls and cassocks. The prisoner was freed of gag and blindfolds. He looked around to see himself in a torture chamber, apparently built in a vast cellar. On one side a small forge was sending up a shower of sparks as a dark-cloaked figure plied the bellows. A closer look and Sartain could see he was heating a forked iron upon which were two knobs, already glowing a cherry red.

George Sartain shuddered. His distended eyes looked around, prying into the darker corners to see even more horrible methods of torment. He had read of these things, but now he was seeing them in actuality. He had known of cases where gangs had tortured their prisoners unmercifully, burning their bodies, cutting them into shreds, staining with acid until they talked—or perished.

The very contemplation of these things weakened the lawyer. Physical pain was abhorrent to him and he shrank when one of the leather-aproned executioners grasped him by the shoulder. His face was livid and his eyes protruded. He looked appealingly into Ted Bosworth's grim gaze and saw no mercy there.

"I'll talk—" he blurted. "Tell me—what you want to know."

"Where's the kid?"

"I don't know." A screech as the man with the leather apron tightened his grip. "I tell you I don't know. She's with a woman, a Mrs. Guzman, Kurt's sister, but—" The man's voice broke into a series of hysterical screams as another aproned figure grasped him.

"Maybe a little fire would do him good."

Bosworth's voice was coldly level. He had given his men their instructions before Sartain was brought on the set. He had no intention of doing the man bodily harm and depended upon the disbarred lawyer's imagination to inflict what torture was applied.

"Okay, boss."

A ripping of cloth as Sartain's shirt was torn from him. Then the executioner at the forge took up a white-hot iron bar and swiftly crossed the room. The leather-aproned figures grasped their victim by the arms and bent him over a metal-topped table.

The glowing iron neared the victim's flesh. Then a fourth man, who had been lurking in the shadows, rushed forward, a piece of ice in his hand. He jabbed it down between Sartain's shoulder blades and then moved it slowly down the spine. At the same time, the smith held a piece of beefsteak to his white-hot iron. The pungent odor of burning flesh came to Sartain's distended nostrils. The touch of the ice felt like the branding iron.

"I'll talk—I'll tell everything," he screamed. "Stop it—I'll come through."

"Okay," Ted Bosworth growled. "But keep those irons hot. He's liable to get forgetful."

**F**OR the next hour, Ted Bosworth listened to the babbling of a broken man. He took notes that disclosed many of the secrets of Kurt Novak's career of crime. As his legal adviser, the disbarred attorney had given the man directions that had kept him within the law's lax pale for years and the kidnaping of little Edythe Shirley had been in direct opposition to his urgings. He gave the names of Tony Casoni, Hans Brahm, Arthur Whipple, Bert Mahony and Mary Guzman, all members of the inner circle.

"But where's the kid?" Bosworth kept repeating.

"I don't know," the man replied, fresh terror welling in his eyes. "Don't you think I'd tell if I knew? I've spilled enough now to kill me if Kurt ever gets a finger on me."

Bosworth nodded and signaled the leather-aproned men to go away. Then he spoke in a low voice.

"Where do you meet Novak?"

Sartain glanced around. No one was near.

"On the plaza in Los Angeles—at 8 P.M. I'm to meet him there tomorrow."

"You'll be there, buddy."

A shudder went through the former lawyer. He had broken under the threat of torture, but now death was beckoning. "He'll kill me if he finds out—"

"He won't. For you'll be there—and won't be. Figure that out."

George Sartain was blinded and taped once more and led away by two of Bosworth's men. Then the publicity man hurried back to Morris Hart's office. He had learned more than the combined forces of the city and state detectives with the G-men thrown in for good measure. He would need their aid now, but he realized he must be chary in giving out information. Little Edythe's life was still suspended by a thin, silver thread.

"What can I do—what can I do?" Hart was still repeating when Bosworth returned to the conference.

"Give Novak the O.K. over the radio as she says and then wait," the young man answered.

