

# THROUGH THE WALL.

BY  
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Harmless substances may merge, become virulent poison. This story of the chemistry of murder will startle you.

**T**HE night of the murder, Mr. Weiss knocked at the door of Mary Russell's room just as the Alka-Ves show came in on the radio. Mr. Weiss was the landlady's husband, a small unimportant person with sandy, fly-away hair and a worn toothbrush of a mustache. It was always Mrs. Weiss who showed the rooms and collected the rent. But if there was a complaint to be voiced Mr. Weiss became Charley McCarthy for his spouse.

Mary Russell, one hand on the door and the other clutching at the neck of her blue chenille robe, looked into Mr. Weiss' eyes without discovering whether they were pale blue or gray. Her mind took a breathless backward plunge and recalled that her room rent was not yet due, thank heaven!

Mr. Weiss' eyes passed quickly from Mary and to Mary's radio.

"It's bothering Mrs. Weiss," he said with some show of indignation. He was always pointing at something or someone with his eyes, preferring pronouns to nouns.

Mary went back to the somber oak table that, in Mrs. Weiss' estimation at least, gave the bedroom the qualities of a living room. The radio was on this table. Mary turned the volume down and faced Mr. Weiss again.

"I'm sorry," she said, suddenly feeling more sympathy for Mrs. Weiss who was sick than she did for herself. Indigestion was probably worse than unemployment. "Is Mrs. Weiss feeling badly tonight?"

Mr. Weiss showed the palms of his hands in a weary gesture; married to a hypochondriac as he was, he must have had to answer that question a tiresome number of times.



Mary burned her notes carefully and completely

"Her indigestion again," he said. And then his strange little eyes scampered away from Mary and back to the radio. "Maybe that's too loud, even." He indicated the south wall of the room. "They're like paper."

He meant the walls, of course. Mary's room and the one occupied by Mr. and Mrs. Weiss were connected by a narrow bath that had been sandwiched into the old house as an afterthought. There was nothing soundproof about the cheap partition.

Mary snapped the radio off entirely and faced Mr. Weiss with thinning lips. He backed, closing her door. His head ducked several times—to express his thanks, no doubt, though Mary was reminded of a greedy rooster pecking at grain.

As soon as Mr. Weiss had fled, Mary clicked on the radio and turned up the volume a little way. She was in time to catch a spatter of applause the Alka-Ves comedian had just received, undeservedly, in Mary's opinion. As for the product of the sponsor,

there were three unopened bottles of Alka-Ves in the top drawer of her monstrosity of a dresser. Alka-Ves was indicated for headaches, indigestion, and overindulgence—symptoms which never bothered her in the least.

“Especially overindulgence,” she thought wryly. After eight weeks of unemployment there was practically nothing left with which to buy even a fraction of a hangover.

SHE had no use for Alka-Ves, yet felt no guilt about writing twenty-five perjured words, on the backs of each of the three cartons, about “Why I like Alka-Ves.” Which only goes to show to what low level an unemployed proofreader will stoop when the lure amounts to ten thousand dollars in cash prizes.

Winners of the contest were to be announced on tonight’s program, and not even Mrs. Weiss’ indigestion was going to prevent Mary from knowing whether or not her name was listed among the fortunate.

On tiptoe, she detoured the chair and sat down on the edge of the bed. The chair was inviting looking with its floral print slip cover which concealed viciously barbed broken springs. Mrs. Weiss had called it “a right comfortable easy chair,” and if you gave Mrs. Weiss the benefit of the doubt the only possible conclusion was that she actually enjoyed suffering.

The Alka-Ves comedian addressed the mike to crack wise about the title of the next musical number. It was about that time that the lights went out, and the sudden darkness and silence in Mary’s room made her sit bolt upright on the edge of the bed.

“Oh well,” she thought, “they’ll be on in a minute.”

But then possibly a minute passed and the lights were not on. The great old house was becoming restless. Other lodgers in the hall outside were talking—talking in whispers imposed by darkness. Mr. Griffin, who lived three doors down and frequently remarked that he owed his success as a brush salesman to his voice, inquired loudly if this was a blackout.

Mary got up, went to the window, looked out across the alley. Houses on Wilson Street had lighted windows. She crossed to the door, opened it, stepped out into the hall to bump squarely into a round, rubbery figure.

