

THE CIRCULAR STAIRCASE

By MARY ROBERTS RINEHART
ILLUSTRATIONS BY RAY WRIGHT

SYNOPSIS

Miss Innes, spinner and guardian of Gertrude and Halsey, established summer headquarters at Sunnyside. Arrived at Sunnyside, she found Gertrude and Halsey, who were to be married. Gertrude, however, had been married to Lucien Wallace, a young man who had been killed in the war. Halsey, who had been in the army, was now a doctor. Miss Innes was found unconscious at the bottom of the circular staircase. She had been thrown down by a man who had been hiding in the room above. The man was later identified as the tramp who had been seen in the neighborhood. The story is a mystery, with many clues and red herrings. The circular staircase is a key element in the plot.

CHAPTER XXVII

Who is Nina Carrington?

The four days, from Saturday to the following Tuesday, we lived, or existed, in a state of the most dreadful suspense. We ate only when Liddy brought in a tray, and then very little. The papers, of course, had got hold of the story, and we were besieged by newspaper men. From all over the country false news came pouring in and raised hopes that crumbled again to nothing. Every morning within 100 miles, every hospital, had been visited without result.

The inaction was deadly. Liddy cried all day, and because she knew I objected to tears, smiled sadly around the corner.

"Per heaven's sake, smile!" I snapped at her. And her ghastly attempt at a grin, with her swollen nose and red eyes, made me hysterical. I laughed and cried together, and pretty soon, like the two old fools we were, we were sitting together weeping into the same handkerchief.

On Tuesday, then, I sent for the car and prepared to go out. As I waited at the porte-cochère I saw the undergardener, an indolent, gray-haired man, trimming borders near the house. The day detective was watching him, sitting on the carriage block. When he saw me, he got up.

"Miss Innes," he said, taking off his hat. "Do you know where Alex, the gardener, is?"

"Why, no. I don't believe I have seen him since yesterday afternoon. Have you—employed him?"

"Only a couple of weeks."

"Is he efficient? A capable man?"

"I hardly know," I said vaguely.

"The place looks all right, and I know very little about such things. I know much more about boxes of roses than boxes of them."

"This man," pointing to the assistant, "says Alex isn't a gardener. That he doesn't know anything about him."

"That's very strange," I said, thinking hard. "Why, he came to me from the boys, who are in Europe."

"Exactly," the detective smiled. "Every man who cuts grass isn't a gardener, Miss Innes, and just now it is our policy to believe every person around here a rascal until he proves to be the other thing."

Warner came up with the car then, and the conversation stopped. As he helped me in, however, the detective said something further.

"Not a word or sign to Alex, if he comes back," he said cautiously.

I went first to Dr. Walker's. I was tired of beating about the bush, and I felt that the key to Halsey's disappearance was here at Sunnyside.

"Please come in," he said curtly.

"I shall stay here, I think, doctor. I don't like his face or his manner; there was a subtle change in both. He had thrown off the air of friendliness, and I thought, too, that he looked anxious and haggard."

"Dr. Walker," I said, "I have come to you to ask some questions. I hope you will answer them. As you know, my nephew has not yet been found."

"No, I understand," he said.

"I believe, if you would, you could help us, and that leads to one of my questions. Will you tell me what was the nature of the conversation you had with him the night he was attacked and carried off?"

"Attacked? Carried off?" he said, with pretended surprise. "Really, Miss Innes, don't you think you exaggerate? I understand it is not the first time Mr. Innes has disappeared."

"You are quibbling, doctor. This is a matter of life and death. Will you answer my question?"

"Certainly," he said, his nerves were bad, and I gave him a prescription for them. I am violating professional ethics when I tell you even as much as that."

"I could not tell him he lied. I think I looked it. But I hazarded a random shot."

"I thought perhaps," I said, watching him narrowly, "that it might be about—Nina Carrington?"

"For a moment I thought he was going to strike me. He grew livid, and a small crooked blood vessel in his temple swelled and throbbed curiously. Then he forced a short laugh."

"Who is Nina Carrington?" he asked.

"I am about to discover that," I replied, and he was quiet at once. It was not difficult to divine that he feared Nina Carrington a good deal more than he did me. Our lively talking was brief, in fact. Our leaving was quick, and Gertrude knew how I felt. As for the murder of the bank president's son, I was of two minds. One day I thought Gertrude knew or at least suspected that Jack had done it; the next I feared that it had been Gertrude herself, that night alone on the

way I thought, and thought hard.