"But he may kill her—"

"Yeah, I know, but the money won't keep him from it. You don't know that bird. Even his own men call him Satan's Heir and—"

"Make a note of that, Harper." Hart turned to his ever present secretary. "That's a good title. Got plenty of box office and—"

Then his mind returned to Edythe Shirley and the doom that hung over her. Next he remembered that Bosworth had asked the use of Stage Five for some unstated reason.

"Learn anything?" he snapped.

"A lot, but we've got to move slow. I'll give Pelton of the G-men the list of gang members—in case anything knocks me over. But they mustn't move until I get the kid."

"You get the kid?"

Morris Hart all but threw his arms about his publicity man.

"That's what I'm aiming at and—"

"Bosworth, you get that little lady back

safe and Cosmos will have something for you—something worth while."

"If I don't—my job's gone with her." The man smiled for the first time since the girl was kidnaped. "So I might as well throw my life along with it."

THE detectives crowded around him, each shooting questions, but Bosworth was working on his own. Too many of them might be loose tongued and give a hint that would reach Novak's ears. To Richard Pelton of the G-men, he gave the names and possible locations of the various members of the gang, but his information on Kurt Novak was a secret he would not divulge.

"You don't want that kid murdered, do you?" he demanded.

"No, but—"

"That's what Kurt will do if you try to rush his hideout."

"Where is the place? We can wait until you've had your try and then—"

"If my try don't work, there won't be any use," Bosworth answered, "and besides, I don't know."

With the detectives gone, the publicity man turned to the new plan he had prepared. He called up the apartment of Henri Pougious, the wizard of the Cosmos make-up department. To him he outlined a problem that would tax an artist's skill. The Frenchman cooed his reply over the telephone.

"Monsieur Bosworth, Henri Pougious has yet to be baffled. I will meet you in my studio—tomorrow."

Restless sleep and then the morning came. More letters arrived at Morris Hart's office. Another from the little star, saying that she depended on him to keep "something turribal from happening."

Newspapers were black with headlines, but barren of fact. The world was responding to the news that the little sweetheart of the screen was in the hands of kidnapers. Men, women and children kept up a constant search.

Messages came from every part of the country telling of seeing her. She was encountered in New York and San Francisco simultaneously and harried police forces of both cities were blamed for not capturing the kidnapers.

The tension increased with each hour. Bosworth scoured his many aids trying to locate Novak's hideout without resort to the last desperate plan he had in mind, but they failed utterly. A final conference with Pelton of the G-men. The federal operatives would do nothing for forty-eight hours. The pledge was demanded and given before Bosworth made his final revelations to the government sleuths.

"Supposing you can get word through?" Pelton asked.

"I'll have only one message, and that'll be 'Do your stuff.' That'll mean pinch everybody connected with this thing. I'll use the word—Pay. Get that? P-A-Y. If you receive it in any manner—go get them and forget me. It'll be too late to do anything."

"Okay. You're a gamester. If press agenting ever gets dull, join the G-men. I think we can find a place for you."

"Thanks—that's a promise."

Bosworth's next step was to hunt up Henri Pougious, the master artist of make up. Instead of visiting him at his studio, he took Pougious to an apartment far out on the outskirts of Hollywood. In it was George Sartain, a captive in the hands of a squad of Bosworth's most trusted aids.

"Here's your job, Henri." Ted pointed to the prisoner. "I want you to make me up so that fellow's own mother can't tell us apart."

NIGHT was drawing in when he felt himself ready for the task. Once more he questioned Sartain, impressing on the man that his own safety was wrapped in the same package as his. The lawyer answered readily enough, but suspicion held his mind. He had tricked so many himself that he suspected every man.

"You may get away with it," he told Bosworth, when the publicity man was ready to leave. "But if you don't, I'll be seeing you in hell."

