

THE CIRCULAR STAIRCASE

By MARY ROBERTS RINEHART
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SYNOPSIS.

Miss Innes, spinster and guardian of Gertrude and Halsey, established summer headquarters at Sunnyside. Arnold Armstrong was found shot to death in the hall. Gertrude and her fiancé, Jack Halley, had conversed in the billiard room shortly before the murder. Detective Jamieson accused Miss Innes of holding back evidence. Cashier Bailey of Paul Armstrong's bank, defunct, was arrested for embezzlement. Paul Armstrong's death was announced. Halsey's fiancée, Louise Armstrong, told Halsey that while she still loved him, she was to marry another. It developed that Dr. Walker was the man. Louise was found unconscious at the bottom of the circular staircase. She said something had brushed by her in the dark on the stairway and she thought Halley was suspected of Armstrong's murder. Thomas, the lodgekeeper, was found dead with a note in his pocket bearing the name "Lucien Wallace." A ladder found out of place deepens the mystery. The stables were burned, and in the dark Miss Innes shot an intruder. Halsey mysteriously disappeared. His auto was found wrecked by a freight train. It developed Halsey had an argument in the library with a woman before his disappearance. New look disappears. Miss Innes learned Halsey was alive. Dr. Walker's face becomes livid at mention of the name of Nina Carrington. Evidence was secured from a tramp that a man, supposedly Halsey, had been found and gagged and thrown into an empty box car. Gertrude was missing. Hunting for her, Miss Innes ran into a man and fainted. A confederate of Dr. Walker confessed his part in the mystery. He stated that the Carrington woman had been killed, that Walker feared her, and that he believed that Paul Armstrong had been killed by a hand guided by Walker. Halsey was found in a distant hospital. Paul Armstrong was not dead.

CHAPTER XXXI.—Continued.

The slip had said "chimney." It was the only clue, and a house as large as Sunnyside was full of them. There was an open fireplace in my dressing room, but none in the bedroom, and as I lay there, looking around, I thought of something that made me sit up suddenly. The trunk-room, just over my head, had an open fireplace and a brick chimney, and yet there was nothing of the kind in my room. I got out of bed and examined the opposite wall closely. There was apparently no flue, and I knew there was none in the hall just beneath. The house was heated by steam, as I have said before. In the living room was a huge open fireplace, but it was on the other side.

Why did the trunkroom have both a radiator and an open fireplace? Architects were not usually erratic. It was not 15 minutes before I was upstairs, armed with a tape-measure in lieu of a foot-rule, eager to justify Mr. Jamieson's opinion of my intelligence, and firmly resolved not to tell him of my suspicion until I had more than theory to go on. The hole in the trunkroom wall still yawned there, between the chimney and the outer wall. I examined it again, with no new result. The space between the brick wall and the plaster and lath one, however, had a new significance. The hole showed only one side of the chimney, and I determined to investigate what lay in the space on the other side of the mantel.

I had a blister on my palm when at last the hatchet went through and fell with what sounded like the report of a gun to my overstrained nerves. I sat on a trunk, waiting to hear Liddy fly up the stairs, with the household behind her, like the tail of a comet. But nothing happened, and with a growing feeling of uncertainty I set to work enlarging the opening.

The result was absolutely nil. When I could hold a lighted candle in the opening I saw precisely what I had seen on the other side of the chimney—a space between the true wall and the false one, possibly seven feet long and about three feet wide. It was in no sense of the word a secret chamber, and it was evident it had not been disturbed since the house was built. It was a supreme disappointment.

It had been Mr. Jamieson's idea that the hidden room, if there was one, would be found somewhere near the circular staircase. In fact, I knew that he had once investigated the entire length of the clothes chute, hanging to a rope, with this in view. I was reluctantly about to concede that he had been right, when my eyes fell on the mantel and fireplace. The latter had evidently never been used; it was closed with a metal fire front, and only when the front refused to move, and investigation showed that it was not intended to be moved, did my spirits revive.

I hurried into the next room. Yes, sure enough, there was a similar mantel and fireplace there, similarly closed. In both rooms the chimney flue extended well out from the wall. I measured with the tape-line, my hands trembling so that I could scarcely hold it. They extended two feet and a half into each room, which with the three feet of space between the two partitions, made eight feet to be accounted for. Eight feet in one direction and almost seven in the other—what a chimney it was!