“Oomp!” half squeal, half grunt.

“Mrs. Weiss!” Mary dropped her hands on rounded shoulders covered with the flannel of a dressing gown. “I’m sorry, Mrs. Weiss.”

“Oh, it’s you, dearie,” Mrs. Weiss said, gasping. “My, what a start you give me and my heart cuttin’ up fit to kill.”

“I’m sorry,” Mary repeated. “My lights went out and I came out to see if they were out all over the house.”

“Well, I guess! It’s the electric company, most likely. A body pays for service and what do you get, I ask you? You pay and pay plenty, and what happens?”

“You don’t pay when the lights are out,” Mary assured her.

“Well maybe you just think you don’t,” Mrs. Weiss said. “Don’t think they don’t pad your bill up anyway. Oh, I know a thing or two about electric companies. I haven’t kept house all these years for nothing.”

Mary told Mrs. Weiss that the houses on Wilson Street were lighted, and Mrs. Weiss shuffled back into her own room to verify this and Mary followed.

“Well, so they are!” Mrs. Weiss said, alarmed. “All up and down Wilson Street. You don’t suppose it’s us, do you?”

“Maybe just a fuse,” Mary said consolingly.

Mrs. Weiss came back from the window and breathed heavily near Mary. “My, I hope it ain’t something that costs. Probably take all my rents for two months back paying for it. Like I always say, it ain’t the cost so much as the upkeep.”

“Where’s Mr. Weiss?” Mary asked.

“Went to get me some new medicine,” Mrs. Weiss said. “He would be out a time like this. That’s the way with men. Always under your feet when they’re no good to you and not around when you need ‘em.”

Mary thought, “Some men are nice.” Especially that Johnny Straus who had the front room at Mrs. Weiss’.

“Oh, you’ll find out,” Mrs. Weiss clattered on in the dark. “You can’t tell a young girl. Might as well save your breath, but they find out.”

MRS. WEISS had maneuvered herself between Mary and the door. She put a hand on Mary’s arm and the sheep-dog smell of her bathrobe was particularly evident.

“Tell you what you do if you want, dearie. You come over here to the easy chair and set a piece with me till Weiss or the lights come back. I don’t like the dark, especially with my heart cuttin’ up fit to kill like now.”

Mary allowed herself to be guided into a chair. She sat down on a cushion that had all the promontories of a relief map of the Rocky Mountains. Mrs. Weiss sat down in the rocker which Mary had often heard creaking at late hours of the night. She brought up the subject of Mrs. Weiss’ health—a topic which would require only an occasional sympathetic “ah” on her part. She wondered if the electricity would come on in time for her to hear the announcement of the winners of the Alka-Ves contest.

“It’s gas,” Mrs. Weiss was saying. “Pressing up around my heart so I can’t get my wind, which is why I got to sit up straight like this. You got no idea what I suffer. The agony of it! People don’t really know how lucky they are until they get sick, I always say.”

And so on, until after a while Mary thought it was time she said something.

“I’m sorry my radio bothered you, Mrs. Weiss.”

“Why, it don’t,” Mrs. Weiss said. “In fact, as I said to Weiss tonight, ‘Don’t Miss Russell’s radio sound real cheery?’ I said that to Weiss. You know you can hear it right through the wall. I often thought I should get me one of them bedroom radios, ailing a lot like I do. But then you came along and took that room and you had a radio. . . .”

Mary wondered if Mrs. Weiss was lying or whether the radio had actually annoyed Mr. Weiss. She fully intended to ask Mrs. Weiss if she hadn’t asked Mr. Weiss to tell Mary to turn the radio down. But then the lights came on all over the house.

“They’re on again,” Mrs. Weiss said unnecessarily. “Maybe it was a fuse. Maybe Mr. Griffin fixed it. My, but it’s nice to see again!”

Mrs. Weiss stood up, puffing. She was a round-shouldered, big-hipped woman, shapeless in the gray bathrobe she wore. There were hard lines around her eyes and mouth—hard in spite of a certain pouchiness. Carelessness had given a yellow tarnish to her silver hair. She put a hand on Mary’s arm.

“It was right nice for you to come in and talk with an old lady, Miss Russell. Maybe someday, when you’re old and ailin’, somebody will come in

and sit a spell with you. And then you’ll know just how nice.”