A taxicab was summoned and the young man departed. He changed to a second machine at Sunset Boulevard and Western Avenue. Then he ordered the driver to take him to the old Los Angeles plaza. The ancient church from which the city takes its name looked down upon the square that was once the center of the old Spanish town. The language of Castile is still more often heard there than English. Bosworth felt a tingle go through him as he alighted and paid his chauffeur. Then he strolled to the other side of the plaza and sat down on a bench.

His heartbeat quickened when he saw a tall, wide-shouldered man coming in his direction. As he neared, Kurt Novak's cold eyes rested on Bosworth's perfectly made up face. Shaded by a hat with a wide brim, the young man had no fears for the moment. The real test would come when he and Novak were face to face in a full light.

A small gesture as Novak passed and Ted arose to follow him. Around the corner a limousine was waiting. Novak paused before it and gestured Bosworth to enter. Within were two husky gunmen, who glared at the newcomer as he took a seat. Bosworth recognized them as Brahm and Whipple, the men who had actually kidnaped little Edythe.

"We want you to come out and talk to the kid, judge," Novak said, as he took his seat beside the disguised publicity man. "She's acting a little funny."

"I'll fix her up," Bosworth said, drawling in the fashion of George Sartain.

"That's what I told my sister," Novak agreed. "I said that if anybody could get her to eating—you could."

The limousine was speeding out Sunset Boulevard, Bosworth noted. He had expected it to go to Alhambra or Pasadena, any place but Hollywood, but Novak had outguessed his

pursuers. He had established himself in the very heart of the motion picture colony.

Next they were climbing the Beverly Hills, sweeping up a winding highway that passed the Shirley home and skirted the peaks. Bosworth watched, a frown gathering in spite of his efforts to be nonchalant. At last, they swept through high ornamental gates that only recently marked the home of a famous motion picture actor, whose star had set suddenly in the wake of domestic scandal. Novak had leased the house through a dummy and it would be among the last places visited by the frantic searchers for little Edythe Shirley.

"Come on in, judge. She'll be waiting for you." Novak was almost cordial, as they alighted from the limousine.

Beautiful bronze portals opened and they entered a baronial reception hall. Then the doors closed silently behind them and the two gunmen, who had ridden out with Novak, stepped forward and stood on either side of Ted Bosworth.

"Listen, you double crossing dick," the gang chief's eyes were as deadly as a cobra's, "you're going to do just what I tell you—or you start rotting in fifteen minutes."

"Where's the kid?" was all Bosworth could say.

"She's here. And you're going to get her on her feed—or I'll croak the two of you."

**T**ED BOSWORTH looked into the gray, pitiless eyes of his captor and knew that his life span was limited to days, if not hours. Novak had marked him for death. No doubt about that. Little Edythe might go free, if the collection of ransom broke just right and Novak succeeded in making his escape before she was restored to her parents. But no such contingency would save him. As long as he lived, he would be a witness who could send Kurt Novak to the gallows. The arch criminal never allowed such a witness to live. He sacrificed both friends and enemies to his own safety.

By Novak's quick penetration of his disguise, Bosworth knew that he had been betrayed. In some manner word had been sent warning Novak of his coming. Instead of being murdered and having his body thrown out beside a lonely highway, he had been brought to the hideout where Edythe was held. His captor had told him the reason. The child was ill and they wanted some one who could bring back the smile to her lips and induce her to eat.

"Where's the kid?" Bosworth repeated.

"Take that stuff off your face and get into some clothes first," one of the triggermen answered.

The publicity agent paid no attention to the speaker. His eyes were on Kurt Novak. The man's cold gaze was appraising him again, measuring him like some monster who looks at the living thing it soon will consume.

"Where's the kid?"

"Do as he tells you." Novak nodded to the bodyguard.

He turned on his heel and stalked from the room, beckoning the second of his rods to follow him. Bosworth looked around. If Edythe were ill, he must see her and try to get her back to health. He realized that she must have missed her parents horribly. The confinement, the absence of the activities of studio life, these and other unsettling influences had undoubtedly had a marked effect on the little girl. Because of this, his life was spared for a moment, but he knew that as soon as she was well again, he would be destroyed with as little compunction as though he were an insect.

