

MURDER DONE TWICE

By ROBERT LESLIE BELLEM

Only a little while ago Dan had seen Kathy and she had been dead—very, very dead. Now, alive as anyone possibly could be, she was sitting up, talking flirtatiously, positively amused at his amazement! What could it mean? Was his mind going?



I said, "Keep your voice down, and don't move! If you do, you'll wish you hadn't."

SHE was looking swell—a hundred percent better than the last time I'd seen her, three months before. Somebody must have given her the cure, I figured. Someone must have got her off the needle.

I started toward her, grinning. I said: "Hello, there, Kathy Moritz! Long time no see!"

And she cut me dead. She looked right through me with her wide blue eyes, as though I'd been a pane of glass. It made me

feel as screwy as hell.

It was in Palm Springs, at the height of the winter season. The old kidneys had finally backfired on me; so my doc had pared me down to a single quart of Scotch per day and sent me to the desert to bake the jitters out of my system. I knew I wasn't looking so damned hot; but that wasn't a good reason for Kathy Moritz giving me the big go-by.

KATHY was N-D-N's Swedish star—Sid Hemrick's biggest box-office money-maker. Also, she was Sid Hemrick's heart-interest. She was a tall, raw-boned blonde with a feline attractiveness that made you forget her gawkiness. And her legs were knockouts.

Every movie-goer in the country knew Kathy Moritz's legs. I knew them pretty well myself. I'd been on quite a few parties with Kathy. We'd even necked a little, when Sid Hemrick wasn't looking. And now she was pretending not to know me!

She was dressed in a sweater and shorts. She was riding in one of those nutty rickshaws that Palm Springs had introduced recently. A nice-looking, athletic kid in running pants was hitched to the shafts of the contraption. He was almost as tall as I am, and he was tanned berry-brown.

Kathy Moritz clucked to him as though he might be a horse. He grabbed the shafts of the rickshaw and trotted off, leaving me standing there looking silly.

I needed a drink after that. I ambled back to my hotel—El Mirador—and went up to my room. I wrestled a slug of Scotch past my tonsils. Then I had three more. After which I looked at myself in the mirror to see if I'd changed my face overnight.

I hadn't. I was still Dan Turner, Hollywood private dick. But why the devil hadn't Kathy Moritz recognized me?

I made up my mind to find out.

I went to the telephone and called the house manager. I said: "This is Dan Turner. Can you tell me Kathy Moritz's room number?"

He told me. It was on my floor.

I said: "Much obliged," and hung up. I walked out of my room, went down the corridor and rapped on Kathy's door. I was all set to bawl her out for high-hatting me.

There wasn't any response from inside her room. I knocked again. Still no answer.

I took a chance and tried the knob. The door was unlatched. I opened it and walked in.

I said: "What the hell—!"

Kathy Moritz was lying on the floor. The clothes had been partially ripped from her body, as if she'd had a hell of a brawl with someone. She was as dead as last year's newsreels.

There was a shiv sticking out of her heart.

I sprang forward, dropped to my knees beside her corpse. I knew better than to grab that knife and yank it out of her rounded breast. There might be fingerprints on the handle.

The blade was buried hilt-deep; but her flesh was still warm; and a little trickle of crimson still flowed around the sharp edges of the dagger. She'd been killed not more than ten minutes before!

I stared down at her. I felt funny. I'd spoken to her less than an hour ago and now she was defunct. Her arms were flung upward over her head, disclosing the smoothness of her white armpits and pulling her small breasts taut, flat.

Her lovely legs were crumpled under her grotesquely, ungracefully. Her yellow hair was all tousled around her shoulders. Her kisser was parted in a horrible grimace. Her blue glims were glazing, staring, accusing.

I shivered. Kathy's dead face looked

older, harder, now that life had departed from it. Tiny lines showed around her mouth. Dissipation-lines. She seemed to have aged five years since I'd seen her in that rickshaw, thirty minutes ago.

I GOT up, made a bee-line toward the telephone at the other side of the room. And then the door of the chamber opened behind me. I whirled around.

Sid Hemrick, high mogul of N-D-N Pix, was standing there. He looked green around the fringes. His lamps wavered from Kathy's corpse, finally met my gaze. "You—Turner!" he gasped.