But I had only located the hidden room. I was not in it, and no amount of prying on the carving of the wooden mantels, no search of the floors for loose boards, none of the customary methods available at all. This was a means of entrance, and probably a simple one, I could be certain. But what? What would I find if I did get in? Was the detective right, and were the bonds and money from the Traders' bank there? Or was our whole theory wrong?



"I Heard a Sad and Pitiful Narrative."

Would not Paul Armstrong have taken his booty with him? If he had not, and if Dr. Walker was in the secret, he would have known how to enter the chimney room. Then—who had dug the other hole in the false partition?

CHAPTER XXXII.

Anne Watson's Story.
Liddy discovered the fresh break in the trunkroom wall while we were at luncheon, and ran shrieking down the stairs. She maintained that, as she entered, unseen hands had been digging at the plaster; that they had stopped when she went in, and she had felt a gust of cold damp air. In support of her story she carried in my wet and muddy boots, that I had unluckily forgotten to hide, and held them out to the detective and myself.

"What did I tell you?" she said dramatically. "Look at 'em. They're yours, Miss Rachel—and covered with mud and soaked to the tops. I tell you, you can scuff all you like; something has been wearing your shoes. As sure as you sit there, there's the smell of the graveyard on them. How do we know they weren't tramping through the Casanova churchyard last night, and sitting on the graves?"

Mr. Jamieson almost choked to death. "I wouldn't be at all surprised if they were doing that very thing, Liddy," he said, when he got his breath. "They certainly look like it."

I think the detective had a plan on which he was working, but which was meant to be a trap. But things went so fast there was no time to carry it into effect. The first thing that occurred was a message from the Charity hospital that Mrs. Watson was dying and had asked for me. I did not care much about going. There is a sort of melancholy pleasure to be had out of a funeral, with its pomp and ceremony, but I shrank from a death-bed. However, Liddy got out the black things and the crepe veil I keep for such occasions, and I went. I left Mr. Jamieson and the day detective going over every inch of the circular staircase, pounding, probing and measuring. I was inwardly elated to think of the surprise I was going to give them that night; as it turned out, I did surprise them—almost into spasms.

I drove from the train to the Charity hospital, and was at once taken to a ward. There, in a gray-walled room in a high iron bed, lay Mrs. Watson. She was very weak, and she only opened her eyes and looked at me when I sat down beside her. I was conscience-stricken. We had been so engrossed that I had left this poor creature to die without even a word of sympathy.

The nurse gave her a stimulant, and in a little while she was able to talk. So broken and half-coherent, however, was her story that I shall tell it in my own way. In an hour from the time I entered the Charity hospital I had heard a sad and pitiful narrative, and had seen a woman slip into the unconsciousness that is only a step from death.

Briefly, then, the housekeeper's story was this:

She was almost 40 years old, and had been the sister-mother of a large family of children. One by one they had died, and been buried beside their parents in a little town in the middle west. There was only one sister left, the baby, Lucy. On her the older girl had lavished all the love of an impulsive and emotional nature. When Anne, the elder, was 22 and Lucy 19, a young man had come to the town. He was going east, after spending the summer at a celebrated ranch in Wyoming—one of those places where wealthy men send worthless and dissipated sons for a season of temper-

ance, fresh air and hunting. The sisters, of course, knew nothing of this, and the young man's ardor rather carried them away. In a word, seven years before, Lucy Haswell had married a young man whose name was given as Aubrey Wallace.

Anne Haswell had married a carpenter in her native town and was a widow. For three months everything went fairly well. Aubrey took his bride to Chicago, where they lived at a hotel. Perhaps the very unsophistication that had charmed him in Valley Mill jarred on him in the city. He had been far from a model husband, even for the three months, and when he disappeared Anne was almost thankful. It was different with the young wife, however. She drooped and fretted, and on the birth of her baby boy she had died. Anne took the child and named him Lucien.

Anne had had no children of her own, and on Lucien she had lavished all her aborted maternal instinct. On one thing she was determined, however: That was that Aubrey Wallace should educate his boy. It was a part of her devotion to the child that she should be ambitious for him; he must have every opportunity. And so she came east. She drifted around, doing plain sewing and keeping a home somewhere always for the boy. Finally, however, she realized that her only training had been domestic, and she put the boy in an Episcopalian home, and secured the position of housekeeper to the Armstrongs. There she found Lucien's father, this time under his own name. It was Arnold Armstrong.