"Come on, get going," snarled the guard.

He led Bosworth to the upper floor where a suit of clothes had been laid out for him. He stared, when he recognized it as one of his own. Novak had had plenty of warning. An agent had gone to his bungalow and robbed his closet in preparation for his coming.

A few minutes work removed the disguise, but his hair remained streaked with gray. He

grinned as he noted the effect it gave along with the deep lines of worry that showed upon his face. His guard, however, had small patience. He growled when Bosworth paused before the mirror.

"She's a kid, not a frail. Get going!"

"Okay." He followed his jailor down the hall and entered a huge room in which Edythe Shirley was held a prisoner. The child's hazel eyes widened with surprise and delight when she saw him come through the door. Leaping from the day bed upon which she had been lying, she ran toward him with hands outstretched.

"Mister Bosworth—Mister Bosworth—have you come to take me home?"

She had leaped into his arms and kissed him before he could answer.

"Sure that's what he's here for," a cold voice answered.

The young man looked to one side to see Kurt Novak entering from another chamber. The man's gray eyes were like bits of cloudy ice as they met the publicity agent's gaze.

"When—when are we going—right away?" Edythe leaned back to look into Ted's face.

"Not this minute—pretty soon," he mumbled.

A cloud crossed the child's features, a mist of disappointment more eloquent than her finest bits of acting. It was real.

"That's what they've said—every day—every hour. I want Mumzy and Daddy—and Mr. Hart—and you."

"You've got him, honey," a woman spoke up.

**B**OSWORTH had not noticed her before. She was Mary Guzman, Novak's sister, who had taken charge of the child. Her tone was saccharine, too sweet for sincerity. Edythe turned in Bosworth's arms and looked at the woman. Then her curly head bent low and she whispered in the young man's ear:

"I don't like her. Do you?"

"No."

"Nor him—that man with the glassy eyes. He's bad."

"Yes—very bad."

"Cut that out, Bosworth," Kurt Novak snapped.

Little Edythe understood the threat in the tone, if not the words. She wriggled from Bosworth's embrace and slid to the floor, but her eyes continued to peer into his. There was a question in their hazel depths, a question he dared not answer.

A man entered the room bearing a tray. It was one of the triggermen with whom he had ridden to the hide-out. The little girl was surrounded by ruthless beings, who would not hesitate to cut her pretty throat in answer to Novak's nod.

Bosworth glanced at the tray. It was laid for two. The child had not been eating and they expected him to get her into a frame of mind where she would take food. Novak walked to the table where the plates were being placed. His eyes gestured for action.

"All right," said Bosworth. "But not for you—for her."

"Can that kind of chatter," one of the gunmen growled.

Bosworth sat down. Death was hovering over the table at which he and little Edythe ate. Seated opposite him, she smiled elfishly as she went through the routine of hostess at her own table.

"Gee. I didn't know I was so hungry." The hazel eyes were dancing. "Aren't you hungry, Mr. Bosworth?"

"No—not very—" the man half choked.

Edythe's elastic mind had forgotten her fears for the moment, but they were very real to Ted Bosworth. He knew the menace hanging over that table, a menace not only to him, but the child. Kurt Novak was merely waiting for Edythe to recuperate. With the color back in her cheeks, his gunmen would make short work of Bosworth. Her turn would follow, unless the negotiations for ransom

were fruitful and without danger.

With the meal finished, Novak re-entered the room. After him came one of his gunmen bearing a radio set that was plugged into a baseboard socket. The gang chief's glassy eyes were fixed on Bosworth's face as the young man studied the apparatus.

"Short wave to set in automobile—double relay before your crowd gets it." The man's pale lips thinned into a cold smile.

"What's the big idea?" Bosworth demanded.

"You and the kid are both going to talk—to Morris Hart," Novak answered. "After that, it depends on him just how long you live."