I said: "Yeah. Right on deck as usual, Sid. Excuse me while I phone the sheriff's sub-station."

He got greener than ever. He was a shrimp-sized guy, full of a dynamic energy that had boosted him to the top in Hollywood. He was a big shot in the galloping tintypes; but right now he looked as limp as a used dishrag. "*Gott in Himmel!*" he whispered. "Kathy dead!"

Before I could stop him, he plunged across the room, grabbed the knife and pulled it from the girl's remainders. Ketchup welled out slowly, thickly.

I said: "You damned fool! There might have been fingerprints on that knife-handle!" Then I made a grab for him.

He fought me off. He lashed out with his fist and socked me below the belt. The punch was foul by about two feet, and I felt my insides curling up. I doubled over, cursing and holding the place that hurt worst.

And meanwhile, Hemrick wasn't paying a damned bit of attention to me. He was cradling Kathy Moritz's body in his arms, rocking it, moaning over it. His hands were all bloody where he had touched her.

I felt like bouncing one off his chin, as soon as I was able to straighten up. But I

didn't. I was sorry for him. He'd loved Kathy; now she was dead. I didn't have the heart to take a poke at him.

Instead, I said: "You can't do her any good. She's finished. Probably died the moment that shiv entered her pump. Pull yourself together while I phone the law."

He stared at me, as if seeing me for the first time. Then, gently, he lowered Kathy's body to the floor; got to his feet. He put out his hand toward me. His fingers were sticky-wet and red. He said: "Dan—don't!" He took a staggering step forward. "Don't telephone the authorities!" he whispered.

I said: "You must be goofy." I picked up the phone.

He grabbed at my arm. His hands left crimson smears on my sleeve. He said: "Listen. Let me talk to you a minute. You've got to listen! You hear me? You've got to!"

There was something so insistent in his voice that I put down the telephone and looked at him. I said: "Okay. Hurry up and speak your piece, Sid. This is murder—and we've got to get the cops on the job."

"No! No, I tell you! You can't do it!" he almost shrieked.

I said: "And why not?"

He was trembling. He said: "Turner, we just finished Kathy's last picture. It set me back more than a million dollars. If it becomes known that Kathy's dead—murdered—I'll have to shelve that production! I'll never be able to exhibit it! And—and I can't afford to lose that much money, Turner. N-D-N is in a jam with the banks right now. Kathy's new picture will pull us out—put us in the clear. We've got to keep this thing quiet—cover it up! If we don't, I'm sunk!"

I said: "And if we do cover it up, the murderer will go scot-free. Then what?"

His chin trembled. "What good would it do Kathy to capture her murderer now? 'What if he's caught—gassed? Would that

bring Kathy back to life! No!” He moaned faintly.

I STARED at him. I’d always liked the guy. He was a decent sort of egg. But I’d never realized that his love for money would warp him to this extent. I said: “Hell, Sid—you’re talking through your hat. You know damned well you can’t get away with anything like that!”

“Yes we can, Turner! We can remove Kathy’s . . . body . . . tonight, in the dark. A couple of months from now we can announce that she died of pneumonia or something. By that time her last film will have been shown in all the first-run houses, and I can afford to withdraw it from the neighborhood runs. Give me a break on this, Turner—for the love of God!”

I shook my head and said: “Nothing doing.”

“I—I’ll give you ten thousand dollars if you’ll play ball with me, Dan!” he whispered.

Under other circumstances I might have listened to him. Ten grand is ten grand, and that much sugar doesn’t grow on bushes. I’m in this game for the dough I can get, and I don’t like to pass up any opportunities. I’m saving up for a retirement-fund, so that I can quit before some sharp apple puts a slug through me when I’m not looking. But this was different. Kathy Moritz had been croaked and I couldn’t see letting the killer get away with it. I said: “Nix, Hemrick. I won’t play.”

His lamps narrowed. “Won’t you even think it over, Turner? Don’t go off half-cocked, man! Wait a minute—I’ll pour you a drink while I talk about it some more.”

I said: “You can talk from now until you turn Chinaman, and you won’t change my mind any. But I could stand a drink.”

