THE CIRCULAR STAIRCASE

By MARY ROBERTS RINEHART

ILLUSTRATIONS BY RAY WALTERS

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 fiance, Jack Halsey, had conversed in the billiard room shortly before the murder. Detective Hammon arrested Miss Innes of holding back evidence. Cashier Bailey of Paul Armstrong's bank, defaulted, was arrested for embezzlement. Paul Armstrong's death was announced. Halsey's fiancee, Louise Armstrong, told Halsey that while she still loved him, she was to marry another. It developed that Dr. Walker was the man. Liddy 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 fainted. Halsey is suspected of Armstrong's murder. Thomas, the lodge-keeper, was found dying with a note in his pocket bearing the name "Lucien Wilbur." A bullet found out of plaster despite the mystery. The stables were burned, and in the dark Miss Innes shot an intruder. Halsey mysteriously disappeared. His motor was found wrecked by a freight train. It developed Halsey had an engagement in the library with a woman before his disappearance. New clues appeared. 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 woman supposedly Halsey, had been heard and glimpsed 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. Miss Innes discovered secret rooms in which the Traders' bank treasure was believed to be. Mrs. Watson, dying, said she killed Arnold Armstrong, who years before had married her sister under the alias of Walker. Louise Walker was born of the marriage. Miss Innes discovered a secret panel in the mysterious room and unwittingly locked herself within. During the hunt for her the searchers ran across Paul Armstrong. Armstrong plunged forward down the circular staircase, breaking his neck. In the secret room was found the Traders' bank loot, which Armstrong had taken.

He Was Kissing Her.

CHAPTER XXXIII.—Continued.

As Alex and I reached the second floor, Mr. Jamieson met us. He was grave and quiet, and he nodded comprehendingly when he saw the safe.

"Will you come with me for a moment, Miss Innes?" he asked soberly, and on my assenting, he led the way to the east wing. There were lights moving around below, and some of the maids were standing gaping down. They screamed when they saw me, and drew back to let me pass. There was a sort of hush over the scene; Alex, behind me, muttered something I could not hear, and brushed past me without ceremony. Then I realized that a man was lying doubled up at the foot of the staircase, and that Alex was stooping over him.

As I came slowly down, Winters stepped back, and Alex straightened himself, looking at me across the body with impenetrable eyes. In his hand he held a shaggy gray wig, and before me on the floor lay the man whose headstone stood in Casanova churchyard—Paul Armstrong.

Winters told the story in a dozen words. In his headlong flight down the circular staircase, with Winters just behind, Paul Armstrong had pitched forward violently, struck his head against the door to the east veranda, and probably broken his neck. He had died as Winters reached him.

As the detective finished, I saw Halsey, pale and shaken, in the cardroom doorway, and for the first time that night I lost my self-control. I put my arms around my boy, and for a moment he had to support me. A second later, over Halsey's shoulder, I saw something that turned my emotion into other channels, for behind him, in the shadowy cardroom, were Gertrude and Alex, the gardener, and—there is no use mincing matters—he was kissing her!

I was unable to speak. Twice I opened my mouth; then I turned Halsey around and pointed. They were quite unconscious of us; her head was on his shoulder, his face against her hair. As it happened, it was Mr. Jamieson who broke up the tableau.

He stepped over to Alex and touched him on the arm.

"And now," he said quietly, "how long are you and I to play our little comedy, Mr. Bailey?"

CHAPTER XXXIV.

The Odds and Ends.

Of Dr. Walker's sensational escape that night to South America, of the recovery of over $1,000,000 in cash and securities in the safe from the chimney room—the papers have kept the public well informed. Of my share in discovering the secret chamber they have been singularly silent. The inner history has never been told. Mr. Jamieson got all kinds of credit, and some of it he deserved, but if Jack Bailey, as Alex, had not traced Halsey and insisted on the disinterring of Paul Armstrong's casket, if he had not suspected the truth from the start, where would the detective have been?

