



He went into his dive three feet from the window sill and cleared everything

# STALEMATE

By J. S. ENDICOTT

*Facing a murder rap on an accessory charge, private eye  
Peter Croy runs afoul of blackmailers and plug-uglies!*

**H**E WAS a two-hundred-pound, six feet of middle-aged guy in a two hundred dollar checked suit. He stood there, just inside my door and grinned at me.

“Well, well, if it ain’t Petey Croy,” he said. “And all fixed up like a private shamus with a nice office and everything. Remember me, kiddo?”

I couldn’t have forgotten him if I was a thousand years old. Because he was the wrong guy I’d once worked for when I was on the other side of the fence. He was one of those mistakes a man likes to forget and never can.

“Hello, Janvier,” I said. “It’s been a long time.”

He sat down, still grinning. “Yeah—

since Prohibition went off. Boy, we lived in those days. The dough came easy and in big hunks. Petey—how'd you ever make out with that murder rap?"

Here it was. My past had reared up and landed a right hook. Jason Janvier knew the truth. The guy knew everything. I could see fifteen years of hard work, my nice office and my private detective license shriveling up as if they never existed. I saw prison bars too.

"How'd you find me, Janvier?" I inquired.

He crossed his legs and right then I planned on wiping that grin off his face some day soon. It seemed frozen there.

"Accident, Petey. Sheer accident. We passed on the street yesterday. You didn't see me—I spotted you."

"Well, it's nice of you to drop in. Do it again after twenty more years have gone by. It's my busy day, Janvier."

That grin grew wider and there was something wrong with it. There was fear behind it. Janvier wanted something and no matter what it was I'd give it to him. Time, money or muscle. He had me against the mat and all he had to do was yelp and I'd holler.

"About that rap again, Petey. I hate to bring up things like that, but after I saw you yesterday I did some fast checking up. Know what? There's still a warrant for your arrest in Chicago. Murder, or being the accessory to murder, has no statute of limitations. More than that—all the witnesses are still alive. How'd you like to go back to Chicago, Petey?"

"How'd you like to find yourself in a star role at a funeral?" I got up and walked toward him. He raised the hat on his lap and there was a gun under it.

"Sit down, Petey. Don't make me do it because the job would be too easy. They'd pin a medal on me for drilling you. I'm a reasonable man. We can iron this out."

I SAT down. Janvier always had been fast with a gun. "What do you want?" I asked.

He relaxed a bit. "Funny thing, but when I saw you yesterday, the whole solution of a problem came to me. I want to retain you—as a private detective."

"What's the matter?" I asked him. "Wouldn't she give you a divorce?"

He smiled thinly. "No—she wouldn't. I had to make her."

I started to reach for a cigarette and the gun came up quickly. I decided I didn't want to smoke. I said, "Take your troubles to somebody else, Janvier. I worked for you once and got myself mixed up in a murder. The taste of it still lingers. I don't want any more of that stuff."

"Ah—but you'll accept this case," he told me. "Because if you refuse it, the cops are going to get a tip that a man wanted by Chicago cops for conspiracy to murder, happens to be working as a private shamus. You might blow the rap, but what happens to your reputation? To your license? They don't let ex-mugs have private eye licenses. That's why I knew you'd help me."

I thought I might as well hear him out. Especially since every word he said was true. I'd been no killer, but I was part of the mob that did a lot of shooting and bloodletting. I'd been a crazy young squirt, but that didn't cut any ice with a judge and jury.

I waved my hand in a grandiloquent gesture that he could continue. I didn't want him to think I was afraid of him. But he knew it. I was certain he knew it.

"Two years ago, Petey, I was married to a woman named Olivia," Janvier said. "One of those kind with a bedroom shape and eyes that seem to tell a story that isn't there. She was strictly out for dough and she landed me. She also found out I'd been married before and that suited her fine

because my first wife was alive and I hadn't gotten a divorce. You follow me, Petey?"

"Yeah—I know you're the same sort of rat as always."

He flushed a little, but didn't come back at me. He just went on with his story. "So Olivia demanded a lot of dough. I paid off for a while, but it couldn't go on and I knew it. She was a funny dame.

