

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. Amidst various difficulties the servants deserted. As Miss Innes looked up for the night, she was startled by a dark figure on the veranda. She passed a terrible night, which was filled with unseemly noises. In the morning Miss Innes found a strange link cuff button in a clothing hamper. Gertrude and Halsey arrived with Jack Bailey. The house was awakened by a revolver shot. A strange man was found shot to death in the hall. It proved to be the body of Arnold Armstrong, whose banker father owned the country house. Miss Innes found Halsey's revolver on the lawn. He and Jack Bailey had disappeared. The link cuff button mysteriously disappeared. Detective Jamieson and the coroner arrived. Gertrude revealed that she was engaged to Jack Bailey, with whom she had talked in the billiard room a few moments before the murder. Jamieson told Miss Innes that she was hiding evidence from him. He imprisoned an intruder in an empty room. The prisoner escaped down a laundry chute. It developed that the intruder was probably a woman. Gertrude was suspected for the intruder left a print of a bare foot. Gertrude returned home with her right ankle sprained. A negro found the other half of what proved to be Jack Bailey's cuff button. Halsey suddenly reappeared. He said he and Bailey had left because they had received a telegram. Gertrude said that she had given Bailey an unloaded revolver, fearing to give him Halsey's loaded weapon.

CHAPTER IX.—Continued.

They stared at each other across the big library table, with young eyes all at once hard, suspicious. And then Gertrude held out both hands to him appealingly.

"We must not," she said brokenly. "Just now, with so much at stake, it is shameful. I know you are as ignorant as I am. Make me believe it, Halsey."

Halsey soothed her as best he could, and the breach seemed healed. But long after I went to bed he sat downstairs in the living room alone, and I knew he was going over the case as he had learned it. Some things were clear to him that were dark to me. He knew, and Gertrude, too, why Jack Bailey and he had gone away that night, as they did. He knew where they had been for the last 48 hours, and why Jack Bailey had not returned with him. It seemed to me that without fuller confidence from both the children—they are always children to me—I should never be able to learn anything.

As I was finally getting ready for bed, Halsey came upstairs and knocked at my door. When I had got into a negligee—I used to say wrapper before Gertrude came back from school—I let him in. He stood in the doorway a moment, and then he went into agonies of silent mirth. I sat down on the side of the bed and waited in severe silence for him to stop, but he only seemed to grow worse. When he had recovered he took me by the elbow and pulled me in front of the mirror.

"How to be beautiful," he quoted. "Advice to maids and matrons, by Beatrice Fairfax!" And then I saw myself. I had neglected to remove my wrinkle eradicators, and I presume my appearance was odd. I believe that it is a woman's duty to care for her looks, but it is much like telling a necessary falsehood—one must not be found out. By the time I got them off Halsey was serious again, and I listened to his story.

"Aunt Ray," he began, extinguishing his cigarette on the back of my ivory hair-brush. "I would give a lot to tell you the whole thing. But I can't, for a day or so, anyhow. But one thing I might have told you a long time ago. If you had known it, you would not have suspected me for a moment of—of having anything to do with the attack on Arnold Armstrong. Goodness knows what I might do to a fellow like that, if there was enough provocation, and I had a gun in my hand—under ordinary circumstances. But I care a great deal about Louise Armstrong, Aunt Ray. I hope to marry her some day. Is it likely I would kill her brother?"

"But the whole thing is absurd," I argued. "And besides, Gertrude's sworn statement that you left before Arnold Armstrong came would clear you at once."

Halsey got up and began to pace the room, and the air of cheerfulness dropped like a mask.

"She can't swear it," he said finally. "Gertrude's story was true as far as it went, but she didn't tell everything. Arnold Armstrong came here at 2:30—came into the billiard room and left in five minutes. He came to bring—something."

"Halsey," I cried, "you must tell me the whole truth. Every time I see a way for you to escape you block it yourself with this wall of mystery. What did he bring?"

"A telegram—for Bailey," he said. "It came by special messenger from town, and was—most important. Bailey had started for here, and the messenger had gone back to the city. The steward gave it to Arnold, who had been drinking all day and couldn't sleep, and was going for a stroll in the direction of Sunnyside."

"And he brought it?"

"Yes."

"I can tell you—as soon as certain things are made public. It is only a matter of days now," gloomily.

"And Gertrude's story of a telephone?"

"Poor Trude!" he half whispered.

"Poor loyal little girl! Aunt Ray,



They Stared at Each Other Across the Big Library Table.

there was no such message. No doubt your detective already knows that and discredits all Gertrude told him."