"Nina Carrington, Nina Carrington," the roar and rush of the wheels seemed to sing the words. "Nina Carrington, N. C." And I then knew, knew as surely as if I had seen the whole thing. There had been an N. C. on the suit case belonging to the woman with the pitted face. How simple it all seemed. Mattie Bliss had seen Nina Carrington. It was she Warner had heard in the library. It was something she had told Halsey that had taken him frantically to Dr. Walker's office, and from there perhaps to his death. If we could find the woman, we might find what had become of Halsey.

We were almost at Richfield now, so I kept on. My mind was not on my errand there now. It was back with Halsey on that memorable night. What was it he had said to Louise, that had sent her up to Sunnyside, half wild with fear for him? I made up my mind, as the car drew up before the Tate cottage, that I would see Louise if I had to break into the house at night.

Almost exactly the same scene as before greeted my eyes at the cottage. Mrs. Tate, the baby-carriage in the path, the children at the swing—all were the same.

She came forward to meet me, and I noticed that some of the anxious lines had gone out of her face. She looked young, almost pretty.

"I am glad you have come back," she said. "I think I will have to be honest and give you back your money."

"Why?" I asked. "Has the mother come?"

"No, but some one came and paid the boy's board for a month. She talked to him for a long time, but when I asked him afterward he didn't know her name."

"A young woman?"

circle staircase. And then the mother of Lucien Wallace would outrage herself, and an almost equally good case might be made against her. There were times, of course, when I was disposed to throw all those suspicions aside, and fix definitely on the unknown, whoever that might be.

I had my greatest disappointment when it came to tracing Nina Carrington. The woman had gone without leaving a trace. Marked as she was, it should have been easy to follow her, but she was not to be found. A description to one of the detectives, on my arrival at home, had started the ball rolling. But by night she had not been found. I told Gertrude, then, about the telegram to Louise when she had been ill before about my visit to Dr. Walker, and my suspicions that Mattie Bliss and Nina Carrington were the same. She thought, as I did, that there was little doubt of it.

I said nothing to her, however, of the detective's suspicions about Alex. Little things that I had not noticed at the time now came back to me. I had an uncomfortable feeling that perhaps Alex was a spy, and that by taking him into the house I had played into the enemy's hands. But at eight o'clock that night Alex himself appeared, and with him a strange and repulsive individual. They made a queer pair, for Alex was almost as disreputable as the tramp, and he had a badly swollen eye.

Gertrude had been sitting listlessly waiting for the evening message from Mr. Jamieson, but when the singular pair came in, as they did, without ceremony, she jumped up and stood staring. Winters, the detective who watched the house at night, followed them, and kept his eyes sharply on Alex's prisoner. For that was the situation as it developed.

He was a tall lanky individual, ragged and dirty, and just now he



He is not—dead? I implored. The tramp cleared his throat.

"No," he said huskily. "He was used up pretty bad, but he weren't dead. He was comin' to hisself when I—he stopped and looked at the detective. 'I didn't steal it, Mr. Winters,' he whined. 'I found it in the road, honest to God, I did.'"

Mr. Winters paid no attention to him. He was watching Alex.

"I'd better tell what he told me," Alex broke in. "It will be quicker. When Jamieson—when Mr. Jamieson calls up we can start him right. Mr. Winters, I found this man trying to sell that watch on Fifth street. He offered it to me for \$2."

"How did you know the watch?" Winters snapped at him.

"I had seen it before, many times. I used it at night when I was watching at the foot of the staircase. The detective was satisfied. 'When he offered the watch to me, I knew it, and I pretended I was going to buy it. We went into an alley and I got the watch.' The tramp shivered. It was plain how Alex had secured the watch. 'Then—I got the story from this fellow. He claims to have seen the whole affair. He says he was in an empty car—in the car the automobile struck.'"

The tramp broke in here and told his story, with frequent interpretations by Alex and Mr. Winters. He used a strange medley, in which familiar words took unfamiliar meanings, but it was gradually made clear to us.

On the night in question the tramp had been "pounding his ear"—this struck me as being graphic—in an empty box-car along the siding at Casanova. The train was going west, and due to leave at dawn. The tramp and the "brakes" were friendly, and things going well. About ten o'clock, perhaps earlier, a terrific crash against the side of the car roused him. He tried to open the door, but could not move it. He got out of the other side, and just as he did so, he heard some one groan.