He hauled a pint out of his hip pocket. The bottle wasn’t quite full. He handed it to

me. I uncorked it and let about four fingers slide down my throat. It was good bourbon—only I don’t like the taste of bourbon. I gave the bottle back to Hemrick, and he put it in his pocket—

WHEN I opened my eyes, I had a headache built for a whale. My mouth felt like a skunk’s nest, and everything was dark. My guts were churning around inside my belly, and seven illegitimate devils were hammering on dishpans inside my ears.

I was in bed. Undressed. It was night. How early or how late at night I didn’t know. I didn’t even know what night it was.

I reached out instinctively, found the switch-pull of the lamp alongside the bed. I yanked it. The lamp glowed into life. I stared around me. I was in my own room in the hotel. And I was damned sick.

I made a dive for the bathroom and popped my biscuits. Then I felt better. Also, I was beginning to wonder about a few things . . .

“Sid Hemrick!” I whispered to myself. “The dirty double-crosser slipped me a powder in that bourbon!”

With that, I made a flying dive for my duds. As I slipped into my coat, I suddenly thought of those blood-stains on the sleeve, where Hemrick had grabbed me with his sticky dukes. It wouldn’t do to show up with those stains on me. I started to take off the coat again, so that I could put another one on.

Then I noticed my coat-sleeve. There was no blood-stain on it!

I said: “What the hell—!” I was puzzled, plenty. I got a grip on myself and went out into the hallway. My knees felt sort of wobbly, and I didn’t make very fast progress. But at last I reached the door of the room in which Kathy Moritz had been murdered.

I opened it.

I felt sweat break out.

The room was lighted. Sid Hemrick was sitting in a chair, smoking a cigar. And perched on the bed opposite him, clad in a frilly, revealing negligee, sat Kathy Moritz herself!

She turned as I walked into the room. Her blue eyes widened. She smiled a surprised little smile. "Well, of all people!" she cooed in her throaty, faintly-accented voice. "Dan Turner himself—in the flesh! And looking like the end of a hard winter!"

Sid Hemrick got to his feet. "Hello, Gumshoe," he greeted me. He thrust out his hand. "When in hell did you get here? And how did you know we were here in the hotel?"

I stared at the two of them. My ears were buzzing, and my think-tank felt full of pinwheels. They were both acting as though they hadn't seen me before that day. And Kathy Moritz was alive!

I felt a cold chill creeping along my spine. "What—what—?" I gasped. I'll admit I was feeling pretty screwy. My eyes tried to focus on the jane. "You—aren't dead—?" I whispered.

She drew a sharp breath. "Me? Dead? You must be drunk, Philo."

"But—I found you with a knife in your—"

"In my what?" She was grinning.

"In—your heart—"

Deliberately, provocatively, she drew her negligee down over her shoulders; bared her brassiere. It was crammed full of interesting scenery, perfect, un-scarred.

I said: "Something's wrong somewhere!" I turned on Sid Hemrick.

"What about that mickey you slipped in the skee you gave me? What about—"

HE HAD the blankest look I've ever seen. "Mickey? Skee? For the love of God, Turner, are you goofy?"

I was beginning to wonder the same thing myself. I was beginning to think maybe I had the D-T's. My head was all full of funny noises, and my grey matter wasn't functioning at all.

I looked dazedly at Kathy Moritz and said: "Listen, hon. Did you or did you not see me today on the street? You were in a rickshaw. I spoke to you. You high-hatted me. Didn't you?"

She shook her head slowly. She said: "This is the first time I've seen you in three months, Sherlock. You shouldn't drink and then go out in the hot sun. It's bad for little boys."

I said: "Jeeze!" and backed out of the room. I was scared—plenty scared. I was losing my marbles. I wasn't all there.

I went downstairs and out of the hotel. I had the shakes. The stars danced in the blue sky over my head; and they seemed to be mocking at me. Out on the main street, I suddenly saw somebody—

IT WAS the tall, broad-shouldered lad who had been hitched to Kathy Moritz's rickshaw that afternoon. He was dressed in civvies, now. He was leaning against a telegraph-pole, smoking a pill.

I went up to him. I slipped him a buck and said: "Listen, punk. Take a good look at me. Did you ever see me before?"

He took the buck and put it in his pocket. Then he grinned in my kisser. "Never," he told me.