"And when she went back, it was to get—the telegram?"

"Probably," Halsey said slowly. "When you get to thinking about it, Aunt Ray, it looks bad for all three of us, doesn't it? And yet—I will take my oath none of us even inadvertently killed that poor devil."

I looked at the closed door into Gertrude's dressing room, and lowered my voice.

"The same horrible thought keeps recurring to me," I whispered. "Halsey, Gertrude probably had your revolver; she must have examined it, anyhow, that night. After you—and Jack had gone, what if—that ruffian came back, and she—and she—"

I couldn't finish. Halsey stood looking at me with shut lips.

"She might have heard him fumbling at the door—he had no key, the police say—and thinking it was you, or Jack, she admitted him. When she saw her mistake she ran up the stairs, a step or two, and turning, like an animal at bay, she fired."

Halsey had his hand over my lips before I finished, and in that position we stared each at the other, our stricken glances crossing.

"The revolver—my revolver—thrown into the tulip bed!" he muttered to himself. "Thrown perhaps from an upper window; you say it was buried deep. Her prostration ever since, her—Aunt Ray, you don't think it was Gertrude who fell down the clothes chute?"

I could only nod my head in a hopeless affirmative.

CHAPTER X.

The Traders' Bank.

The morning after Halsey's return was Tuesday. Arnold Armstrong had been found dead at the foot of the circular staircase at three o'clock on Sunday morning. The funeral services were to be held on Tuesday, and the interment of the body was to be deferred until the Armstrongs arrived from California. No one, I think, was very sorry that Arnold Armstrong was dead, but the manner of his death aroused some sympathy and an enormous amount of curiosity. Mrs. Ogden Fitzhugh, a cousin, took charge of the arrangements, and everything, I believe, was as quiet as possible. I gave Thomas Johnson and Mrs. Watson permission to go into town to pay their last respects to the dead man, but for some reason they did not care to go.

Halsey spent part of the day with Mr. Jamieson, but he said nothing of what happened. He looked grave and anxious, and he had a long conversation with Gertrude late in the afternoon.

Tuesday evening found us quiet, with the quiet that precedes an explosion. Gertrude and Halsey were both gloomy and distraught, and as Liddy had already discovered that some of the china was broken—it is impossible to have any secrets from an old servant—I was not in a pleasant humor myself. Warner brought up the afternoon mail and the evening papers at seven—I was curious to know what the papers said of the murder. We had turned away at least a dozen reporters. But I read over the head-line that ran half-way across the top of the Gazette twice before I comprehended it. Halsey had opened the Chronicle and was staring at it fixedly.

"The Traders' bank closes its doors!" was what I read, and then I put down the paper and looked across the table.

"Did you know of this?" I asked Halsey.

"I—expected it. But not so soon," he replied.

"And you?" to Gertrude.

"Jack—told us—something," Gertrude said faintly. "Oh, Halsey, what can he do now?"

"Jack!" I said scornfully. "Your Jack's flight is easy enough to explain now. And you helped him, both of you, to get away! You got that from your mother; it isn't an Innes trait. Do you know that every dollar you have, both of you, is in that bank?"

Gertrude tried to speak, but Halsey stopped her.

"That isn't all, Gertrude," he said quietly; "Jack is—under arrest."

"Under arrest!" Gertrude screamed, and tore the paper out of his hand. She glanced at the heading, then she crumpled the newspaper into a ball and flung it to the floor. While Halsey, looking stricken and white, was trying to smooth it out and read it, Gertrude had dropped her head on the table and was sobbing stormily.

I have the clipping somewhere, but just now I can remember only the essentials.

On the afternoon before, Monday, while the Traders' bank was in the rush of closing hour, between two and three, Mr. Jacob Trautman, president



Sent Two Telegrams.

of the Pearl Brewing Company, came into the bank to lift a loan. As security for the loan he had deposited some 300 International Steamship Company's, in total value \$300,000. Mr. Trautman went to the loan clerk, and, after certain formalities had been gone through, the loan clerk went to the vault. Mr. Trautman, who was a large and genial German, waited for a time, whistling under his breath. The loan clerk did not come back. After an interval, Mr. Trautman saw the loan clerk emerge from the vault and go to the assistant cashier; the two went hurriedly to the vault. A lapse of another ten minutes, and the assistant cashier came out and approached Mr. Trautman. He was noticeably white and trembling. Mr. Trautman was told that through an oversight the bonds had been misplaced, and was asked to return the following morning, when everything would be made all right.