The habits of a lifetime made him cautious. He slipped on to the bumper of a car and peered through. An automobile had struck the car and stood there on two wheels. The tail lights were burning, but the headlights were out. Two men were stooping over some one who lay on the ground. The taller of two started on a dog-trot along the train looking for an empty. He found one four cars away and ran back again. The two lifted the unconscious man into the empty box-car, and getting in themselves, stayed for three or four minutes. When they came out, after closing the sliding door, they cut up over the railroad embankment toward the town. One, the shorter one, seemed to limp.

The tramp was wary. He waited for ten minutes or so. Some women came down a path to the road and inspected the automobile. When they had gone, he crawled into the box-car and closed the door again. Then he lighted a match. The figure of a man, unconscious, gagged, and with his hands tied, lay far at the end. The tramp lost no time; he went through his pockets, found a little money and the cuff-links, and took them. Then he loosened the gag—it had been cruelly tight—and went his way, again closing the door of the box-car. Outside on the road he found the watch. He got on the last freight east, some time after, and rode into the city. He had sold the cuff-links, but on offering the watch to Alex he had been "copped."

The story, with its cold recital of villainy, was done, I hardly knew if I were more anxious, or less. That it was Halsey, there could be no doubt. How badly he was hurt, how far he had been carried, were the questions that demanded immediate answer. But it was the first real information we had had; my boy had not been murdered outright. But instead of vague terrors there was now the real fear that he might be lying in some strange hospital receiving the casual attention commonly given to the charity cases. Even this, had we known it, would have been paradise to the terrible truth. I wake yet and feel myself cold and trembling with the horror of Halsey's situation for three days after his disappearance.

(TO BE CONTINUED.)



Alex Was Almost as Disreputable as the Tramp.

looked both terrified and embarrassed. Alex was too much engrossed to be either, and to this day I don't think I ever asked him why he went off without permission the day before.

"Miss Innes," Alex began abruptly, "this man can tell us something very important about the disappearance of Mr. Innes. I found him trying to sell this watch."

He took a watch from his pocket and put it on the table. It was Halsey's watch. I had given it to him on the twenty-first birthday; I was dumb with apprehension.

"He says he had a pair of cuff-links also, but he sold them—"

"For a dollar a half," put in the disreputable individual harshly, with an eye on the detective.

Froze Solid During Night

Rushing Mountain Torrent Silenced in a Few Hours by the Intense Cold.

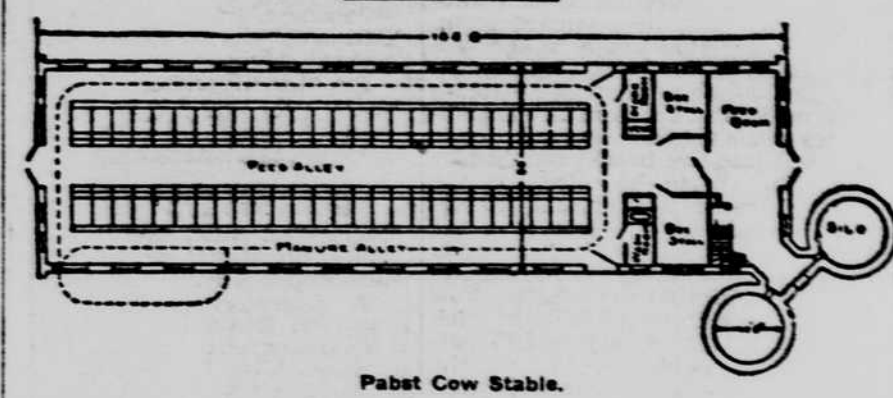
Running water is usually the last thing to freeze solid, and when it does so, the cold must be extreme. J. Claude White, in the Wide World Magazine, gives the following description of this very rare occurrence—the freezing of a mountain torrent in a single night.

The phenomenon was one that I have never before experienced—a running river frozen solid in a night! When we arrived the waters of this stream, tumbling over the great boulders and rushing through the tortuous channels, made a deafening roar. Gradually, but almost perceptibly, the tumult decreased, while, worn out after a hard day, we fell asleep.