When Halsey learned the truth, he insisted on going the next morning, weak as he was, to Louise, and by night she was at Sunnyside, under Gertrude's particular care, while her mother had gone to Barbara Fitzhugh's.

What Halsey said to Mrs. Armstrong I never knew, but that he was considerate and chivalrous I feel confident. It was Halsey's way always with women.

He and Louise had no conversation together until that night. Gertrude and Alex—I mean Jack—had gone for a walk, although it was nine o'clock, and anybody but a pair of young geese would have known that dew was falling, and that it is next to impossible to get rid of a summer cold.

At half after nine, growing weary of my own company, I went downstairs to find the young people. At the door of the living room I paused. Gertrude and Jack had returned and were there, sitting together on a divan, with only one lamp lighted. They did not see or hear me, and I beat a hasty retreat to the library. But here again I was driven back. Louise was sitting in a deep chair, looking the happiest I had ever seen her, with Halsey on the arm of the chair, holding her close.

The next day, by degrees, I got the whole story.

Paul Armstrong had a besetting evil—the love of money. Common enough, but he loved money, not for what it would buy, but for its own sake. An examination of the books showed no irregularities in the past year since John had been cashier, but before that, in the time of Anderson, the old cashier, who had died, much strange juggling had been done with the records. The railroad in New Mexico had apparently drained the banker's private fortune, and he determined to retrieve it by one stroke. This was nothing less than the looting of the bank's securities, turning them into money, and making his escape.

But the law has long arms. Paul Armstrong evidently studied the situation carefully. Just as the only good Indian is a dead Indian, so the only safe defaulter is a dead defaulter. He decided to die, to all appearances, and when the hue and cry subsided, he would be able to enjoy his money almost anywhere he wished.

The first necessity was an accomplice. The connivance of Dr. Walker was suggested by his love for Louise. The man was unscrupulous, and with the girl as a bait, Paul Armstrong soon had him fast. The plan was apparently the acme of simplicity: A small town in the west, an attack of heart disease, a body from a medical college dissecting room shipped in a trunk to Dr. Walker by a colleague in San Francisco, and palmed off for the supposed dead banker. What was simpler?

The woman, Nina Carrington, was the cog that slipped. What she only suspected, what she really knew, we never learned. She was a chambermaid in the hotel at C——, and it was evidently her intention to blackmail Dr. Walker. His position at that time was uncomfortable: To pay the woman to keep quiet would be confession. He denied the whole thing, and she went to Halsey.

It was that that had taken Halsey to the doctor the night he disappeared. He accused the doctor of the deception, and, crossing the lawn, had said something cruel to Louise. Then, furious at her apparent connivance, he had started for the station. Dr. Walker and Paul Armstrong—the latter still lame where I had shot him—hurried across to the embankment, certain only of one thing. Halsey must not tell the detective what he suspected until the money had been removed from the chimney room. They stepped into the road in front of the car to stop it, and fate played into their hands. The car struck the train, and they had only to dispose of the unconscious figure in the road. This they did as I have told. For three days Halsey lay in the box car, tied hand and foot, suffering tortures of thirst, delirious at times, and discovered by a tramp at Johnsville only in time to save his life.

To go back to Paul Armstrong. At the last moment his plans had been frustrated. Sunnyside, with its hoard in the chimney room, had been rented without his knowledge! Attempts to dislodge me having failed, he was driven to breaking into his own house. The ladder in the chute, the burning of the stable and the entrance through the cardroom window—all were in the course of a desperate attempt to get into the chimney room.

Louise and her mother had, from the first, been the great stumbling-blocks. The plan had been to send Louise away until it was too late for her to interfere, but she came back to the hotel at C—— just at the wrong time. There was a terrible scene. The girl was told that something of the kind was necessary; that the bank was about to close and her stepfather would either avoid arrest and disgrace in this way, or kill himself. Fanny Armstrong was a weakling, but Louise was more difficult to manage. She had no love for her stepfather, but her devotion to her mother was entire, self-sacrificing. Forced into acquiescence by her mother's appeals, overwhelmed by the situation, the girl consented and fled.