I said: "Think hard. Didn't you see me stop and talk to a blonde dame you were dragging around in your go-cart today? Didn't you see her give me the freeze-out?"

He shrugged. "I don't know what it's all about, mister. I never dragged any blonde dame around in a go-cart."

"Aren't you a rickshaw boy?" I asked him.

He laughed and said: "Hell, no."

I said: "Excuse me, son," and went

back into the hotel. Now I was sure I had the D-T's!

I went up to my room and opened my suitcase. I dragged out my two remaining bottles of Vat 69 and took them into the bathroom. I pulled the cork out of the first one and emptied the whole fifth of Scotch down the drain. I started to do the same thing with the second bottle.

Then I reconsidered. If I was going to see snakes, I might as well see lots of them. So instead of pouring the rest of the joy-juice into the wash-bowl, I poured it down my throat—on the inside.

I hit my bed and stretched out, waiting for the purple elephants to start climbing up the walls. They didn't. Instead, I began to feel lots better. I began to be able to think.

And the more I thought, the more I realized that something was damned rotten in Denmark. I sat up, fished a gasper out of my pocket. I touched it off with my lighter and gulped in a comforting wad of smoke. Abruptly, I said: "By God—!"

I looked at my wrist-watch. It was close to eleven o'clock at night. I jumped for the telephone and started making calls.

THERE are only a few drugstores in Palm Springs, and I hit it lucky on my very first try. I said: "This is the man who bought some chloral from you earlier this afternoon. Are you sure it was full strength?"

On the other end of the connection, a voice answered: "Why, yes. Of course. Is anything wrong?"

I said: "No. I guess not. Thanks." Then I hung up and waited a minute. After which I asked the operator to connect me with Kathy Moritz's room. I heard the buzzing sound of the signal in my receiver, and pretty soon Kathy's voice said: "Hello?"

I hung up without answering. I just wanted to make sure she was still there. And now I was satisfied. So I flashed the

hotel operator and said: "Give me Jim Devlin on the *Los Angeles Examiner*."

It didn't take long for the call to go through. I heard somebody say: "City Desk, Devlin speaking."

I said: "This is Dan Turner. I'm at Palm Springs. I've got a hell of a swell murder story for you, Jim. I'll give it to you on one condition. You've got to promise to smear it all over the front page of your eleven-thirty bulldog edition tonight; and you've got to shoot a batch of those papers down here to Palm Springs by airplane the minute they're off the press. Send along a street-hustler with good lungs. One who can yell 'Extra' so loud he'll wake up the town."

"You're not kidding me, Dan? This is on the level?"

I said: "Absolutely."

He said: "Okay. Gimme the dope."

So I told him what I wanted him to print. It was hot stuff, too. He took every word of it – and thanked me for it.

As soon as I'd finished with Devlin, I hung up and went into the bathroom. I climbed under the shower, braced myself for the shock of the cold spray, ran a razor over my chin and put on pajamas and a dressing-gown.

I was feeling better every minute; and I knew I had the answer to my riddle.

I went out of my room and locked the door. Then I sneaked down the hallway to Kathy Moritz's room. I rapped softly.

Kathy's voice said: "Who's there? Is that you, Mr. Hemrick?"

I said: "Yes. Let me in."

I heard her coming close to the door, on the inside of the room. She said: "Where's the key I gave you?"

I put my mouth up against the thin woodwork and whispered: "I lost it. Open up!"

The door opened. I shoved myself past her and entered the room. When she saw

me, she went pale. “Y-you—!” she whispered.

SHE was dressed in a nightgown. Her yellow hair was tousled, as though she’d been in bed. But she still had her make-up on her face. The nightgown was sheer, thin. I could see plenty through it. Her figure wasn’t especially good; not nearly as nifty as it looked when she was fully dressed. And yet, as she took a step toward me, there was a subtle rhythm to her movements—a certain rippling of lithe muscles that had a feline quality. Her breasts weren’t very big; but there was a feminine softness about their delicate curvatures that I liked. And they pushed against the lacy top of the nightgown in a way that gave me ideas. As I’ve said before, her legs were knock-outs.

I grinned at her. I said: “So you were expecting Sid Hemrick, were you?”

“Why—y-yes.”

“Won’t I do until he comes along?”