A few hours later, when we awoke, a deadly silence prevailed, and on looking out to the rushing torrent, I found that the rushing torrent of the previous night had been transformed into a solid mass of ice! In this re-

COW STABLE COMFORTABLY ACCOMMODATES MANY HEAD

Structure Erected by Fred Pabst at Oconomowoc, Wis., Supplied With Extensive Ventilation System, Etc.



The cow stable erected upon the farm of Fred Pabst at Oconomowoc, Wis., is thirty-eight feet wide and 144 feet long and will comfortably accommodate fifty-four head of cattle exclusive of those which for any reason may be confined in the two large box stalls, says Homestead. The two rows of cows face toward a common feeding alley which is fourteen feet in width and which opens to the out-doors at either end of the barn through a large doorway. Back of each row of cows is a ten-foot manure alley which gives ample room for workmen. The barn is supplied with thirty-five windows, which admit abundant light, and an extensive ventilating system which continuously provides fresh air and withdraws the gases and other impurities. A wash room, fully equipped with the necessary appliances, enables the manager to enforce greater cleanliness than would be possible or practicable without this equipment. The feed room and the silos open into the feed alley, and are therefore conveniently situated for the feeder. The barn is modern throughout and is one of the very best models built in recent years in the West.

CAUSES OF HORSE COLIC

Farm Animal Will Thrive, Work Better and Remain Healthier if Given "Hard Feed" During Busy Season.

(By S. C. MILLER.)

When a farm horse is working hard it does not pay to let him eat grass when it is green. He will thrive, work better and remain healthier and more enduring if fed "hard feed" during the busy season. The soft, watery, green grass is palatable of course, but it makes the horse soft and flabby, keeps the bowels too loose, and is apt to induce colic.

If the horse has no work to do he may go on pasture right along and have little grain and when his work is done in late summer he may enjoy the fall pasture made green again by rains. The pasture also is a good place for the brood mare as it promotes flow of milk.

We find that severe attacks of colic often are caused by allowing the hot, tired horse to eat grass at the road side when he has made a long trip to town.

The trouble, too, is prone to come on when horses are suddenly fed new hay or new oats. Both new hay and new oats should be fed in small quantities gradually at first, and along with old hay and oats until the horses become accustomed to the change.

Either the new feed is so palatable that the horse eats too much of it, or it contains some ferment that sets up indigestion and formation of gas. Water very seldom causes colic. Nature intends horses to have all of it they want, at any and all times and so provided it does no harm. We may cause trouble by withholding drinking water for long periods of time and then forcing the hot, tired horses to drink too much of it at noon and especially just after eating grain.

Allow the work horse adequate supplies of cool, pure water often when he is at work and he never will take too much of it or suffer ill effects from drinking. Indeed the water so given will be likely to prevent sickness and always is appreciated and beneficial.

COULDN'T PUT BLAME ON HIM

Unreliability of the Doctors Cause of Tramp's Seemingly Disregard of Truth.

Clement J. Driscoll, New York's commissioner of weights and measures, advocates the sale of bread strictly by weight.

"Some bakers oppose this idea," he said the other day. "They prove that it is better for the poor to trust to the baker's generosity than to pin him down, as grocers and butchers are pinned down now."

"Well, it seems to me that those bakers are as illogical and absurd as the beggar who wore a placard, saying, 'I have only six months to live. He was a robust beggar, but the placard touched all hearts, and through its agency he must have made six or seven dollars a day."

"A Philadelphian in Philadelphia in 1905, came across the fellow, wearing the same placard, in Los Angeles in 1909."

"Why, you ought to be ashamed of yourself," the Philadelphian cried. "Only six months to live, forsooth! You were saying that five years ago."

"Well," growled the beggar, "it ain't my fault, is it, if the doctors make mistakes?"

The Guilty Party.

Cook (to her young man)—Here, take the rest of the roast duck. (Sighing) Poor pussy!

Young Man—What has the cat got to do with it?

Cook—Well, she'll be blamed for it tomorrow—Flitengee Blatter.

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Thanks for the Relief.

Mrs. Nagitt—I don't feel like myself tonight.

Mr. Nagitt—Then we ought to have a very pleasant evening.—Stray Stories.

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Increase of Commerce.

The commerce of the port of New York has had a growth of 62 per cent. in the last ten years.