From somewhere in Colorado she sent an anonymous telegram to Jack Bailey at the Traders' bank. Trapped as she was, she did not want to see an innocent man arrested. The telegram, received on Thursday, had sent the cashier to the bank that night in a frenzy.

Louise arrived at Sunnyside and found the house rented. Not knowing what to do, she sent for Arnold at the Greenwood club, and told him a little, not all. She told him that there was something wrong, and that the bank was about to close. That his father was responsible. Of the conspiracy she said nothing. To her surprise, Arnold already knew, through Bailey that night, that things were not right. Moreover, he suspected what Louise did not, that the money was hidden at Sunnyside. He had a scrap of paper that indicated a concealed room somewhere.

His inherited cupidity was aroused. Eager to get Halsey and Jack Bailey out of the house, he went up to the east entry, and in the billiard room gave the cashier what he had refused earlier in the evening—the address of Paul Armstrong in California and a telegram which had been forwarded to the club for Bailey, from Dr. Walker. It was in response to one Bailey had sent, and it said that Paul Armstrong was very ill.

Bailey was almost desperate. He decided to go west and find Paul Armstrong and to force him to disgorge. But the catastrophe at the bank occurred sooner than he had expected. On the moment of starting west, at Andrews station, where Mr. Jamieson had located the car, he read that the bank had closed, and, going back, surrendered himself.

John Bailey had known Paul Armstrong intimately. He did not believe that the money was gone; in fact, it was hardly possible in the interval since the securities had been taken. Where was it? And from some chance remark let fall some months earlier by Arnold Armstrong at a dinner, Bailey felt sure there was a hidden room at Sunnyside. He tried to see the architect of the building, but, like the contractor, if he knew of the room, he refused any information. It was Halsey's idea that John Bailey

come to the house as a gardener, and pursue his investigations as he could. His smooth upper lip had been sufficient disguise, with his change of clothes, and a hair-cut by a country barber.

So it was Alex, Jack Bailey, who had been our ghost. Not only had he alarmed Louise—and himself, he admitted—on the circular staircase, but he had dug the hole in the trunkroom wall, and later sent Eliza into hysteria. The note Liddy had found in Gertrude's scrap-basket was from him, and it was he who had startled me into unconsciousness by the clothes chute, and, with Gertrude's help, had carried me to Louise's room. Gertrude, I learned, had watched all night beside me, in an extremity of anxiety about me.

That old Thomas had seen his master, and thought he had seen the Sunnyside ghost, there could be no doubt. Of that story of Thomas, about seeing Jack Bailey in the footpath between the club and Sunnyside, the night Liddy and I heard the noise on the circular staircase—that, too, was right. On the night before Arnold Armstrong was murdered, Jack Bailey had made an attempt to search for the secret room. He secured Arnold's keys from his room at the club and got into the house, armed with a golf-stick for sounding the walls. He ran against the hamper at the head of the stairs, caught his cuff-link in it, and dropped the golf-stick with a crash. He was glad enough to get away without an alarm being raised, and he took the "owl" train to town.

The oddest thing to me was that Mr. Jamieson had known for some time that Alex was Jack Bailey. But the face of the pseudo-gardener was very queer indeed when, that night, in the cardroom, the detective turned to him and said:

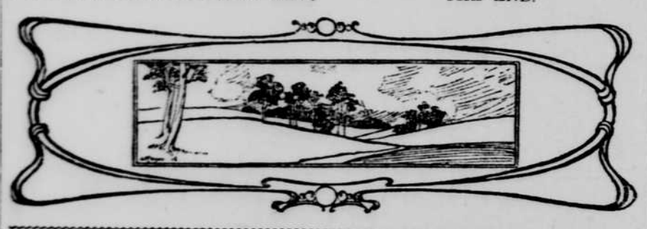
"How long are you and I going to play our little comedy, Mr. Bailey?"