Mary thought, “Heaven forbid!” When she went out the door she saw Mr. Weiss returning, his hat on and wearing a dirty leather jacket. He had a bottle of Alka-Ves in his left hand. As he ducked his head at Mary she noticed a greasy black cobweb trailing from the crown of his hat.

**I**N HER own room she found the radio playing again. But the Alka-Ves program was over. She switched the set off, flung herself on the bed, and argued herself out of crying. She never had built up any real hopes about winning the contest. Except for maybe one of the twenty-five dollar prizes. Twenty-five dollars would have come in pretty handy right now, kept her floating until she found another job or decided what to do about Johnny Straus.

Johnny had asked her to marry him; had asked her presumptuously the fourth evening they had been out together. And she’d told him that he didn’t know her well enough yet. Johnny was a cop—not that that had anything to do with her saying yes or no. What mattered most was that Johnny Straus was a square-shooter. To be fair with herself she had to be fair with Johnny, too. And it didn’t seem fair to allow her shrunken savings to influence her decision. No, not until after she had a job would she give serious consideration to Johnny; she’d be sure then that it was love and not miss-meal cramps.

For a long time she lay there on the bed, ankles crossed, hands clasped beneath her head. She always waited for Mr. and Mrs. Weiss to get through with the bathroom before she prepared for bed. But when eleven o’clock rolled around and she still had not heard the creak of the bathroom door nor the thump of the cranky faucets, she decided she was being too considerate. She got up, equipped herself with towel and toothbrush, started for the door.

Sounds came out of the Weiss room. First it was Mrs. Weiss’ voice, stretched thin and gasping:

“Weiss. Weiss, where are you? What’ve you done?”

And then Mr. Weiss’ voice, a hushing whisper without intelligible words.

Mary stood at her door, one hand on the knob, listening at the sounds through the wall.

“Weiss! It’s poison!”

And from the unexpected source of meek little Mr. Weiss himself came a short, sharp oath. Then: "Shut up!"

Someone fell to the floor. The Weiss door opened and Mary turned the knob of her own door and peeked out into the hall. Mr. Weiss was out there in a gray and pink striped night shirt, his arms stabbing at the sleeves of a bathrobe, his hair standing on end, eyes bright with fear.

"You'll be all right," he was saying. "I'll get Doc Crowell."

He pattered down the hall, still lunging at the armholes of his robe. Lottie Swain, the beautician who had the middle room, put her head out of her door and asked what the trouble was. "Her indigestion," Mr. Weiss said, going down the steps. Lottie Swain, in cold cream and curlers, started toward the Weiss room. And then came Mr. Griffin, asking what was up. "Mis' Weiss," Lottie said, and she was the first to enter Mrs. Weiss' room. Mr. Griffin followed Lottie Swain, and then Mary.

"Oh, poor Mis' Weiss!"

MRS. WEISS, gray, shapeless, inert, lay upon the floor beside her rocking chair. Lottie Swain and Mr. Griffin got down on their knees and tried to lift her. They tried twice independently and then once together, held her between them, with Mrs. Weiss' short arms dangling forward. And it was some time before Lottie Swain asked: "Is she—?" Mr. Griffin, his left hand flat against Mrs. Weiss' breast, said gravely: "I'm afraid so."

Mary stood near the door, trembling, trying not to look at Mrs. Weiss. On the table beside the rocker was a bottle of Alka-Ves, one tablet removed. Nothing more on the table—just the bottle.

Mr. Weiss bounded up the steps, ran down the hall to burst into the room. He asked: "How is she?" Lottie Swain looked at him and shook her head. Mr. Griffin looked at him and shook his head. Mary looked at him and saw, in this frightened little man who was wringing his hands and blubbering, something that was inexplicably horrible.

Mary went to her room. Through the wall she heard Dr. Crowell's arrival. Breathlessly she listened to the quiet movements in the next room—background for the nervous sobs of Lottie Swain. Then Mr. Weiss explained how his wife had been

troubled with indigestion all evening; how he had given her an Alka-Ves tablet. Then Dr. Crowell's consoling words came distinctly through the wall:

"As I told you before, Mrs. Weiss' case was one of those things that might drag on for years. Or it could come to an end suddenly, as it did tonight."

"Yes," Mr. Weiss said hoarsely. "Yes, you told me, Doc. But then a person can't prepare himself for a shock like this. You keep hoping it will be years yet."

