

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. The servants desert. Gertrude and Halsey arrive with Jack Bailey. The house was awakened by a revolver shot and Arnold Armstrong was found shot to death in the hall. Miss Innes found Halsey's revolver on the lawn. He and Jack Bailey had disappeared. Gertrude revealed that she was engaged to Jack Bailey, with whom she talked in the billiard room shortly before the murder. Detective Jamieson accused Miss Innes of holding back evidence. He imprisoned an intruder in an empty room. This prisoner escaped. Gertrude was suspected because of an injured foot. Halsey reappears and says he and Bailey were called away by a telegram. Called by 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 at the bottom of the circular staircase. Recovering consciousness, she said something had brushed by her on the stairway and she fainted. Bailey is suspected of Armstrong's murder. After "seeing a ghost," Thomas, the lodgekeeper, was found dead with a slip in his pocket bearing the name of "Laden Wallace." Dr. Walker asked Miss Innes to vacate in favor of Mrs. Armstrong. She refused. A note from Bailey to Gertrude arranging a meeting at night was found.

CHAPTER XXI—Continued.

"Grossmutter," he said. And I saw Mr. Jamieson's eyebrows go up.

"German," he commented. "Well, young man, you don't seem to know much about yourself."

"I've tried it all the week," Mrs. Tate broke in. "The boys know a word or two of German, but he doesn't know where he lived, or anything about himself."

Mr. Jamieson wrote something on a card and gave it to her.

"Mrs. Tate," he said, "I want you to do something. Here is some money for the telephone call. The instant the boy's mother appears here, call up that number and ask for the person whose name is there. You can run across to the drug store on an errand and do it quietly. Just say, 'The lady has come.'"

"The lady has come," repeated Mrs. Tate. "Very well, sir, and I hope it will be soon. The milk bill alone is almost double what it was."

"How much is the child's board?" I asked.

"Three dollars a week, including his washing."

"Very well," I said. "Now, Mrs. Tate, I am going to pay last week's board and a week in advance. If the mother comes she is to know nothing of this visit—absolutely not a word, and, in return for your silence, you may use this money for something for your own children."

Her tired, faded face lighted up, and I saw her glance at the little Tate's small feet. Shoes, I divined—the feet of the genteel poor being almost as expensive as their stomachs.

As we went back Mr. Jamieson made only one remark; I think he was laboring under the weight of a great disappointment.

"Is King's a children's outfitting place?" he asked.

"Not especially. It is a general department store."

He was silent after that, but he went to the telephone as soon as we got home, and called up King & Co. in the city.

After a time he got the general manager, and they talked for some time. When Mr. Jamieson hung up the receiver he turned to me.

"The plot thickens," he said with his ready smile. "There are four women named Wallace at King's, none of them married, and none over 20. I think I shall go up to the city to-night. But before I go, Miss Innes, I wish you would be more frank with me than you have been yet. I want you to show me the revolver you picked up in the tulip bed."

"So he had known all along!"

"It was a revolver, Mr. Jamieson," I admitted, cornered at last, "but I cannot show it to you. It is not in my possession."

CHAPTER XXII.

A Ladder Out of Place.

At dinner Mr. Jamieson suggested sending a man out in his place for a couple of days, but Halsey was certain there would be nothing more, and felt that he and Alex could manage the situation. The detective went back to town early in the evening, and by nine o'clock Halsey, who had been playing golf—as a man does anything to take his mind away from trouble—was sleeping soundly on the big leather davenport in the living room.

I sat and knitted, pretending not to notice when Gertrude got up and wandered out into the starlight. As soon as I was satisfied that she had gone, however, I went out cautiously. I had no intention of eaves-dropping, but I wanted to be certain that it was Jack Bailey she was meeting. Too many things had occurred in which Gertrude was, or appeared to be, involved, to allow anything to be left in question.

I went slowly across the lawn, skirting the hedge to a break not far from the lodge, and found myself on the open road. Perhaps 100 feet to the left the path led across the valley to the Country club, and only a little way off was the foot-bridge over Casanova creek. But just as I was about to turn down the path I heard steps

coming toward me, and I shrank into the bushes. It was Gertrude, going back quickly toward the house.

I was surprised. I waited until she had had time to get almost to the house before I started. And then I stepped back again into the shadows. The reason why Gertrude had not kept her tryst was evident. Leaning on the parapet of the bridge in the moonlight, and smoking a pipe, was Alex, the gardener. I could have throttled Liddy for her carelessness in reading the torn note where he could hear. And I could cheerfully have choked Alex to death for his audacity.

But there was no help for it; I turned and followed Gertrude slowly back to the house.