Well, it is all over now. Paul Armstrong rests in Casanova churchyard, and this time there is no mistake. I went to the funeral, because I wanted to be sure he was really buried, and I looked at the step of the shaft where I had sat that night, and wondered if it was all real. Sunnyside is for sale—no, I shall not buy it. Little Lucien Armstrong is living with his step-grandmother, who is recovering gradually from troubles that had extended over the entire period of her second marriage. Anne Watson lies not far from the man she killed, and who as surely caused her death. Thomas, the fourth victim of the conspiracy, is buried on the hill. With Nina Carrington, five lives were sacrificed in the course of this grim conspiracy.

There will be two weddings before long, and Liddy has asked for my heliotrope poplin to wear to the church. I knew she would. She has wanted it for three years, and she was quite ugly the time I spilled coffee on it. We are very quiet, just the two of us. Liddy still clings to her ghost theory, and points to my wet and muddy boots in the trunkroom as proof. I am gray, I admit, but I haven't felt as well in a dozen years. Sometimes, when I am bored, I ring for Liddy, and we talk things over. When Warner married Rosie, Liddy sniffed and said what I took for faithfulness in Rosie had been nothing but mawkishness. I have not yet outlived Liddy's contempt because I gave them silver knives and forks as a wedding gift.

So we sit and talk, and sometimes Liddy threatens to leave, and often I discharge her, but we stay together somehow. I am talking of renting a house next year, and Liddy says to be sure there is no ghost. To be perfectly frank, I never really lived until that summer. Time has passed since I began this story. My neighbors are packing up for another summer. Liddy is having the awnings put up, and the window-boxes filled. Liddy or no Liddy, I shall advertise to-morrow for a house in the country, and I don't care if it has a Circular Staircase.

THE END.



Queer Place for Lightship

Government Has Ordered It Moored in a Peach Orchard 40 Miles Inland.

A lightship in the heart of Delaware and in a peach orchard at that? Sounds strange, but according to "Notice to Mariners No. 27" that is precisely what the lighthouse board contemplates.

Fenwick Island Shoal lightship, off the Delaware coast, is to be moved, and according to this official bulletin it is to be placed in latitude north 38 degrees 27 minutes 25 seconds, longitude west 75 degrees 46 minutes 40 seconds.

Mariners upon receiving copies of the notice sent out by the lighthouse board concerning the change promptly began to plot it out on their charts. When they found that the ship would be located 40 miles inland from the coast they rubbed their eyes and began to calculate over again, but each time the lightship brought up in a Delaware peach orchard.

"How does it happen," Lieut. Com. Bispham, lighthouse engineer of this district, was asked, "that Fenwick Island Shoal lightship is to be moved inland?"

"Why, of course it isn't." Then he, too, began to use instruments, and brought up where the mariners had. "It's a mistake," he said, "and there will have to be a correction. We don't want them trying to navigate through the state of Delaware. That longitude should be 74 degrees instead of 75."—Philadelphia North American.

Hunters Kill Big Grizzly.

The monster grizzly bear that for years has been making many sleepless nights for the farmers, miners and residents of the northwestern Trinity region has at last been slain.

This monarch of the forest and slayer of small domestic animals was killed by Thomas McDonald, a wealthy mining man who has been camping along the Salmon range in Trinity.

Single-handed McDonald, who is a mountaineer of marked ability, killed the bear after a lively tussle.

The bear weighed 1,000 pounds, and is the finest and biggest specimen ever seen in the Trinity mountain regions. The animal had for years defied all efforts to capture or kill him.—Maryville Correspondence San Francisco Call.

HIS LIKELIHOOD AT STAKE

Certainly Candidate for Governor Could Not Expect to Get That Vote.

An incident in which former Gov. Odell of New York figured as the victim was told by Col. James Hamilton Lewis at a recent banquet.