After Dr. Crowell came the quiet bustle of the mortician's men. While they were busy in the next room, Mary slipped out into the hall, ran downstairs, back through the kitchen, and down into the basement. There in the yellow lighted gloom, she tiptoed across the floor, crackling coal dust beneath her slippers. She went to the main electric switch on the wall beside the steam boiler, looked into the switch box. Hanging from the rafters and pipes above were festooned cobwebs, greasy-black with soot.

"Mis' Weiss died from chronic myocard-something," Lottie Swain told Mary when they met in the front hall. "That means her heart. And the contributing cause Dr. Crowell wrote down was acute indigestion. Makes you wonder a person can't be too careful what they put in their stomick."

"Myocarditis," Mary thought, as she got away from Lottie, "and the contributing cause was—was murder!"

She wished she could talk to Johnny Straus about it, but there was no opportunity until the following night when Johnny came off duty and suddenly dated her for supper. Out of uniform, Johnny reminded her of a cherub with hair on its chest. He had a round, pink face, a mere button of a nose, eyes so innocently blue as to make Mary forget that he was presumptuous and even downright insulting at times. With a short, square-shouldered body like that a double-breasted tweed jacket was the last thing he should have worn, but his blue eyes gained him forgiveness for that, as well.

MARY related her story over the restaurant table. Johnny listened in a preoccupied manner, and when she had to stop for breath he shook a fork at her.

"Now, kitten," he said. "Now, kitten, just because you're going to marry a cop don't get notions you've got undiscovered detective ability

like Myrna Loy in the Thin Man pictures.”

“I haven’t any notions, and I’m not going to marry a cop!” she retorted. “Anyway, I haven’t said so.”

He grinned. “Then let’s eat.”

“But he killed her, Johnny. I know he did.”

“Who?” Johnny attacked his steak.

“Mr. Weiss. Who do you think I’ve been talking about?”

“Oh, no,” Johnny said. He chewed a while. “Do you know who Mr. Weiss is?”

“Well, he’s no G-man!”

“No. He’s little Mr. Public,” Johnny said gravely. “That’s who I always think of when I see him. Mr. Public. In the cartoons you know the little guy who wears the derby, is burdened with taxes, never gets any attention except at election time? That’s Mr. Public. That’s Mr. Weiss, too.”

“He *looks* like that,” she admitted. “But just the same he murdered his wife.”

“With an Alka-Ves tablet?”

“With an Alka-Ves tablet which he didn’t dissolve in water. Don’t you see, Johnny, he gave her the tablet dry. All that chemical reaction, that ordinarily takes place when the tablet is dropped in water, took place in Mrs. Weiss’ stomach. That created pressure on her heart which resulted in her death. It’s happened before. I read in the paper where somebody accidentally took one of those tablets without dissolving it, and that person died, too. There’s a caution printed right on the label to the effect that the tablet must be in solution.”

“How do you know he didn’t give it to her in water?” Johnny asked.

“Because there wasn’t any water in the room. And to get water out of the bathroom, Mr. Weiss would have had to turn on a faucet. I *know* he didn’t turn on any faucet, because you can’t touch the faucets in that bathroom without making the pipes thump and knock. And I was listening for the noise the faucets make, because that would tell me when Mr. and Mrs. Weiss were through with the bathroom.”

Johnny didn’t say anything. He just went on eating, not visibly impressed by all her deductions.

“There are other reasons why I know Mr. Weiss deliberately gave his wife a dry tablet. The dosage and administration instructions had been cut off the label of that bottle of Alka-Ves which I saw in the room!”

Johnny snorted. “Maybe he entered that get-

rich-quick slogan contest—the same one you entered. That’s probably why he tore off the label. Come to think of it, maybe you’re trying to pin murder on him to eliminate him from the competition.”

MARY didn’t think that was funny. “And besides, it’s the carton you send in with your contest entry—not the label. No, he cut off that portion of the label so that Mrs. Weiss wouldn’t know the tablet was supposed to be dissolved in water.

“And why else did Mr. Weiss want me to turn my radio down? I was listening to the Alka-Ves show and you know how the announcer always tells you to dissolve the tablets in water. It was Mr. Weiss who wanted the radio silenced—not his wife. She told me she liked to hear it. And when I wouldn’t turn the radio off entirely, Mr. Weiss went down the basement and turned off the electric switch. He was supposed to have gone to the drugstore for the Alka-Ves, but he really went down into the basement. You don’t get greasy cobwebs on your hat doing to the drugstore.”