"You wouldn't hurt Mr. Bosworth—you wouldn't dare!" Edythe Shirley had leaped to her feet.

Her childish legs were spread far apart as she planted herself before the man who had engineered her kidnaping. The young face was flushed with anger and her hazel eyes snapped.

"Don't you dare hurt him," she shrilled.

"He ain't going to hurt him, honey," Mary Guzman tried to put her arms about the child.

"Go away. I don't like you. You're bad." Edythe pushed the woman away.

"Get that kid quiet," Novak rasped, glassy gaze resting on Bosworth.

The young man turned wrathfully, his fists clenched. Then he saw an automatic appear in the hands of the gunman who had brought the tray. He would be shot down before Edythe's eyes if he resisted. He checked himself with an effort.

"Come on, pal," he said to her, taking the feather-light form in his arms. "Let's talk over the radio to Mr. Hart. Then—we'll go see Mumzy and Daddy."

"Honest?" the hazel eyes looked squarely into his.

"Yes, dear—honest." He swallowed hard to get the lump out of his throat.

KURT NOVAK snapped the switch of the short wave radio transmitter and waited until he heard a voice come from the attached loudspeaker. Then he thrust a sheet of paper into Edythe's hand.

"Read it—into the mike," he commanded.

The child looked at the sheet. Her clear brow wrinkled into frown.

"I can't—those big words—" she began.

"I'll read them to her," Bosworth offered, still holding her in his arms.

"Okay, but any funny business will be just too bad." Novak growled.

Then came a voice in the loudspeaker announcing all was in readiness.

"Mr. Hart—Mr. Hart—this is Edythe speaking," the little girl began, as Bosworth whispered in her ear. "I'm afraid to write so—so I'm talking to you. Please send the million dollars—right away."

She recited the words as if they were spontaneous. Her training on the stage gave her a poise and sense of drama that made everything seem real, even the absurd reality of her capture.

"Say, 'Pay—pay—pay!'" Bosworth whispered. "Right away—"

"Pay—pay—pay!" echoed the child. "Right a—"

The switch shut with a metallic click and Kurt Novak snapped a heavily calibered automatic from his pocket. An icy flame burned in his eyes.

"That wasn't in there," he spoke between tightly held teeth. "I told you to watch your step, but you're asking for it."

He clicked down the weapon's safety catch.

Ted Bosworth gently lowered Edythe to the floor. He had held her in his arms, but a bullet from that heavily calibered gun would tear her trail body to bits.

"Put that thing away—while she's here," he muttered.

"Yeah?"

"You heard me. I was just trying to get

this business over with. Pay is a word they'll understand. You can't keep this kid a prisoner indefinitely. She'll die on you and then where'll you be?"

Novak shoved his weapon back into his arm-pit holster. Then he gestured to the gunman who had brought the tray.

"Take that set out of here and get hold of Whipple. I'll talk to him when you've got him."

"Okay, boss."

Little Edythe Shirley stood looking up into Novak's cruel face. Her childish mind was just beginning to grasp the stark reality of her situation. For a time it had been like one of the film dramas in which she had taken part. Now she sensed it was no longer make-believe. She was stunned for the moment, stunned to silence. Her brave little spirit did not falter, but she did not know what to do. She turned to Ted Bosworth, uncertainly, her small lips trembling.

"Tell me a story, Mr. Bosworth. Tell me about the three bears and Little Golden Locks."

A whisper passed between Kurt Novak and his sister. The two withdrew from the room. The danger was over for a moment, but menace would hang as long as Kurt Novak lived. Ted Bosworth looked around. No hope of getting out a window. He knew the doors and stairs were guarded. He wondered if Pelton of the G-men would get his keyword, "Pay."

He heard himself telling little Edythe the story of Golden Locks, even as his thoughts raced with plans to escape. All centered on killing Kurt Novak. Satan's Heir must be slain before the adventure could be brought to an end. His words droned on and the child's lids lowered. Soon he noticed that she was sleeping, stretched upon the day bed upon which she had lain when he first entered the room.