Mr. Trautman, however, was a shrewd business man, and he did not like the appearance of things. He left the bank apparently satisfied, and within 30 minutes he had called up three different members of the Traders' board of directors. At 3:30 there was a hastily convened board meeting, with some stormy scenes, and late in the afternoon a national bank exam-

iner was in possession of the books. The bank had not opened for business Tuesday.

At 12:30 o'clock the Saturday before, as soon as the business of the day was closed, Mr. John Bailey, the cashier of the defunct bank, had taken his hat and departed. During the afternoon he had called up Mr. Aronson, a member of the board, and said he was ill, and might not be at the bank for a day or two. As Bailey was highly thought of, Mr. Aronson merely expressed a regret. From that time until Monday night, when Mr. Bailey had surrendered to the police, little was known of his movements. Some time after one on Saturday he had entered the Western Union office at Cherry and White streets and had sent two telegrams. He was at the Greenwood Country club on Saturday night, and appeared unlike himself. It was reported that he would be released under enormous bond some time that day, Tuesday.

The article closed by saying that while the officers of the bank refused to talk until the examiner had finished his work, it was known that securities aggregating a million and a quarter were missing. Then there was a diatribe on the possibility of such an occurrence; on the folly of a one-man bank, and of a board of directors that met only to lunch together and to listen to a brief report from the cashier, and on the poor policy of a government that arranges a three or four day examination twice a year. The mystery, it insinuated, had not been cleared by the arrest of the cashier. Before now minor officials had been used to cloak the misdeeds of men higher up. Inseparable as the words "speculation" and "peculation" have grown to be, John Bailey was not known to be in the stock market. His only words, after his surrender, had been: "Send for Mr. Armstrong at once." The telegraph message which had finally reached the president of the Traders' bank, in an interior town in California, had been responded to by a telegram from Dr. Walker, the young physician who was traveling with the Armstrong family, saying that Paul Armstrong was very ill and unable to travel.

That was how things stood that Tuesday evening. The Traders' bank had suspended payment, and John Bailey was under arrest, charged with wrecking it; Paul Armstrong lay very ill in California, and his only son had been murdered two days before. I sat dazed and bewildered. The children's money was gone; that was bad enough, though I had plenty, if they would let me share. But Gertrude's grief was beyond any power of mine to comfort; the man she had chosen stood accused of a colossal embezzlement—and even worse. For in the instant that I sat there I seemed to see the coils closing around John Bailey as the murderer of Arnold Armstrong.

Gertrude lifted her head at last and stared across the table at Halsey.

"Why did he do it?" she asked.

"Couldn't you stop him, Halsey? It was suicidal to go back!"

Halsey was looking steadily through the windows of the breakfast room, but it was evident he saw nothing.

"It was the only thing to do, Trude," he said at last. "Aunt Ray, when I found Jack at the Greenwood club last Saturday night, he was frantic. I cannot talk until Jack tells me I may, but—he is absolutely innocent of all this, believe me. I thought, Trude and I thought, we were helping him, but it was the wrong way. He came back, isn't that the act of an innocent man?"

"Then why did he leave at all?" I asked, unconvinced. "What innocent man would run away from here at three o'clock in the morning? Doesn't it look rather as though he thought it impossible to escape?"

Gertrude rose angrily. "You are not even just!" she flamed. "You don't know anything about it, and you condemn him!"

"I know that we have all lost a great deal of money," I said. "I shall believe Mr. Bailey innocent the moment he is shown to be. You profess to know the truth, but you cannot tell me! What am I to think?"

Halsey leaned over and patted my hand.

"You must take us on faith," he said. "Jack Bailey hasn't a penny that doesn't belong to him; the guilty man will be known in a day or so."

"I shall believe that when it is proved," I said grimly. "In the meantime, I take no one on faith. The Inneses never do."

Gertrude, who had been standing aloof at a window, turned suddenly. "But when the bonds are offered for sale, Halsey, won't the thief be detected at once?"

Halsey turned with a superior smile.

"It wouldn't be done that way," he said. "They would be taken out of the vault by some one who had access to it, and used as collateral for a loan in another bank. It would be possible to realize 80 per cent. of their face value."

(TO BE CONTINUED.)

Origin of "John Bull."

The name "John Bull," as applied to the English nation, was first made use of in a poem dated 1712.

DANGER SIGNALS.

Sick kidneys give unmistakable signals of distress. Too frequent or scanty urinary passages, backache, headache and dizzy spells tell of disordered kidneys. Neglect of these warnings may prove fatal. Begin using Doan's Kidney Pills. They cure sick kidneys.

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Remember the name—Doan's. For sale by all dealers. 50 cents a box. Foster-Milburn Co., Buffalo, N. Y.