Johnny went on eating. Between mouthfuls, he said: “Now, I’ll tell one. Your radio was bothering Mr. Weiss, so he went into your room and asked you to turn it off. He would say it was bothering Mrs. Weiss, because that’s the kind of a guy he is. A buck-passer. His wife had indigestion, and when he was in your room he was reminded that Alka-Ves was good for indigestion—Shoot the catsup over here, will you, kitten?”

Mary watched him deluge the remaining portion of his steak with catsup. He cut himself another bite, put it in his mouth, and grinned.

“So,” he continued, the steak lumped in his cheek, “Weiss goes to the drugstore, buys a bottle of Alka-Ves. When he gets back to the house, he finds all the lights are out. He does what anybody else would do, knowing that the lights were going in his neighbors’ houses. He goes down the basement and to the switch and fuse box—this is where he gets the cobweb on his hat—and he replaces a blown-out fuse.”

“What did he do with the blown-out fuse?” Mary asked, sticking to her guns in the face of some pretty logical opposition.

“He throws it in the furnace, buries it in the ashes, puts it in his pocket, maybe he eats it. What do people do with no-good fuses? Heck, I used to

collect them when I was a kid—old fuses, old light globes.”

“What about the label on the bottle?” Mary asked. “When did he have time to cut off the dosage directions?”

Johnny waved his hands. “Hell, but you’re a picky girl!” He grinned and then was suddenly serious. “I’m afraid we just don’t have a case, kitten. Even if we could prove he gave her the dry tablet, he could claim it was an accident. That other case you read about in the papers was an accident.”

“But you could get fingerprints off the electric switch,” she persisted. “You could ask him about the fuse. You could find out about the cut label. You could check with the drugstore and find out when he bought the Alka-Ves.”

JOHNNY shook his head. “Not me. I’m just a dumb flatfoot. A harness bull. I don’t know anything about fingerprints. I should go into Homicide and tell the captain all this junk you’ve been telling me. Suppose I make it good enough so they start an investigation. About the first guy they’ll tackle will be Dr. Crowell, who passed the whole thing off as natural death. When that got publicity think of what it would do to Crowell’s reputation. And Crowell has money. Suppose the investigation fell through, as it would be bound to do. Who do you think Crowell would break first? Me, the dumb flatfoot who started it all.”

“But it’s not right, Johnny. She was murdered, Mrs. Weiss was. I’ve practically proved that she was. It’s not right to just let it go.”

He said, “Pull in your claws, kitten. No, it’s not right. But it’s one of those things like— Well, suppose somebody has a rich Aunt Emma who gets pneumonia. Suppose the somebody wants Aunt Emma bad enough to kill for it. He opens Aunt Emma’s window so that a draft blows on her the night of the crisis. Maybe we see him open the window. Aunt Emma dies. It’s murder, but what can the little you-and-me people do about it? You can’t prove it’s murder, because the killer will say he didn’t know he shouldn’t open the window.”

“You mean,” Mary said, “that Mr. Weiss would say he didn’t know the Alka-Ves was supposed to be taken in solution?”

“That’s about it.”

“What about his removing the label from the bottle to conceal the method of administration?”

“Have you got that bottle?” Johnny asked.

She didn’t have, and he must have known that she didn’t have it. Johnny raised his shoulders in a ponderous shrug.

“See? Now let’s forget it, huh?”

She was a little disappointed in Johnny, and their evening was ruined. She begged off early, claiming that she had a splitting headache, and on returning to the Weiss house she said goodnight and went to her room.

The door of the Weiss room was closed and no light showed under the door. Which meant that Mr. Weiss was out—possibly at the funeral director’s— or that he had gone to bed early. She considered momentarily trying to get in and search for some fresh clue which might possibly convince Johnny that she was right. She discarded the idea when she took a measure of her courage. Why, she trembled at the thought of being surprised by little Mr. Weiss!

FOR a while, she sat on the edge of the slip-covered chair with pencil and paper on the table in front of her. She tried consolidating her ideas as detectives in books did. Item one, in the case against Mr. Weiss, was that it was he who had insisted on her turning her radio down. And he had had some other motive besides nervousness for doing this. Mr. Weiss was the kind of a man who would let his neighbor’s chickens ruin his garden and not say anything about it.