"There was nothing immoral about her. She never looked at another guy. She was strictly out for money. I had it and she meant to get it. She used to drink—not much—but the craziest cocktail you ever heard of. One part gin, one brandy and one port wine. I made her drink a little different one night. I put arsenic in it."

I started smiling. This guy was a fool. Yes, he had something on me, but his confession gave me an item much bigger on him. Until I realized that I had no proof beyond his story—and he didn't I have to have proof about me. The Chicago cops had that.

"She seemed to know what had happened," he went on. "She keeled over in about two minutes. I made sure she was dead and then I got out the car. It was raining. It had been raining for five days. I came back, picked her up and put her into the back seat. Nobody saw me. We lived in the country then. I dug a grave, near a stream where the earth was soft. I buried her and then went home again."

He didn't act like a lunatic, but I thought he must be. I never doubted the story. Janvier may not have killed anyone before, but he'd given orders for me to be gunned out more than once.

"It was easier than you think," he told me. "I'd planned it for some time. Matter of fact, I told Olivia we were moving East. We sold our furniture to the people who'd bought our house. Olivia had spread the news that we were going. So all I had to

do was take her clothes and mine, put them in the car and drive away. Nobody ever suspected. Nobody ever found out, I thought."

The last two words gave it all away. No wonder there was a harrowing fear behind that mechanical grin of his.

He looked at me keenly, as if he knew I'd guessed. "That happened two years ago," he continued. "Two weeks ago I got the first letter. It related where I bought the arsenic. It told where the grave was located. Oh—whoever wrote it knew the truth all right."

"How much did you have to part with?" I asked him.

"Twenty thousand. Last week I had to dig up ten more. Tonight I'm to bring thirty thousand. It'll never stop. Petey, you're going to find out who wrote those notes. Who spied on me when Olivia died. You're going to find out, tell me and I'll kill that man."

JANVIER was putting it up to me in a big way.

"Suppose I refuse?" That was me talking day dreams.

"I'll turn you in. Anonymously—and then I'll disappear. You may sing but who'll believe you, and they won't be able to question me. I've got to hide out anyway—unless I find out who knows the truth about me."

"What's the set-up?" I asked him. "Who could know you're a wife-killer?"

He seemed to realize he'd won. He put the gun away, moved his chair closer to my desk and got more confidential. "That's just it—nobody who knew Olivia or me could be wise. I tell you we were miles from anywhere. But I remember seeing puddles of water in the garage. Somebody must have taken refuge there from the storm, prowled and saw me kill her. They must have followed me and saw

me bury the body. A bum, maybe. I don't know."

"How'd you pay off the first two times?" I asked. At least it was an interesting case.

"I went to a certain bench in Central Park, late at night. I wrapped the dough in a newspaper, sat on the bench until somebody told me I could go and then I put the paper wrapped dough on the bench and got out of there."

"You never saw the guy?"

"Not even his shadow. I doubled back the second time, but the dough was gone. I'm supposed to be there again tonight. Only you're taking my place. We're built pretty much alike. In the darkness it would be hard to tell who was who. You'll pay over the dough and just go away. But I'm going to tail the guy who picks it up. I've got to find out who he is, where he lives and if he wrote out the story of the murder and has it hidden some place. Also if there is more than one blackmailer involved."

I couldn't see much of an out for me. If Janvier did get the guy, I'd still be under his thumb. If I refused—well, I knew what that meant. By consenting I'd at least win a little time to think this out.

We made the arrangements and he gloated a little. I was his boy all right and he knew it. At ten that night I went to his apartment. He showed me three stacks of bills—small ones—lined up on a table. He wrapped them in a piece of newspaper and handed them to me with detailed instructions as to where the rendezvous was to be. Neither of us said very much. He was too jumpy and I was too sore about the whole thing.

I drove my car to within a few hundred feet of the bench where I was supposed to meet the blackmailer. I threw a slug into the firing chamber of my automatic and slipped off the safety. I thrust the gun back into my shoulder harness, because I was

fast on the draw and I didn't figure on much trouble anyhow.

I had the answer too. I knew why I was helping Janvier. Blackmailers, to a private eye, are a pain in the neck. I'd dealt with dozens of them and never yet met one worth shedding a tear over. If Janvier knocked this guy off, I wouldn't weep, and then I'd have Janvier just as he had me. We'd both be facing murder raps. I'd be free of him and I mentally visualized the scene when I told him so. I was also going to change the contours of his face.