“But—but you can’t stay here! He’s due at midnight—”

I said: “That’s fine. It gives me a half-hour with you, baby. I can do lots in a half-hour.”

She said: “Wh-what do you mean?”

I said: “You ought to know. It isn’t the first time we’ve been together, is it?”

“N-no,” she faltered.

I said: “Then why all the hesitation? Come on—let’s make a little hay while the moon shines!” Then I grabbed her around the waist and pulled her toward me.

When I kiss them, they stay kissed a long time. And I threw a load of technique into this one. I pried her unwilling lips open with my mouth, and in a minute she was gasping.

The top of her nightgown slipped its moorings. I gandered her delicious charms. She liked it. They all do! What the hell?

I picked her up and carried her to the

couch. I snapped off the light.

There were certain things I wanted to find out—and this was one way of doing it. Not an unpleasant way, either.

At first she tried to fight me off. But after a while, when she saw that she couldn’t help herself, she entered into the spirit of the thing. . . .

AFTER a while, I fired a casual question at her. “Tell me, Kathy,” I said. “What ever happened to that punk down in El Paso?”

She was silent a moment. “I—I don’t know what you mean.”

“You remember—the one you met when you made a personal appearance down there. The one you took for a sleigh-ride. He sent you a lot of fervent letters afterward; you turned ‘em over to me to work on for you.”

“Oh—that,” she whispered. “I—I’ve never heard anything more.”

Again, casually, I dropped another question. “Are you off the needle these days, Kathy?”

She laughed wryly. “Haven’t had a shot of hop for three months.”

I looked at the luminous dial of my wrist-watch. It was almost midnight. So I reached over on the floor and found my dressing-gown. I fumbled in its pocket. I dragged out my flat .32 automatic.

She said: “Wh-what are you doing?”

I laughed grimly. I said: “I’m getting ready to blow a hole in your pretty teeth if you don’t do exactly as I say!” And I jammed the muzzle of my roscoe against her.

She quivered; gasped; shrank away from me. “Wh-what—?” she almost wailed.

I said: “Keep your voice down and don’t move. Because if you do, you’ll wish you hadn’t!”

She kept still. She was plenty scared.

I said: "Look, baby, you may as well know it now. I'm wise to you. You aren't Kathy Moritz!"

"How—how did you guess—?" She choked off her words in mid-sentence. But she'd given herself away, just the same.

I chuckled. "I've made love to Kathy, in my time. And your methods are a lot different." Then I said: "Besides, you spilled the beans when I mentioned that punk in El Paso. The real Kathy Moritz never turned any letters over to me. I just heard about them from outside sources."

BEFORE she had a chance to answer that one, I heard a key scraping in the lock of the door, across the room from the bed. The girl alongside me stiffened. She drew a deep breath; started to scream a warning—

I shifted my automatic to her middle and whispered: "If you yell, you'll have two navels instead of one!"

She didn't yell.

I put my mouth up to the girl's ear. "Answer him. Act natural!"

She opened her mouth. "I—I'm here."

"Well, get up! Help me get Kathy's body out of the closet. We've got to move fast, before Turner starts suspecting the truth—"

I snapped on the bed-lamp and said: "Dan Turner already knows the truth. Grab for the ceiling before I decide to ventilate you!"

In the sudden shaded light, Sid Hemrick, high mogul of N-D-N studios, went corpse-grey. Alongside me, the yellow-haired girl made a grab for my gun-arm. I swung on her with my left; gave her a rap across the jaw with the back of my open knuckles. She shrank back, gasping.

I leaped to my feet. I kept Hemrick and the girl covered. I said: "Well, Sid, the jig's up. I'm wise to the whole thing. The real Kathy Moritz was a hop-head—and it was

beginning to show in her face, in her acting. You found a double for her—this girl here on the bed. You shoved Kathy into some sanitarium, probably; and you coached her double to take Kathy's place, not only in pictures but in private life as well. That's why this girl didn't recognize me when I accosted her in the rickshaw today. She didn't know me—because she wasn't the real Kathy! I was a sap or I'd have seen it for myself, right then. She was younger, fresher—"

"My God, Turner—listen—!" Hemrick rasped.