Item two was: That failing to get Mary to silence her radio entirely, Mr. Weiss had gone down the basement and turned off the electricity. After this she wrote: “Police might check on location of blown-out fuse—if any—refuting Johnny’s theory.”

And of course the sum of items one and two was that Mr. Weiss had premeditated murder, planning to give his wife a dry Alka-Ves tablet. Add to that the tact that Mr. Weiss had removed the dosage instructions from the bottle label, and anybody could see that this was cold-blooded homicide.

“But clever,” she thought, and gnawed her pencil nervously. Was there someone prowling around in the hall outside?

She got up to see, found the hall empty. Returning to her notes, she considered the possible motives, and wrote:

“One. Mrs. Weiss’ money? Two. Life insurance? Three. Another woman?”

This last possibility she crossed out as she recalled Mr. Weiss in a gray and pink striped nightshirt. She returned to thoughtfully gnawing her pencil and was suddenly interrupted by Lottie Swain who called her downstairs to the phone.

It was a Mr. Winkler, managing editor of a hardware trade journal, and if Miss Russell had not yet found employment he would be happy if she would report for work the following morning.

She ran up the stairs again, her heart singing joyously, and it was not until she had reached the end of the hall that she remembered Mrs. Weiss, Mr. Weiss, and sudden death. There was a thin thread of light showing beneath Mr. Weiss' door, and she could hear soft footfalls within the room as Mr. Weiss paced the floor.

Her notes! She had left that paper on which she had summed up her deductions right on her table and in plain sight. If Mr. Weiss had chanced to come in while she was phoning and so much as look through the open door of her room, he would have seen what she had written.

Heart still beating wildly, but for another reason, she entered her own room, shut and locked the door. She approached her table fearfully, only to find that her notes were undisturbed. Nevertheless, he might have seen them!

Fingers trembling, she found matches, ignited the piece of paper, opened the window. When the paper had burned to fragile black ash, she let it drift down into the darkness. She went to bed immediately, so as to be fresh and wide awake for her new job on the morrow.

She awoke in the morning with a cold—not just the sniffles, but one of those maddening, stuffy things that make you feel miserable and look worse. Instead of taking time for breakfast, she dug an electric vaporizer out of her trunk, put water in it for steam, dropped tincture of benzoin on cotton in the spout. After thirty minutes of inhaling the medicated vapor, she felt a little better and did what she could with makeup to conceal red-rimmed eyes and a swollen nose.

What kind of an impression she made on Mr. Winkler that day she didn't know, but she managed to keep alert and appear useful and she was very much relieved when five o'clock came around. She dined wisely if not particularly well, went home, got into bed at seven.

At seven-thirty, Johnny Straus ducked in off his

beat for a moment with a little bouquet of violets for her. He hadn't known she had a cold and she put her nose in the blossoms and tried to smell their perfume. Johnny went out almost at once, commenting that her nose looked as though it had been borrowed from W.C. Fields. As though she didn't know it!

She was asleep at nine to awake she didn't know how many hours later, her nasal passages so completely clogged she could scarcely breathe. She thought of the electric vaporizer which she had left on the table, got out of bed, shivering in the silent dark, and turned on the light. She put on her robe, went to the table, plugged in the vaporizer.

Two teaspoons of water went into the bottom half of the vaporizer and ten drops of the benzoin compound on the cotton in top. Medicated steam puffed from the spout a moment later, and she thrust her face into the moist warm cloud, inhaling as deep as she possibly could. How many times she inhaled before she felt the full effects, she didn't know. All she knew was that her head suddenly began to feel like an inflated balloon and that a strange sickness came over her.

She gasped—gasped at the cloud of steam. Mingled with the pungent odor of the benzoin was a sickening, cloying odor that wrapped its scented, velvet-gloved fingers about her throat. She reeled back from the table, fighting the moist gray cloud that rose monstrously before her. The floor took on dizzy motion and she wondered giddily just where her feet were. She knew that she had fallen, that one ordinarily strikes the floor when one falls. But she had the ghastly notion she had fallen up to the ceiling.