At eleven-thirty I was seated on the park bench with my hat pulled down quite a bit. The newspaper wrapped package of money was in my lap, as prominently displayed as the darkness would permit. I didn't have to wait long.

He was in the bushes behind the bench and he spoke in a hoarse whisper. "Okay, Janvier, put the bundle on the bench, get up and take ten steps. Then freeze and stay there until I check the dough. Clasp your hands behind your neck and keep 'em there."

I was getting the jitters now. The original scheme called for me to do nothing but walk away. I was still trying to puzzle it out when I felt the muzzle of a gun against the back of my neck. I got up, put the bundle on the bench, counted ten steps and put my hands where he told me to.

I heard the newspaper crackle. There was a brief flash of light from an electric torch and then a resounding curse. I sensed what was wrong and there was only one thing I could do about it. I pivoted neatly and sprang at the shadowy form in the darkness. I hit him before he could bring the gun to bear. He must have been pretty sure I was Janvier and he must have known Janvier from old. An attack like this was something Janvier would never attempt. It surprised him and gave me an

edge.

**K**NOCKING the man down, I pinned his gun hand to the path, and let him have one on the jaw. I got a knee against his chest and I was getting set to go to town. That was when the building fell on me. It was no two or three story dwelling. It was a skyscraper of cement and steel.

When I woke up, I was draped over the wheel of my car. At first it was hard to orient myself until I realized this was still Central Park and the reason why I was here at this time of night came back to me. I raised my hand to my throbbing head. My hat was gone, but somebody had tied a bandage around my skull.

I leaned out of the car window, debating whether or not to be sick. The air made me feel a little better. I found the three packages of what I'd thought was currency, lying on the seat beside me. It was then that I saw through Janvier's plan. They were dummy packages. Janvier intended the blackmailer would see that he'd been gypped and take a shot at the man who delivered the phony dough. That was me.

Janvier had been thinking along the same lines that my mind worked, only I was just a little cog in the wheel. I was to have been the victim. That blackmailer would have killed me, thinking I was Janvier. From then on, even after he knew the truth, he'd be in no further position to blackmail anybody. He and Janvier would be stalemate, just as I intended it to be between Janvier and me.

I was a sucker. The stooge who'd absorb a bullet and lay down dead like a nice guy. There'd been two of them—unless Janvier had slugged me and maybe knocked the blackmailer off. That idea gave me the jitters. I got out of the car, staggered a little for the first few steps, but got back to the park bench where I'd been

sitting. There was no corpse, no nothing.

I guessed the blackmailer had a friend along. I smoked a dozen cigarettes when I was back in the car. I'd been double-crossed, but I was pretty good at that sort of thing myself. If I could find this blackmailer, I'd have Janvier where I wanted him. I couldn't turn him in without jeopardizing myself, but he couldn't act against me either. Sometimes a stalemate works two ways.

I found my hat in the back of the sedan and tried to put it on. It wouldn't fit because of the bandage. I ripped the bandage off. It turned out to be a white silk scarf, lightly perfumed. The scent was so vague that I couldn't determine whether or not it came from some man's freshly shaven and lotioned neck—or from a woman.

I got a flashlight out of the glove compartment and studied the scarf inch by inch. I found what I was looking for too—a dry cleaner's mark. I drove home and went to bed. The shape I was in, I wasn't good for anything else.

In the morning I went to work. I half expected to hear from Janvier, but I didn't. Morning newspapers carried no stories of somebody found dead in or near the park. Matter-of-fact, it was one of those rare mornings when there wasn't a single new murder described. So Janvier hadn't even been at the park to carry out his promise. He'd never intended to be there.

I drove down to Headquarters after a late breakfast. I was known there and fairly well liked. Long ago I'd learned that cops don't like any private eye, no matter how square he shoots. But they cooperated. I was allowed to study their files on dry cleaning marks.

I determined the plant where the scarf had been cleaned, drove there and got the name and address of the tailor who'd sent the scarf in. He was an Italian who didn't

want to talk until he saw the edge of a twenty dollar bill, my license, and heard that the owner of the scarf was the heir to an estate.