I gathered that there was no particular enmity at that time in Anne's mind. She told him of the boy, and threatened exposure if he did not provide for him. Indeed, for a time, he did so. Then he realized that Lucien was the ruling passion in this lonely woman's life. He found out where the child was hidden, and threatened to take him away. Anne was frantic. The positions became reversed. Where Arnold had given money for Lucien's support, as the years went on he forced money from Anne Watson instead until she was always penniless. The lower Arnold sank in the scale, the heavier his demands became. With the rupture between him and his family things were worse. Anne took the child from the home and hid him in a farmhouse near Casanova, on the Claysburg road. There she went sometimes to see the boy, and there he had taken fever. The people were Germans, and he called the farmer's wife grossmutter. He had grown into a beautiful boy, and he was all Anne had to live for.

The Armstrongs left for California, and Arnold's persecutions began anew. He was furious over the child's disappearance and she was afraid he would do her some hurt. She left the big house and went down to the lodge. When I had rented Sunnyside, however, she had thought the persecutions would stop. She had applied for the position of housekeeper and secured it. That had been on Saturday. That night Louise arrived unexpectedly. Thomas sent for Mrs. Watson and then went for Arnold Armstrong at the Greenwood club. Anne had been fond of Louise—she reminded her of Lucy. She did not know what the trouble was, but Louise had been in a state of terrible excitement. Mrs. Watson tried to hide from Arnold, but he was ugly. He left the lodge and went up to the house about 2:30, was admitted at the east entrance and came out again very soon. Something had occurred, she didn't know what; but very soon Mr. Innes and another gentleman left, using the car.

Thomas and she had got Louise quiet, and a little before three Mrs. Watson started up to the house.



Thomas had a key to the east entry, and gave it to her.

On the way across the lawn she was confronted by Arnold, who for some reason was determined to get into the house. He had a golf-stick in his hand, that he had picked up somewhere, and on her refusal he had struck her with it. One hand had been badly cut, and it was that, poisoning having set in, which was killing her. She broke away in a frenzy of rage and fear, and got into the house while Gertrude and Jack Halley were at the front door. She went upstairs, hardly knowing what she was doing. Gertrude's door was open, and Halsey's revolver lay there on the bed. She picked it up and turning ran part way down the circular staircase. She could hear Arnold fumbling at the lock outside. She slipped down quietly and opened the door; he was inside before she had got back to the stairs. It was quite dark, but she could see his white shirt-bosom. From the fourth step she fired. As he fell somebody in the billiard room screamed and ran. When the alarm was raised, she had had no time to get upstairs; she hid in the west wing until every one was down on the lower floor. Then she slipped upstairs and threw the revolver out of an upper window, going down again in time to admit the men from the Greenwood club.

If Thomas had suspected, he had never told. When she found the hand Arnold had injured was growing worse, she gave the address of Lucien at Richfield to the old man and almost \$100. The money was for Lucien's board until she recovered. She had sent for me to ask me if I would try to interest the Armstrongs in the child. When she found herself growing worse she had written to Mrs. Armstrong, telling her nothing but that Arnold's legitimate child was at Richfield, and imploring her to recognize him. She was dying; the boy was an Armstrong, and entitled to his father's share of the estate. The papers were in her trunk at Sunnyside, with letters from the dead man that would prove what she said. It was she who had crept down the circular staircase, drawn by a magnet, that night Mr. Jamieson had heard some one there. Pursued, she had fled madly, anywhere—through the first door she came to. She had fallen down the clothes chute, and been saved by the basket beneath. I could have cried with relief; then it had not been Gertrude, after all!

That was the story. Sad and tragic though it was, the very telling of it seemed to relieve the dying woman. She did not know that Thomas was dead, and I did not tell her. I promised to look after little Lucien, and sat with her until the intervals of consciousness grew shorter and finally ceased altogether. She died that night. (TO BE CONTINUED.)

Ways to Keep Neat.

"My children were becoming dreadfully careless about leaving their things around," said an original mother, "and the older members of the family weren't any too tidy. So I made up my mind that I wasn't going to be a 'pick-up' drudge for the rest of the household. I set up a big fine box, a box with an oblong hole in the top, into which I put every single thing—hat, coat, toy, pipe, no matter what—that I found lying around in the way. And to get his or her property the owner had to pay a penny—If it was one of the children; ten cents in case of the older ones. As the children have only an allowance of ten cents a week each, they didn't naturally want to pay it out in fines; so they began to be careful. Gradually the whole family mended their ways, and now my fine box is generally empty, and the house is as tidy as you please."