The frequent invasions of the house had effectually prevented any relaxation after dusk. We had redoubled our vigilance as to bolts and window-locks, but, as Mr. Jamieson had suggested, we allowed the door at the east entry to remain as before, locked by the Yale lock only. To provide only one possible entrance for the intruder, and to keep a constant guard in the dark at the foot of the circular staircase, seemed to be the only method.

In the absence of the detective, Alex and Halsey arranged to change off, Halsey to be on duty from ten to two, and Alex from two until six. Each man was armed, and, as an additional precaution, the one off duty slept in a room near the head of the circular staircase and kept his door open, to be ready for emergency.

These arrangements were carefully kept from the servants, who were only commencing to sleep at night, and who retired, one and all, with barred doors and lamps that burned full until morning.

The house was quiet again Wednesday night. It was almost a week since Louise had encountered some one on the stairs, and it was four days since the discovery of the hole in the trunk-room wall. Arnold Armstrong and his father rested side by side in the African churchyard, and at the Zion Casanova church, on the hill, a new mound marked the last resting-place of poor Thomas.

Louise was with her mother in town, and, beyond a polite note of thanks to me, we had heard nothing from her. Dr. Walker had taken up his practice again, and we saw him now and then flying along the road, always at top speed. The murder of Arnold Armstrong was still unavenged, and I remained firm in the position I had taken—to stay at Sunnyside until the thing was at least partly cleared.

And yet, for all its quiet, it was on Wednesday night that perhaps the boldest attempt was made to enter the house. On Thursday afternoon the laundress sent word she would like to speak to me, and I saw her in my private sitting room, a small room beyond the dressing room.

Mary Anne was embarrassed. She had rolled down her sleeves and tried a white apron around her waist, and she stood making folds in it with fingers that were red and shiny from her soap-suds.

"Well, Mary," I said encouragingly, "what's the matter? Don't dare to tell me the soap is out?"

"No, ma'am, Miss Innes." She had a nervous habit of looking first at my one eye and then at the other, her own optics shifting ceaselessly, right eye, left eye, right eye, until I found myself doing the same thing. "No, ma'am, I was askin' did you want the ladder left up the clothes chute?"

"The what?" I screamed, and was sorry the next minute. Seeing her suspicions were verified, Mary Anne had gone white, and stood with her eyes shining more wildly than ever.

"There's a ladder up the clothes chute, Miss Innes," she said. "It's up that tight I can't move it, and I didn't like to ask for help until I spoke to you."

It was useless to dissemble; Mary Anne knew now as well as I did that the ladder had no business to be there. I did the best I could, however. I put her on the defensive at once.

"Then you didn't lock the laundry last night?"

"I locked it tight, and put the key in the kitchen on its nail."

"Very well, then you forgot a window."

Mary Anne hesitated.

"Yes'm," she said at last. "I thought I locked them all, but there was one open this morning."

I went out of the room and down the hall, followed by Mary Anne. The door into the clothes chute was securely bolted, and when I opened it I saw the evidence of the woman's story. A pruning ladder had been brought from where it had lain against the stable and now stood upright in the clothes shaft, its end resting against the wall between the first and second floors.

I turned to Mary.

"This is due to your carelessness," I said. "If we had all been murdered in our beds it would have been your fault." She shivered. "Now, not a word of this through the house, and send Alex to me."

The effect on Alex was to make him apoplectic with rage, and with it all I fancied there was an element of satisfaction. As I look back, so many things are plain to me that I wonder I could not see at the time. It is all known now, and yet the whole thing was so remarkable that perhaps my stupidity was excusable.

Alex leaned down the chute and examined the ladder carefully.

"It is caught," he said with a grim smile. "The fools, to have left a warning like that! The only trouble is, Miss Innes, they won't be apt to come back for a while."

"I shouldn't regard that in the light of a calamity," I replied.

Until late that evening Halsey and Alex worked at the chute. They forced down the ladder at last, and put a new bolt on the door. As for myself, I sat and wondered if I had a deadly enemy, intent on my destruction.

I was growing more and more nervous. Liddy had given up all pretense at bravery, and slept regularly in my dressing room on the couch, with a prayer-book and a game knife from the kitchen under her pillow, thus preparing for both the natural and the supernatural. That was the way things stood that Thursday night, when I myself took a hand in the struggle.

CHAPTER XXIII.

While the Stables Burned.

About nine o'clock that night Liddy came into the living room and reported that one of the housemaids declared she had seen two men slip around the corner of the stable. Gertrude had been sitting staring in front of her, jumping at every sound. Now she turned on Liddy pettishly.

"I declare, Liddy," she said, "you are a bundle of nerves. What if Eliza did see some men around the stable? It may have been Warner and Alex."

"Warner is in the kitchen, miss," Liddy said with dignity. "And if you had come through what I have, you would be a bundle of nerves, too. Miss Rachel, I'd be thankful if you'd give me my month's wages to-morrow. I'll be going to my sister's."