The owner was someone named Kay Kimball. So it was a woman's scarf after all. The address was Central Park West—evidently Kay Kimball wasn't on relief. Facing her and trying to make her talk wasn't part of my plans. If she was a member of a blackmail ring, she'd know all the answers.

I merely studied the layout of the building, found she lived on the eighteenth floor and that she had two brothers named Chris and Walt. She was some sort of a top hand clothes designer and everybody liked her.

So did I when she was pointed out to me by a doorman who became richer by five bucks. Kay Kimball was about thirty, slim and straight. Her hair was black and upswept. She was class, figure, face and manners. The clothes she wore went with the address too. A silver fox jacket, a tan suit and a hat that looked like something Luther Burbank must have grown.

I kept out of sight and trailed her downtown. She seemed to have an honest job for plenty of dough. I ate dinner two tables away from her and nearly choked on the size of the check they gave me. I trailed her home again and decided I'd better do something about her.

**A**S USUAL, my decisions came about the same time that somebody else made up their minds about me. While I waited for the elevator to take me to Kay Kimball's floor, two men lined up on either side of me. Two guns poked against my ribs.

"Walk out to the street, chump," the slimmer and younger of the pair ordered. "You'll see a blue Olds at the curb. Get into the back seat and don't say a word."

"I like it better right here," I told them.

The guns jabbed me again. The slim one said, "Have it your own way, chump, but if you stay, it will be until the boys from the morgue come and sweep you up."

"I'd like a ride in a blue Olds," I said, and hoped my grin wasn't too lopsided.

The ride lasted about three-quarters of an hour. Just long enough to reach a spot on Long Island where there was a lot of space and no people. The first inkling of what was in store came from the butt of the slim guy's gun. It smacked me squarely on the same spot which had been opened up by a sap the night before.

I was dumped out of the car. Both of them pitched in then. Not with gun butts but with their fists, until my face felt as lumpy as the ground. They made no attempt to cripple or to inflict permanent injuries. They were just making each punch as painful as possible.

Neither said a word until I lay on my back, unable to move and cursing them through swollen lips. Then the slim one bent over me.

"That's it, shamus," he said. "Just a lesson. Next time you get promoted with a chunk of lead. Keep out of this and you'll last a long time. Stay in and you're finished."

"Who are you?" I asked and wondered how he ever understood the words, my face was that swollen. "Chris or Walt?"

"Okay, so you know that much. I'm Chris Kimball and this is my brother Walt. What difference does it make if you know? You're just a stooge hired by Janvier to do his dirty work. For the double-o last night, he pays twice as much. So long, chump, and we don't want to see you again."

The feeling wasn't mutual. Especially after I got back to town and took a look at myself in the mirror. I could have passed

for a gargoyle. Cold applications brought the swelling down some. There weren't many lacerations except for the hole in my head being opened up again by that first blow from the gun butt.

I whistled softly as I changed my clothes. I never whistled unless I was mad. Give me a load of good news and I scowl like somebody who just heard from the tax collector. Slug me with adverses and I grin and whistle. Sometimes I had the idea I was nuts.

I rested for a few hours and at eight o'clock I was parked across the street from that Central Park West address. I wasn't interested in Kay Kimball now, nor in Jason Janvier. They could keep. But I was very much interested in her two brothers, Chris and Walt. They had something due them and I prided myself on paying such debts.

It was Walt, the older and stockier one who came out first. He was alone—my first real break. I tailed him to a bar down Broadway a few blocks. He was having himself a rye and soda.

I saw this through the glass door and I automatically took a look around before going in. This Kimball family was too good with a sap when a man's back was turned. I didn't see any of the Kimballs, but I did see Lieutenant Monroe of the Broadway Squad and, what was worse, he saw me.

Monroe was a beefy lad, deceptively flabby. He had an ugly face, a punch like Joe Louis and an unimpeachable record. He was as square as they came. There wasn't a monkey on Broadway who wouldn't cross the street when Monroe came along. He was a great guy, with people he liked. Poison to those he didn't like. Lieutenant Monroe didn't like me.

"Hello," I said. "Come on in and have a drink. I'll buy you anything not over a nickel."

He laughed. "Croy, you look like you'd been on a sixty day bender and tried pushing over the Empire State Building with your face. What's the name of my pal who massaged you?"