Cheering Her Up.

Islington, which is no longer rural, was once so esteemed by medical men that they sent their patients there after severe illness. Many also went there in the last stages in the forlorn hope that the invigorating air might restore them to health. A story related by Dr. Abernethy turns on the latter class of visitors. One of his patients engaged some rooms in Islington, and casually remarked to the landlady that the banisters on the staircase were very much broken. "Lor' bless you, mam," said the landlady, "it's no use to mend them, for they always get broken when the undertaker's men bring the coffins downstairs."—London Chronicle.

Intelligence in the Kitchen.

The higher the intelligence and the broader the education of the woman in the kitchen, the greater the pleasure and satisfaction in household duties. The woman who cooks intelligently is commanding great and mysterious forces of nature. She is an alchemist behind an apron. At her command food constituents that are indigestible, unpalatable and even poisonous, are subjected to chemical changes that render them an epicurean delight. The woman of real intelligence and power of imagination finds in her well ordered kitchen a source of deep and enduring interest and pleasure.

TERRIBLE SUFFERING ENDED.

How An Allegan, Mich., Woman Regained Her Health.

Mrs. Robert Schwabe, R. F. D. No. 3, Allegan, Mich., says: "Doctors could not cure me and I was rapidly running into Bright's disease. Kidney secretions were like blood and I arose 3 to 10 times at night to void them. I became frightened at my condition. My sight began to fail and pains in my back were like knife-thrusts. I cried for hours, unable to control my nerves. After I started using Doan's Kidney Pills, I began to feel better and soon I was cured. I am a living testimonial of their merit." Remember the name—Doan's. For sale by all dealers, 50 cents a box.

Foster-Milburn Co., Buffalo, N. Y.

Poor Prospects.

"Yes," said Miss Passay, "I found a very nice boarding house today, but the only room they had to offer me had a folding bed in it, and I detest those things." "Of course," remarked Miss Pert, "one can never hope to find a man under a folding bed."—Catholic Standard and Times.

HIS HANDS CRACKED OPEN

"I am a man seventy years old. My hands were very sore and cracked open on the insides for over a year with large sores. They would crack open and bleed, itch, burn and ache so that I could not sleep and could do but little work. They were so bad that I could not dress myself in the morning. They would bleed and the blood dropped on the floor. I called on two doctors, but they did me no good. I could get nothing to do any good till I got the Cuticura Soap and Cuticura Ointment. About a year ago my daughter got a cake of Cuticura Soap and one box of Cuticura Ointment and in one week from the time I began to use them my hands were all healed up and they have not been a mite sore since. I would not be without the Cuticura Remedies. "They also cured a bad sore on the hand of one of my neighbor's children, and they think very highly of the Cuticura Remedies. John W. Hasty, St. Ervingham, N. H., Mar. 5, and Apr. 11, '09."



More to Be Pitied.
Tramp (to lonely spinster)—Come Missus, arst yer 'usband if 'e ain't got a pair o' trousers to give away.
Spinster (anxious not to expose her solitude)—Sorry, my good man, he—eh—never wears such things.—Punch.

Against Orders.

"If you refuse me, Miss Gladys, I shall get a rope and commit suicide."
"No, colonel, you must not do that. Papa said distinctly he would not have you banging about here."

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Money makes the mare go, but we are never quite sure of her destination.

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Just Gessed.
"Mrs. Wadsworth, I am very glad, indeed, to meet you. But, haven't I had the honor of being introduced to you before? What was your name formerly, if I may ask?"
"My maiden name?"
"No; your name before you were divorced."
"How did you know I had been divorced?"
"Why, hasn't everybody?"

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Fred—I proposed to Miss Dingley last night.
Joe—Don't believe I know her. Is she well off?
Fred—Yes, I guess so. She refused me.

Important to Mothers

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A cheerful man is a pessimist's idea of a fool.

Life is a grind, but the world is full of cranks.

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will cause you untold misery, for when this organ is out of order the entire digestive system becomes deranged and the first thing you know, you are real sick. The best medicine to correct, sweeten and tone the stomach is Hostetter's Stomach Bitters and a trial will convince you of that fact. It is for Headache, Indigestion, Dyspepsia and Malaria. Get



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