The Juvenile Buster.

The famous Champ Clark, at a dinner at Bowling Green, said of the trusts:

"The feeling against monopolies has reached even to the nursery. I saw a little girl the other day slip something beneath her plate. Then she murmured angrily: 'I wish there was an anti-trust law.'"

SKIN HUMOR 25 YEARS

"Cuticura did wonders for me. For twenty-five years I suffered agony from a terrible humor, completely covering my head, neck and shoulders, so even to my wife, I became an object of dread. At large expense I consulted the most able doctors far and near. Their treatment was of no avail, nor was that of the Hospital, during six months' efforts. I suffered on and concluded there was no help for me this side of the grave. Then I heard of some one who had been cured by Cuticura Remedies and thought that a trial could do no harm. In a surprisingly short time I was completely cured. S. P. Keyes, 147 Congress St., Boston, Mass., Oct. 12, '09."

Face Covered with Pimples

"I congratulate Cuticura upon my speedy recovery from pimples which covered my face. I used Cuticura Soap, Ointment and Resolvent for ten days and my face cleared and I am perfectly well. I had tried doctors for several months but got no results. Wm. J. Sadler, 1614 Susquehanna Ave., Philadelphia, May 1, 1909."

Recognition.

"At last," said the literary young man, "I have succeeded in having my poetry taken seriously."

"How did you manage it?"

"Put it into the love letters on which a breach of promise suit is now being based."

Casey at the Bat.

This famous poem is contained in the Coca-Cola Baseball Record Book for 1910, together with records, schedules for both leagues and other valuable baseball information compiled by authorities. This interesting book sent by the Coca-Cola Co., of Atlanta, Ga., on receipt of 2c stamp for postage. Also copy of their booklet "The Truth About Coca-Cola" which tells all about this delicious beverage and why it is so pure, wholesome and refreshing. Are you ever hot-tired-thirsty? Drink Coca-Cola—it is cooling, relieves fatigue and quenches the thirst. At soda fountains and carbonated in bottles—5c everywhere.

Inference.

Ethel (confidentially)—Do you know, Clara, that I had two offers of marriage last week?

Clara (with enthusiasm)—Oh, I am delighted, dear! Then the report is really true that your uncle left you his money?—Pick-Me-Up.

TAKE A FOOT-BATH TO-NIGHT

After dissolving one or two Allen's Foot-Tabs (Antiseptic tablets for the foot-bath) in the water, it will take out all soreness, smarting and tenderness, remove foot odors and freshen the feet. Allen's Foot-Tabs instantly relieve weariness and sweating or itchy feet and hot nervousness of the feet at night. Then for comfort throughout the day shake Allen's Foot-Ease the antiseptic powder into your shoes. Sold everywhere. 25c. Avoid substitutes. Samples of Allen's Foot-Tabs mailed FREE or our regular size sent by mail for 25c. Address Allen S. Olmsted, LeRoy, N. Y.

Hard Task, Indeed!

Little Helen was at the seaside with her aunt, and in the house where they were staying was a telephone. One day she heard her mother talking from the city, and she was so terrified that she burst into tears.

"Oh, auntie, auntie!" she sobbed.

"How shall we ever get mamma out of that little hole?"

Not Sisters

Now and again you see two women passing down the street who look like sisters. You are astonished to learn that they are mother and daughter, and you realize that a woman at forty or forty-five ought to be at her finest and fairest. Why isn't it so?

The general health of woman is so intimately associated with the local health of the essentially feminine organs that there can be no red cheeks and round form where there is female weakness.

Women who have suffered from this trouble have found prompt relief and cure in the use of Dr. Pierce's Favorite Prescription. It gives vigor and vitality to the organs of womanhood. It clears the complexion, brightens the eyes and reddens the cheeks.

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SIX LIVES WOULD BE MISSING.



Mr. Shooter—Where's my six-shooter?

Mrs. Shooter—What are you going to do?

Mr. Shooter—Kill two-thirds of a cat.

Valued Absences.

"Always speak kindly of the absent," said young Mr. Primly.

"I would," replied Miss Cayenne, "if I thought it would be an inducement to some tiresome people to remain so."

DON'T WAIT TOO LONG

Don't wait until the digestive organs are almost beyond help—don't wait until the bowels have become constipated and don't wait until the liver and kidneys have become weak and inactive; just take Hostetter's Stomach Bitters—at the very first sign of trouble. It will save you lots of suffering because its results are certain. Try it today for indigestion, Cramps, Diarrhoea, Malaria, Fever and Ague. Be sure to get Hostetter's.

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