I rubbed my tender jaw. "You and your rubber hoses," I said. .

Monroe took hold of me by both lapels. "Shamus—what's it about? You don't take a shellacking like that unless it's big. Come on—talk."

"We'll go downtown," I said, "and let the Inspector sit in. How about it?"

He pushed me away. "Okay, shamus. But keep your troubles out of my territory, understand? I don't want any part of you. Go on and get stewed."

I tipped my hat, bowed a little and went into the bar. Walt was standing at the end of it, hoisting his second or third. He didn't see me coming. I stepped up behind him, brushed a hand across his coattails and felt the gun. I got it out before he knew what happened.

I put the gun on the bar and told the barkeep to hold it. Then I ducked Walt's swing, moved in close and chopped him down. Every punch I landed packed interest for those he'd given me. I went over him from his ears to his waist—until he slumped against the bar and covered his face.

**P**ART of the fight had consisted of a wrestling match on the floor. I bent to pick up the two dollar fountain pen that was supposed to stick out of my breast pocket. I also saw a key, with a wooden tag on it. I kept both objects, planted a couple of punches against Walt's middle for good luck and took myself out of there.

Some of the women customers had yelled. A waiter was out on the street looking for the cop who was never there. Only I had an idea Lieutenant Monroe wouldn't be too far away. I walked to the

door, wondering what I looked like now. Walt had landed more than one and my face had that old familiar feeling of being out of shape again.

My car was conveniently handy and I made it without falling on my kisser. Somebody yelled my name. I saw Monroe and the waiter running up. I pulled away from the curb, made a U-turn and streaked for the nearest entrance to the park. I could lose almost any form of pursuit there and when I emerged to Fifth Avenue, there was nobody on my tail.

I fished out the key which Walt had dropped. It had the name and room number of a medium-priced hotel on the tag. I drove there, parked and went in. I passed the desk as if I owned the place, told the elevator operator I wanted the sixth floor and rode up. I located room 623 and knocked on the door.

“Who is it?” someone asked and the voice was pleasantly familiar. Chris wasn’t putting any rough edges on it now, but it was him all right.

“Open up, Chris,” I said hoarsely in what I hoped was at least a fair imitation of Walt’s voice. I got away with it, mainly because Chris wasn’t expecting any trouble, I imagine.

He had the door open an inch when I hit it with my shoulder from a five foot lunge. Chris let go of the knob, reeled backwards and nearly fell. Only nearly, because he took one look at me, let out a bellow you could hear a dozen blocks away and charged.

I hardly expected it. I figured he’d be so astonished that he couldn’t stir. I see too many movies. He kicked the door shut as he hammered one smack on the tip of my nose. It hurt as much as getting my throat cut—maybe more. He swung another, missed and got off balance. That’s when I had him. For about ten seconds.

Chris could fight. No amateur stuff. He knew the ropes. He knew I’d taken a beating and couldn’t be in very good shape so he concentrated on my face where his blows would hurt the most.

He upset a chair, then a table. He slammed me against a wall so hard that a big picture of some pastoral scene missed my head and smashed to the floor. We made more racket than a bleacher full of Dodger fans at a Giants’ game.

Chris was handy with his fists, but a sucker for left jabs. The short, chopping kind, and gradually I cut him up. We fought across the living room and into the bedroom. The night table fell on its side and the lamp broke into a few dozen pieces.

It was funny in a way because I tripped and fell. My hands were cut on the broken glass and pieces were imbedded in my flesh. Chris stood there, panting and red-faced and bleeding, but he didn’t move as I pulled the pieces of glass out of my anatomy.

When the last piece was free, he came at me again. We landed on the bed, arms and legs wrapped around one another, rolled across it and hit the floor. I got free by thumping his chin hard with the heel of my hand. I let him get up and then moved in.

He dodged behind a small, light chair and kept shifting it so I couldn’t get at him. He could have used the chair as a club or missile if he wanted to, but Chris didn’t fight that way. When he lifted the chair, he tossed it over his shoulder. It hit the window and crashed through.

He made a lunge, missed and landed in the corner. I stood over him, waiting until he got up. Then I heard the sirens. I said, “Excuse me, Chris, but I’ve got to leave now. So long, pal.”

He grinned at me, even if blood did drip off the grin. “See you, shamus.”