I said: "Shut up! I'm doing the talking. And I'm telling you what happened. In some way, the real Kathy Moritz got loose and came here to Palm Springs. She knew what was going on; knew that another girl had usurped her place as a star. So she came here for a show-down. And she was murdered, right here in this room!"

"But Turner—you don't think I—"

"Button your lip!" I snarled at him. "It so happened that I was first to discover her dead body. And you knew if it ever got out that Kathy Moritz was dead, N-D-N was sunk.

"But if the news could be hushed up, this other girl—Kathy's double—could go on playing Kathy's roles; go on taking her place in real life. That's why you asked me not to phone the cops. You'd already gone out and bought some chloral—some knock-out drops. You were probably figuring, at first, on doping Kathy so you could get her back to her sanitarium. But now, when I refused to play ball with you, you slipped me the chloral in that whiskey—removed the blood-stains from my sleeve—put me to bed in my own room.

"You coached this girl—Kathy's double—to recognize me when she next saw me; but to pretend I hadn't spoken to her earlier in the day, in the rickshaw. You probably even bribed the rickshaw boy to

lie to me, so that I'd be convinced I was going screwy!"

"Yes! I'll admit all that. But I didn't—"

I PRODDED him with my roscoe. "Nuts!" I growled. Then I reached for the phone and called the sheriff's sub-station.

After I'd summoned the law, I dragged the partially clad corpse of the real Kathy Moritz out of the closet, where Hemrick had hidden it pending a chance to remove it in the night. I waved Kathy's trembling, yellow-haired double out of the bed; put the corpse in the place she vacated. I covered it with a sheet.

Then I gave Hemrick a long, searching look. I lit a gasper and said: "Listen, Sid. Earlier today, you made me an offer. You wanted this thing hushed up, so that Kathy's latest production wouldn't have to be scrapped. Are you still willing to talk turkey?"

"Damn you!" he rasped. "What are you trying to pull? You've already phoned for the cops. The beans are spilled now."

I said: "Not all of them, Sid. I'll admit you're in a pickle—and I can't do much for you. But I can save the day for N-D-N Pictures."

"How?" he glared at me.

I said: "By telling the law that this dead girl was Kathy's double—not Kathy herself. By permitting her substitute, here"—I pointed toward the blonde girl he'd called Lucille—"by permitting her to go on acting as Kathy!"

Hemrick looked at me. "You—you'd do that, Turner?"

I said: "Yeah, for ten grand."

"It's a bargain!" he whispered.

Then I heard the cops coming along the corridor. I grabbed Kathy Moritz's double and shoved her in a closet, out of sight. I wasn't any too soon. The room's door banged open, and a couple of husky-

looking deputies walked in.

Five minutes later they walked out again, taking Sid with them. Kathy Moritz's corpse was still on the bed. The stiff-wagon was to come for it in a little while.

I WAITED a minute, until the deputies were safely out of the way with Hemrick. Then I went to the bed and pulled the sheet down from Kathy's lifeless map. I arranged her body so that it looked as if she were sleeping peacefully. I doused the lights and made for the closet where I'd hidden the other girl.

I got half-way to it when I heard a bull-like bellow in the night, outside the hotel on the street below. "Wuxtry! Wuxtry! All about the Palm Springs murder! Film star's double killed! Movie magnate arrested! Wuxtry!"

I grinned. Jim Devlin of the *Examiner* had kept his promise to me. And, incidentally, had scored one of the fastest scoops ever known. His Los Angeles paper was here on sale in Palm Springs not ten minutes after the murder itself had been reported to the cops—not five minutes after the actual arrest of Sid Hemrick!

I went into the closet.

The yellow-haired girl was shivering in a corner, all crouched up in a ball. I put my arms around her and said: "It's okay, honey. Everything's going to come out all right. Take a hitch in our galluses and keep your chin up."

She pulled away from me in the darkness. "Let me alone!" she sobbed. "Keep your filthy paws off me! And I-let me out of this c-closet!"

"Not yet," I told her in a whisper. "The coast isn't clear yet. And besides, am I such lousy company, baby!"

"You—you're loathsome!" she snapped at me. "You—you Judas! You deliberately turned Mr. Hemrick over to the police,

when you knew—”

I said: “What do you care? From now on, you’re filling Kathy Moritz’s shoes—dragging down her salary. You’re in clover. And you’re a sweet dish.” I put my hand on her.

