



It Happened Last Night

Riggsie and the 3 Gunmen, In 'The Toughest Saloon'

By Earl Wilson

Danny Kaye told me to be sure to visit "the toughest saloon in town" and get the story of The Great Holdup. He meant Riggsie O'Rourke's Bridge Cafe down by City Hall.

"Get him to tell you about the three tough gunmen holding him up," Danny said. "They were real killers."

Riggsie's place is down under the El at Park Row and Chambers, a noisy, fascinating neighborhood near the Bowery.

"Are you as tough as all that?" I asked Riggsie—the "Mayor of Park Row"—when I finally took my eyes off his tiepin.

He's the son of the late Diamond Jim O'Rourke, also a famous saloonist, and wears his father's 15-carat "DJO" stickpin.

"Tough? Oh, I don't know," said the middle-aged Riggsie, modestly, rubbing his aldermanic stomach.

"I used to have two drawers full of guns I took away from people. There aren't so many tough guys around now..."

He took me to his father's old place, O'Rourke's, a block away, and introduced me to his largish sister, Irene Flynn, a veritable strongwoman who occasionally knocks out a couple male barflies.

"I give 'em a shot in the head with this," Irene said, doubling up her fist.

Angelina, the waitress, is a fighter, too. One night recently four women customers got into a free-for-all slugging match.

Angelina won the evening by jumping on the winner, biting her in the neck, and holding on like a dog.

"Danny Kaye said you should

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tell me about your great holiday," I said to Riggsie.

"Oh, that was when we had a speakeasy," Riggsie said.

"It was so tough you couldn't get a cop to come up there alone. They'd only come in fours.

"It was 5 or 6 o'clock Sunday morning," he said, "and three of them guys is sittin' there drinkin' short beers all night.

"They all had guns and I figured it was a stickup.

"I had about 800 in the dumper and I wasn't gonna let 'em take it. So I went over and told my bartender something.

"He went upstairs and left me alone for a few minutes, and when he did, these three guys sort of moved over to the bar.

"My bartender come downstairs with a big old horse pistol. They musta used it to shoot buffalo out on the plains.

"He handed it to me and then I put a lemon on his head just like I was William Tell.

"I says to him, 'Stand over there like you did the other night,' and he stood against the wall.

"Then he got nervous and excited, and he says, 'Riggsie, for God's sake, don't do it again! I know you can do it. How many times have you got to show me?' And he started to blubber.

"So I says to him, 'All right then, not tonight, anyway, if you're so scared.' And pretty soon the three guys paid for their short beers and left."

"Were you that good a shot with the horse pistol?" I asked him.

"Next day," Riggsie said, "when we got to talkin' about it, we tried out that horse pistol. It was so old, it wouldn't even shoot. Anyway, I'd never had the occasion to fire a gun



RIGGSIE O'ROURKE
The Cops Came in Fours