I headed for the door, but it opened before I got there and Lieutenant Monroe was scowling at me. He walked in, stood with his feet spread slightly apart and never even glanced at Chris.

“So you were looking for trouble,” he said in a heavy voice. “The other bird you polished off got away from me, but somebody knew he lived at this hotel so I came on down. Okay—it’s a pinch for assault, breach of the peace and maybe a couple of other things I can think up.”

CHRIS had been moving as Monroe shot off his mouth. Right now Chris was directly behind the big detective. All I had to do was give him a push and he fell across Chris who promptly crawled up over him while I ran through the door, down the corridor and reached an elevator. I was wishing all my enemies were like Chris.

Monroe didn’t have my car tabbed, so I got away from there fast. There were things to do and it wouldn’t take Monroe long to know where to find me. I drove to Central Park West and proceeded to Kay Kimball’s apartment. Nobody answered the door buzzer.

I worked over the lock a little, got it open and stepped into one of those fancier joints. Everything was light blue or yellow. At first it looked garish, but gradually it became restful. I saw decanters on a sideboard and marched up to them. There were glasses too and I took a healthy slug of brandy. I looked at the other decanters and grinned.

Then I searched the place and might as well have stayed home for my trouble. I didn’t find a thing of interest. Not until I emerged from the bedroom to the living room. She met me in the doorway and there was a pretty little revolver in her pretty little fist.

“Hello!” I said.

She gave me a smile. “Hello yourself, you one man crusade. Walt phoned me and then Chris. How did a nice chap like you get mixed up with a rat like Janvier?”

“It’s a long story,” I said, “and I wouldn’t even tell it to my stepmother. How’s the blackmail game?”

She flushed a shell pink under her make-up. She forced a laugh. It was pretty grim. “Not bad, considering all angles. That was a foolish thing you did—substituting pieces of green paper to look like money. You might have been killed. In fact, I thought you were dead and it frightened me.”

I got a dour expression on what was left of my face. I was feeling happy, you see. “Don’t tell me you swung that lead pipe,” I remarked. “And, for your information, I didn’t substitute the phony dough. Janvier did and I wasn’t even aware of it. Shows what kind of a sap I can be sometimes.”

She stuffed the gun back into her handbag. “So Janvier did it. What was his game?”

I gave it to her cold. “You and those brothers of yours—if they really are brothers.”

“They are, and I love them very much. Go ahead.”

“You three know Janvier knocked off his wife two years ago. You’re bleeding him for it. Not that I blame you, though blackmail is a crummy racket at best. So Janvier knew me from old, knew something about me the cops don’t know. Not here in New York anyway. I was to identify you people for him—or he’d turn me in on an ancient rap.”

“I wondered how a nice boy like you would work for a heel like Janvier,” she said. “Tell me more.”

“That’s about all,” I said. “Except you’re playing with dynamite. Janvier had a plan all made. Your brother was to think

I was Janvier, spot the phony money and let me have it. That would have made a killer of him and Janvier would have you. His side and your side would have been stalemate. You couldn't sing about him because I was dead. I was the little man in between. Get it?"

"Oh, yes," she said. "I might have expected that of Jason. It's exactly the way he operates. What do we do now?"

"Tell me," I said. "I've got a date. Maybe I'll keep it and maybe a few hundred cops will get in my way. I'm plenty hot right now for pushing around a Broadway Squad dick who doesn't like being pushed around. Suppose you stay right here and I'll be back if I can."

"Luck to you," she called at my back.

I liked all three of the Kimball clan. They were smooth operators and could be tough, but they played it straight according to their way of playing any game. I left the building, drove downtown and phoned Jason Janvier.

"Listen, I've got news," was what I said. "It's important and bad, and all for you. Stay there until I arrive. Don't let anybody in but me, and don't answer any more phone calls. That's important. Be there in five minutes."

I hung up for a second, dropped another nickel in the slot and dialed Headquarters. Over the phone I said: "Contact Lieutenant Monroe and tell him if he wants Peter Croy, he'll find him at the Alhambra Hotel, Room Seventeen twenty-one. He's just going in there now and I think he's got a gun."