Somewhere a door opened. The lights snicked off—but off or on she wouldn't have known. She was fighting an overpowering urge to sleep—to sleep long and dreamless. And then she was fighting something else. It was a tangible something, small and strong and hideously reminiscent of Mr. Weiss.

*Mr. Weiss.* She knew it now. Woolen cloth smothered her face, blinding her, gagging her. But she knew that it was Weiss who held her down on the floor. It had to be Weiss—Weiss who had killed his wife. Weiss who was killing Mary Russell because he had seen those notes she had written on the night before.

HER last thought was about Johnny Straus and something Mrs. Weiss had said about men never being around when you needed them most. Johnny . . . Johnny, where are you! And then her mind died.

Died to come alive again—or half alive. Then she was struggling weakly against the people who were trying to pull her out of the darkness into which she had plunged. *Artificial respiration*, her mind told her. She fought it, wishing that they would all go away and let her sleep on and on. They pestered her mouth with stimulants, burned her torturously with hot towels. She fought against all this, only to lose, to stop fighting, to wish to be alive again.

And then there was that interval when she called out for Johnny and he was there, looking down at her and grinning. Then somebody who looked like a doctor joined Johnny and told him he'd better go now.

She said faintly, "What hit me?"

"Chloroform," Johnny said, only to be dragged away because the doctor told him that Miss Russell mustn't think about that now.

But she did think all that day. Lying there half awake and half asleep, she thought and tried to figure how the murderer had put chloroform in her vaporizer. She felt certain that couldn't be, because the chloroform would have evaporated. No, Johnny was wrong about the chloroform as he had been about little Mr. Weiss.

It wasn't until the following morning that she was well enough to see Johnny. He came in grinning, carrying her mail which consisted of an envelope and a package.

"It couldn't have been chloroform," she told him first of all.

"Well," Johnny said, "it wasn't to start with. What he did was put chloral hydrate and baking soda—dry ingredients—underneath the grid in the vaporizer. You added water, and when the vaporizer got hot it gave off pure chloroform. I found out he had studied to be a druggist in early life and so knew about such things. You obligingly breathed in chloroform, and all the while he was watching you through the wall."

"Through the wall?" she gasped. "Mr. Weiss was watching through the wall?"

Johnny nodded. "He'd drilled a tiny hole when he was fixing to murder you. And then he'd jammed your lock so the bolt wouldn't go home.

As soon as the chloroform from the vaporizer began to get you, he rushed in with a wool cloth soaked in the liquid chloroform. He was pretty well along toward finishing you when I came in. That was four in the morning, and I heard the fuss you were making. You didn't like the idea of dying at first, did you?"

MARY shuddered, shook her head.

"And Weiss?"

"Don't make me apologize, will you?" Johnny pleaded.

"I was right about him killing Mrs. Weiss?"

"A hundred percent. At headquarters they knocked it out of him, while I asked leading questions—questions based on what you had told me. You shouldn't have put your deductions on paper, though, because Weiss saw them and got the idea he ought to kill you."

"Why did he kill Mrs. Weiss?" Mary asked.

"For twenty thousand dollars in insurance. And because there was another woman," Johnny said.

"Good heavens, no! What kind of a woman?"

Johnny grinned. "What kind do you suppose?"

"Well, I suppose for twenty thousand dollars—" she began, and then decided to skip it.

"The job he did on Mrs. Weiss was perfect—as perfect a murder as he could possibly have pulled," Johnny said. "If your notes hadn't put the scare into him so that he tried to repeat on you, he'd have got away with it."

Johnny waved the envelope that had come in the mail for her.

"The doctor said not to excite you, kitten, but I got to tell you that you won a prize in the Alka-Ves contest. Of course, it's not exactly the first prize, but it's something."

"What did I win?" she asked, not feeling as elated as she might have expected to feel.

"The two hundredth prize," Johnny said. "I opened the congratulatory letter. And here's the prize itself."

He handed her the package; he had thoughtfully broken the tape that sealed it. She lifted the box flap, looked inside. Two dozen large size bottles of Alka-Ves.

"Johnny," she said, pushing the box away.

"Yeah, kitten?"

"Would you kindly go into the bathroom and fill the tub to the brim."

"What for?" He stared at her incredulously from

the foot of the bed.

“And then empty all these bottles—that’s  
twenty-four times thirty tablets—into the water.

And when it’s all fizzed away, Johnny, just pull out  
the plug.”

THE END.