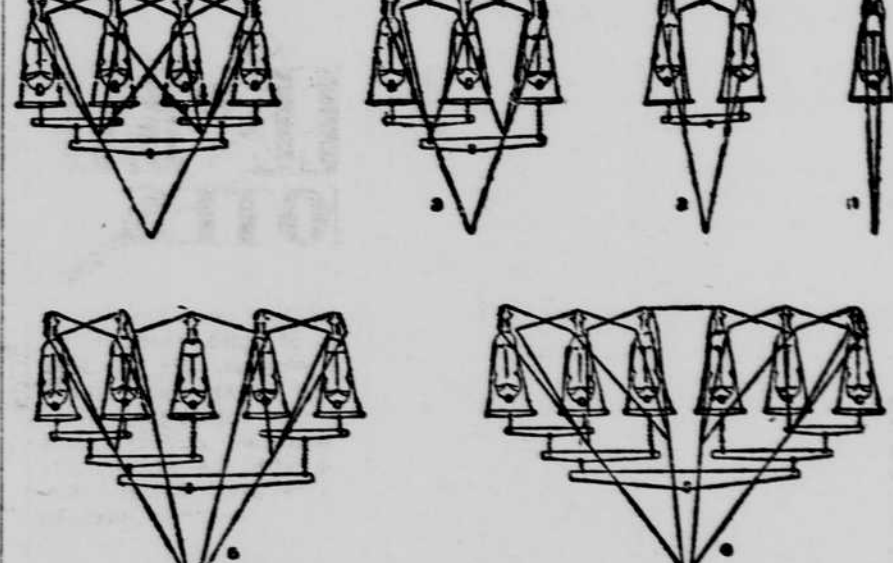
Lewis' Single Binder cigar is never dipped—only tobacco in its natural state.

Woman's sphere now seems to be the whole earth.

Mrs. Winslow's Soothing Syrup. For children teething, soothes the gums, reduces inflammation, allays pain, cures wind colic. Do a bottle.

Most politicians claim the silent vote so long as it keeps silent.

EVENERS AND SINGLE-TREES



There are differences of opinion regarding the correct arrangement of eveners and single-trees, and in particular the lines or reins. The latter depends much upon the temper of the horse. One farmer drives several horses abreast without the use of lines or whip, having trained them to go back, and turn by queer sounding calls, writes I. G. Bayley in Popular Mechanics. Another farmer drives six horses abreast with a single pair of lines attached to the outside horses, the inside horses being connected with single straps.

The methods of harnessing up from one to six horses abreast are shown in the sketch, which has been approved by several farmers that have had several years of experience. The methods shown are for plows, scoops or road-scrappers. When connecting to wagons the only difference is in the design of the last evener, which has a hole in the center for connecting to the pole or tongue instead of the chain hook. Single-trees and eveners for wagons are usually made about one-third heavier than for plows, keeping the same lengths throughout. It will be observed by the arrangement given that horse is able to shirk his duty without being detected. In such a case, the evener will turn in favor of the horse working best, thus enabling the driver to spot the guilty one.

Labor of Haying.

At the best, haying is hard work and no matter how much improved labor-saving machinery we employ it requires muscle and good judgment. The barn should be equipped with a good horse fork, rake, tedder, wagons and hand forks, and where there is a large haying there should be a self-loader.

Care of the Horse.

Farm and road horses are seriously injured by being suddenly warmed by continuous heavy exertion, when first hitched for the day, and then allowed to stand until cool and again put at heavy exertion.

is not nearly so good or so profitable a feed as corn supplemented by some protein food, such as tankage, linseed oil meal or soy beans.

In hogs fed exclusively on corn the animal becomes very fat and chubby and does not develop properly; the bones are brittle and easily broken. Sixty-five hogs were used in this experiment, and they were divided into lots of five each. Twelve different rations were used, with corn alone in two of them, and corn supplemented with some other feed in the others.

The hogs fed on corn and linseed oil meal and those fed on corn and tankage gained the most; those receiving corn alone were most unsatisfactory.

The Manure Spreader.

That manure spreader is a necessity on the stock farm. It will help you to better appreciate what dairying and stock-raising will do to promote the fertility of your farm.

The Best Rations for Hogs.

Recent experiments at the Missouri station prove that corn, good corn, is a good feed for any animal, and that there is no reason for withholding it from any animal needing food. At the same time, it is shown that corn alone

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