"When Gov. Odell was last running for office," said Col. Lewis, "there had been a great deal of talk about Niagara falls and the electrical power that could be conferred on all parts of New York. One day an old negro halted Mr. Odell and said:

"'Mr. Odell, is yo' runnin' for gov'ner, sah?'

"'I am,' answered the candidate.

"'I guess yo' want my vote, den,' said the old colored man.

"'Well, I would like to have your vote, Zeb. I have known you for so many years.'

"'Well, I jist want to ask you a question, Mr. Odell, befo' I give mah vote to you. Are yo' for electric lights in dis town?'

"'Well, Zeb, I am for all modern improvements,' said Odell, with a slight flourish.

"'Well, sah, I cain't vote for you,' said Zeb with firmness. 'Yo' done forget dat I is a lamp lighter.'"

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Lovemaking and Practice.

The only way to become an expert at lovemaking is to practice. This was the information handed out to a handful of hearers by the Hindu philosopher, Sakharam Ganesh Pandit, in a lecture on "The Science of Love."

"Love is a divine discontent," said the philosopher, "and if you want to arouse love in others it can be done only by giving them love. How to develop the emotion of love in another, is the great question of today—the art of making love. It needs a great deal of study and a great deal of practice."

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LUCAS COUNTY.

FRANK J. CHENEY makes oath that he is senior partner of the firm of F. J. CHENEY & Co., doing business in the City of Toledo, County and State aforesaid, and that said firm will pay the sum of ONE HUNDRED DOLLARS for each and every case of CATARRH that cannot be cured by the use of HALL'S CATARRH CURE.

FRANK J. CHENEY.

Sworn to before me and subscribed in my presence, this 6th day of December, A. D., 1886.

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If you would be pungent, be brief; for it is with words as with sunbeams—the more they are condensed, the deeper they burn.—Southey.

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"As to how?"

"I'd have her look after my touring car."

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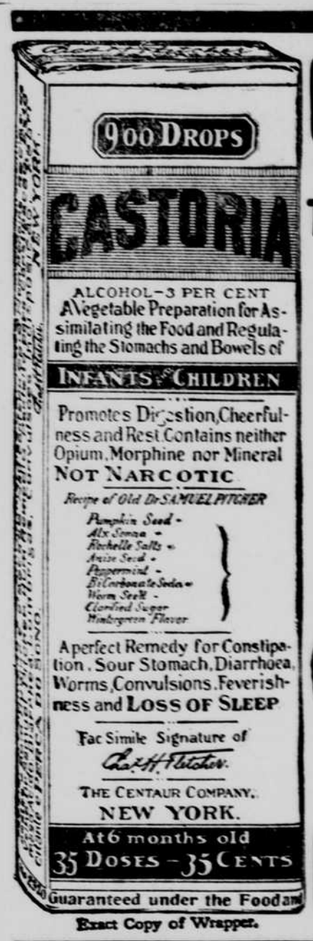

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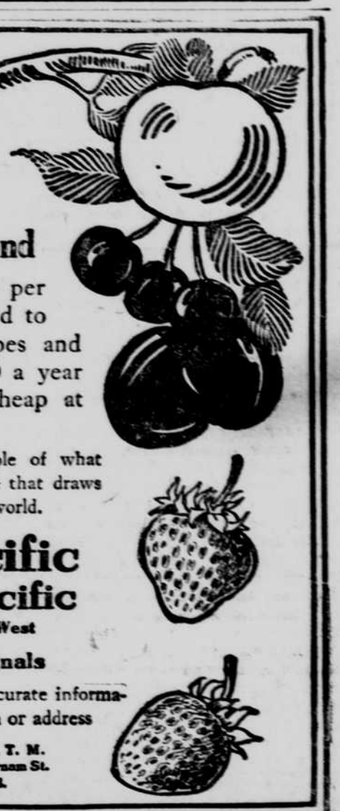

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