He heard a stir near the door and looked up to see Kurt Novak coming toward him, an

automatic in one hand, a long knife in the other.

"Don't shoot—you'll wake her," Mary Guzman said in a whisper.

"Okay. But this is where this rat gets his," the man answered, increasing his stride.

He laid his gun on the table at the head of the day bed and advanced toward Ted Bosworth with long, determined strides.

**B**OSWORTH leaped toward the table upon which Novak had laid the automatic. Novak quickly stepped between him and the weapon, his poniard upraised. His thin lips moved and a ghostly whisper came to the young man's ears.

"Smart guy," he taunted. "Set the G-Men on us, huh? Well—that's your last trick."

He lunged, as though with a sword, but Bosworth twisted to one side. Another rush and the publicity man sidestepped and closed in. For a moment he wrestled with his adversary. Then his left hand gripped Novak's right, holding the poniard's point away.

Bosworth was fighting silently for his life. Any noise would bring some of the trigger men to Novak's aid. He caught a flash of the sleeping child. She was stirring uneasily. If she awoke and screamed, a bullet would silence her.

He twisted desperately on Novak's wrist and all but wrenched the knife from him.

"Mary," the gang chief called. "Get Brahm—tell him to slit this guy's throat."

The woman turned and dashed down the hall. At the same moment, little Edythe sat up suddenly, staring at the struggling men. She leaped to her feet and rushed toward them as though she would aid Ted in his battle for life.

"What'll I do, Mr. Bosworth?" she piped. "Just tell me and—"

"Lock the doors—on the inside," he called.

Novak yelled: "I'll slit—"

Little Edythe dashed across the room and hastily locked one door, keeping the key in her

hands. Then she bolted another. She dashed toward the third, when Mary Guzman appeared. Quick as a flash, the child snatched up the heavy automatic Kurt Novak had laid aside. She grasped it in both hands and pointed it at the woman.

"Get back—I'll shoot you," she threatened.

"Look out, child," the woman screamed, "that safety is still down."

"I know it—you look out," Edythe advanced, the weapon wobbling in her childish grasp.

Mary Guzman turned and fled.

"Good work, kid," Bosworth managed to shout.

The child ran toward the two struggling men, the weapon still in her hands. "I'll kill him now, Mr. Bosworth—then we can go home."

"Look out—you're liable to kill me," he warned.

"No, I'll—"

She circled trying to place the weapon where it would touch Kurt Novak. The man's eyes bulged and he twisted savagely, trying to elude her. For a moment he forgot the fight was for the poniard. His grasp on the handle loosened slightly and the weapon tumbled to the floor.

"Get the knife, honey," Bosworth called.

Edythe sprang forward and snatched it up.

"Shall I give it to you?" she asked.

"Not yet, but—"

Novak's powerful hands fastened themselves upon Ted's throat, choking back his words. Now they were fighting with primitive weapons and death would be the loser's prize.

"You rat—first you—then the kid," the man growled in Bosworth's ear. "You think—"

Yells sounded in the house. Then came a clatter of shots, machine gun shots. The fusillade mounted. The roar of cars coming up the hill to where Novak had made his hideout.

Then more machines. The shrill wail of a police car siren.

NOVAK'S struggles became more desperate. Those sounds spelled doom to him. His retreat had been discovered. To Bosworth, they were tonal beacons of safety. If he could only hold out. His adversary's grip was strangling him. The room darkened, although the lamps still burned. He saw Edythe rush to the window, throwing aside the gun and dagger. She was waving to the men below, showing her presence in the kidnaper's citadel. A shout greeted her appearance and the roar of the machine guns mounted.

Novak's hairy hands were threatening to break Bosworth's neck. He could only last for seconds more. If he only had a weapon of some kind. He saw the knife upon the floor.