She tried to fight me off. But her nearness began to do things to my veins and arteries again. There was something about that yellow-haired wren I liked.

I pinioned her; held her squirming body locked in my encircling arms, so that she couldn’t move. I searched for her lips with my mouth in the blackness of the closet. I kissed her. I caressed her curves. . . . She began to pant a little.

And then, suddenly, she stiffened. “*What was that?*” she whispered.

I slapped a hand over her mouth. “*Quiet!*” I breathed. I’d heard a sound inside the bedroom.

I WAITED an instant. Then, very cautiously, I released my hold on the girl. I pushed the closet door open on a tiny crack. I looked out.

Somebody was in the bedroom—had entered through the window. Had come in through the fire-escape. He had a flashlight. He was moving toward the bed; moving toward the corpse of Kathy Moritz, which didn’t look like a corpse at all. It looked like a sleeping dame.

The guy’s back was turned toward me. I saw him reach the bed. He hesitated. I saw he had a shiv in his hand.

Abruptly, he raised the knife—high. He poised it over his head, as though trying to screw up his courage. Its blade glittered in the white glare of his flashlight.

The yellow-haired girl beside me in the closet stared out through the door’s open crack. She drew a silent, sobbing, frightened breath and shrank against me.

Then, over by the bed, I heard the guy with the knife say: “Now, you hell-cat!”

And he plunged the knife downward.

The dagger thudded home hilt-deep against the breast of that lovely corpse. “Roast in hell, you two-timer!” the guy snarled.

I hurled myself out of the closet and jammed the muzzle of my roscoe into his liver. I said: “If you wink an eye-lash I’ll drill you, punk!”

He stiffened. His back was still toward me; but there was fear in every quivering muscle of his shoulders. I had him—and he knew it.

I SAID, “You walked into it wide open this time, fella. You’re the guy who did the stabbing this afternoon. You’re the kid Kathy Moritz made a monkey of, down in El Paso last year. She let you play around with her until you thought she belonged to you; then she gave you the horse-laugh.

“You wanted revenge. You sent her a lot of threatening letters. Then you came here to California, waiting for an opportunity to get even with her—to carry out your threats. And you got that opportunity this afternoon. But I tricked you with that newspaper yarn tonight.

“Through it, you learned that you’d murdered Kathy’s double by mistake. You learned that Kathy was still alive. So you came back here to do your job over again. You’d already killed one dame—the wrong one, you figured. And now you came back to murder the one you were really after.”

I yanked the sheet down off the bed. “You see, you stuck a knife into the same breast you sliced open this afternoon. You daggered a stiff!”

He gasped, sagged. I grabbed his shoulders, whirled him around to have a look at his face.

I stared into his white, strained features. Just as I expected, he was the rickshaw kid—the broad-shouldered, athletic lad who’d pulled that go-cart on the streets of

Palm Springs earlier in the day.

“God!” he moaned. “No wonder she didn’t recognize me when she rode in my rickshaw! She was the wrong girl!”

I grunted. Then I yelled for the girl in the closet. “Come out here and hold this automatic while I phone the sheriff’s office!” I barked.

The girl came forward, took my roscoe. The rickshaw kid stared at her. “Kathy—” he muttered. Which suited me fine. My lie had got across. He thought this dame was the real Kathy.

I grabbed the telephone, got the sheriff’s sub-station. I told them to release Sid Hemrick and come get the real murderer.

And that’s about all there was to it. The punk went to his death in the gas chamber still thinking he’d killed the wrong woman;

still believing it was Kathy Moritz’s double he’d knifed. . .twice.

For that matter, all the rest of the world thought the same thing. Because as soon as Sid Hemrick was turned loose, he gave me that promised ten grand. And I kept my trap shut.

Kathy was buried under the name of Lucille something-or-other; went to her last reward bearing the assumed identity of the double who had usurped her place in life. After all, it didn’t matter to Kathy. Corpses don’t care.

And the living girl, who had stepped into Kathy’s shoes, still occupies them. If you’re a movie fan, you may think you’re seeing the original Kathy Moritz on the screen. But you aren’t.

I’ve got ten thousand of N-D-N’s money to prove it.