I hung up, stepped from the booth and expanded my lungs a bit. Then I crossed the street to the Alhambra. I took an elevator to the seventeenth floor, tapped on Janvier's door and identified myself. He was as nervous as a cat when I walked in and he kept one hand glued around a gun in his coat pocket.

**B**OLDLY, I threw my hat on a chair. "Take a good look at my kisser," I told him. "Two guys named Kimball did that. Yeah, I found your blackmailers for you and I'd have had them right if you didn't blow your top."

"What do you mean? What do you mean?" he yelped.

"Last night, you gave me phony dough. Blackmailers always check on the lettuce they get. And tricking them makes them sore. I did my best, but it was too late."

"What do you mean, too late?" he demanded. I could hear sirens on the street.

"A blackmailer has one stock in trade. The information he possesses. When his victim pulls a doublecross, the blackmailer resorts to making good his threats. It's the only way he can stay in business. So—these blackmailers went to the cops."

"No!" Janvier shrieked. He'd gone deathly white.

I led him to the window, raised it all the way and showed him radio cars pulling up and uniformed men approaching the entrance to the hotel. He began to tremble.

"If you played it square, this wouldn't have happened," I said. "I did my best, but they nabbed me. I had to fight my way out. I came here right away to warn you. Get all the dough you have and lam out—quick. I'll see if the coast is clear."

He dove for a table drawer, took money from it and began stuffing it into his pocket. I thrust my head out the door, ducked back and slammed it quickly.

"Too late," I told him. "The corridor is swarming with cops. Janvier, this is it. They know where the body of your wife is buried. They'll find the arsenic in it. That stuff stays with a corpse for years and years. You're going to burn, Janvier."

He brushed past me and opened the door himself. By that time the cops really

were there. He slammed the door, shot the bolt and acted like somebody in the last stages of a terrific bender. Then he turned slowly, eyed the wide open window and began running. I don't think any part of him touched the window sill. He went into his dive three feet from it and cleared everything very neatly.

I explained to Lieutenant Monroe when he got there, but I left out any connection the Kimballs had with the case. I told him our battles were friendly ones. Monroe had nothing much on me. I was out on bail in a couple of hours. It seemed Janvier was wanted and Monroe was quite content that he got him, even if Janvier was nothing more than a mangled mass of broken bones.

I cleaned up a bit and went to see Chris and Walt Kimball. And Kay. Mostly Kay. I told them what happened. I walked over to the sideboard and poured three drinks of brandy. I gave one to Walt, another to Chris and took the third myself.

"Hey, what about me?" Kay asked.

I put my glass down and gravely turned to the sideboard. I put a piece of ice in the shaker and added a jigger of gin.

"Janvier took what he thought was the easy way out," I said. "Personally, I don't think he killed his wife. In the first place he said he gave her arsenic in a cocktail and she just keeled over in two minutes. Arsenic doesn't work that way. It creates stomach pains first and kills slowly. Even a good big shot of the stuff doesn't kill in two or three minutes.

"I think his wife—her name was Olivia, he said—knew he was going to kill her. Maybe because she had something on

him. Perhaps he did have another wife and was a bigamist. We'll never know the truth about that, I suppose. Maybe he had his eye on some cute blond number. Anyway, she knew he'd try to kill her. So she keeled over and pretended to be dead. If she hadn't taken the poisoned cocktail, he'd have strangled her most likely.

"Then Janvier went to the garage to get the car ready. He was certain somebody had been there on account of water dripped on the floor. Now whoever was in the garage, knew what happened. Perhaps gave Janvier's wife an emetic to get rid of some of the poison before Janvier returned. He took his wife's body out and buried it in a shallow grave. After he buried her, this good fairy got her out before she smothered. Janvier would have been careless. He was plenty scared and in too much of a hurry.

"A doctor could have used a stomach pump in time to save her. Janvier took a dry dive for nothing, except what existed in his imagination."

Nobody said a word. I added a slug of brandy to the gin and ice. Poured another jigger of port wine and dumped that in. I shook the mixture, poured it into a tall glass and presented it to Kay Kimball with a slight bow.

"Janvier told me how easy it was to poison his wife," I said. "She drank nothing but a weird cocktail which would hide the taste of anything. It was composed of gin, brandy and port wine. How can you stand it?"

She raised the glass. "I never drink anything else, shamus," she said.