"Depends on who first gets it," he thought.

A kick at Novak's legs and he fell forward. The kidnaper threw his weight against him and Ted tumbled back. For a second he was stunned. Then his hand flew out and grasped the poniard. Novak saw it and reached for the gun. He missed it by inches. Then he grasped Bosworth's knife hand.

His fingers closed around Ted's wrist, but the blade moved slowly toward the man's body. Air had entered the young man's lungs and his strength was returning swiftly. He caught a look of horror in Novak's gray eyes as the point of the poniard touched his body. The man writhed and twisted, but Bosworth concentrated his strength.

Now the point was no longer visible. It had penetrated Novak's clothing. The man winced when it pricked his skin. Still Bosworth pushed, steadily, keeping every ounce of his energy concentrated on the task.

Fraction by fraction the steel was forced forward. Novak fought desperately. A greenish pallor had covered his face, but the glassy eyes were filled with hate rather than fear. He knew that capture meant the noose and he was ready for death in battle.

A final push and the grasp on Bosworth's wrist relaxed. Novak swayed drunkenly. Then he slid sidewise to the floor.

"Oh, you beat him, Mr. Bosworth, you beat him," little Edythe called, dashing away from the window. "The men downstairs are beating the ones in the house. They're making them hold up their hands. We won, didn't we?"

"Yes, we won, honey."

"Gee, I'm glad. Now I'll see Mumzy and Daddy—and Mr. Hart. Did you beat the bad man badly?"

"Yes, I guess so—bad enough."

WITH G-men, city police and highway patrolmen swarming around, the kidnaper gang was soon under arrest. Hans Brahm was killed in the struggle, but the others were captured.

Richard Pelton swarmed up the stairs at the head of the G-men. Bosworth had the doors open by the time he arrived and appeared with little Edythe in his arms.

"Where's Novak?" the government sleuth demanded.

Ted nodded to the still form.

"Mr. Bosworth beat him," Edythe piped.

"Did you—"

Ted nodded and made a sign for silence. Then they went downstairs. Other cars arrived, cars bearing John Shirley and his wife and another with Morris Hart. A triumphal procession returned to Hollywood. Bosworth rode with Pelton and the G-men.

"There's one thing I can't figure out," he said to the government sleuth, "and that's how Novak knew me down at the Plaza. I walked right into his trap."

"I can explain that," Pelton answered. "Your friend George Sartain had a pocket wireless outfit that looked like a watch. He waited until you were on your way and then flashed the word. Those dumbbells guarding him were fooled by his apparent acceptance of the situation, but our listening-in outfit picked

up the signals. We also tracked their relay car. That's how we got such quick action as soon as you passed the word. We just tailed them to the house and there you were."

Bosworth sighed wearily. It had been a long hard day. He would sleep that night without dreams to bother him. Then he remembered another face, almost as cold and hard as Novak's.

"If we could only get that guy who was out to the studio and put the finger on Edythe. He posed as Carter Thompson, a magazine writer, but I had a hunch right from the start that he—"

"You mean Finger French?"

"I don't know his real name."

"Well that's it and that's one thing our department managed to do without your aid. We grabbed him at Newark, New Jersey, when he landed from the transcontinental flyer and when our boys got through with him he

had told everything, which was plenty. Now I guess you know it all."

But Bosworth did not know it all. The finale did not happen until the next day when he returned to his desk in Publicity Row to find a stranger occupying it. He raged into Morris Hart's office, boiling with wrath. Then he cooled rapidly.

"You see," the head of Cosmos Studios explained, "we figure we may need a smart fellow like you again sometime and want you so bad that it will gum up the publicity to take you off of it. To keep from doing that, I'm creating a new department, a sort of studio detective force—at two-fifty a week and a ten thousand bonus for services rendered in the Edythe Shirley case. Here's the check and—I guess that's about all."

"It's plenty," said Ted Bosworth.

Their hands met in a firm, hard grasp.