"Very well," I said, to her evident



amazement. "I will make out the check. Warner can take you down to the noon train."

Liddy's face was really funny.

"You'll have a nice time at your sister's," I went on. "Five children, hasn't she?"

"That's it," Liddy said, suddenly bursting into tears. "Send me away, after all these years, and your new shawl only half done, and nobody knowin' how to fix the water for your bath."

"It's time I learned to prepare my own bath." I was knitting complacently. But Gertrude got up and put her arms around Liddy's shaking shoulders.

"You are two big babies," she said soothingly. "Neither one of you could get along for an hour without the other. So stop quarreling and be good. Liddy, go right up and lay out aunty's night things. She is going to bed early."

After Liddy had gone I began to think about the men at the stable, and I grew more and more anxious. Halsey was aimlessly knocking the billiard balls around in the billiard room, and I called to him.

"Halsey," I said when he sauntered in, "is there a policeman in Casanova?"

"Constable," he said laconically. "Veteran of the war, one arm; in office to conciliate the G. A. R. element. Why?"

"Because I am uneasy tonight." And I told him what Liddy had said. "Is there any one you can think of, who could be relied on to watch the outside of the house to-night?"

"We might get Sam Bobannon from the club," he said thoughtfully. "It wouldn't be a bad scheme. He's a smart ducky, and with his mouth shut and his shirt-front covered, you couldn't see him a yard off in the dark."

Halsey conferred with Alex, and the result, in an hour, was Sam. His instructions were simple. There had been numerous attempts to break into the house; it was the intention, not to drive intruders away, but to capture them. If Sam saw anything suspicious outside, he was to tap at the east entry, where Alex and Halsey were to alternate in keeping watch through the night.

As before, Halsey watched the east entry from ten until two. He had an eye to comfort, and he kept vigil in a heavy oak chair, very large and deep. We went upstairs rather early, and through the open door Gertrude and I kept up a running fire of conversation. Liddy was brushing my hair, and Gertrude was doing her own, with a long free sweep of her strong, round arms.

"Did you know Mrs. Armstrong and Louise are in the village?" she called.

"No," I replied, startled. "How did you hear it?"

"I met the oldest Stewart girl to-day, the doctor's daughter, and she told me they had not gone back to town after the funeral. They went directly to that little yellow house next to Dr. Walker's, and are apparently settled there. They took the house furnished for the summer."

"Why, it's a bandbox," I said. "I can't imagine Fanny Armstrong in such a place."

"It's true, nevertheless. Ella Stewart says Mrs. Armstrong has aged terribly, and looks as if she is hardly able to walk."

I lay and thought over some of these things until midnight. The electric lights went out then, fading slowly until there was only a red-hot loop to be seen in the bulbs, and then even that died away and we were embarked on the darkness of another night.

(TO BE CONTINUED.)

Condemns Sunshine Fad.

A well-known medical man condemns emphatically the form of vanity that leads people on their holidays to do their utmost to get sunburned. "Workers in city offices," he says, "who go into the country or to the seashore for only one or two weeks will deliberately sit about hatless in the blazing sun, so that they may come back looking brown and healthy. As often as not this practice will send them home far less fit for work than they were when the sun started, for even if one escapes sunstroke the effects of the sun's rays upon the uncovered head are very bad. They will cause dizziness, headache, nausea and loss of appetite and will often upset the digestive system for many days. There are ways of avoiding the more serious effects of the sun, but personally I would advise the city dweller who must have a brown face to stain it with walnut juice and wear a broad-brimmed hat like a sane and sensible individual."

Making Him Go.

"I don't think I shall go to the poker party to-night."

"That's one of the truest things you have done for quite awhile."

"Jinx owes me \$5 which he was to pay me at the party to-night, and which I had decided to give to you to go shopping with, but I am really too tired to go out; guess I'll let it go this time."

"That is just like you! If it was anything you wanted to do you would go in a minute, but when it is something for your wife you are too tired! You will go to that poker party to-night or you will hear from me!"

Two Parables of Judgment

Sunday School Lesson for Sept. 4, 1910
Specially Arranged for This Paper

LESSON TEXT.—Matthew 21:23-46.
Memory verses, 45, 46.

GOLDEN TEXT.—"Therefore, say I unto you: The kingdom of God shall be taken from you."—2 Matthew 21:43.

TIME.—Tuesday, April 4, A. D. 29. Two days after the triumphal entry.

PLACE.—In the courts of the temple.

Suggestion and Practical Thought.

Sustaining the Faith of His Disciples, which was so soon to be tested to the utmost.—Matt. 21:20-21; Mark 11:20-25. The fig tree on which the curse for fruitlessness rested on Monday morning, was found withered as Jesus and his disciples passed by it Tuesday morning on their way to the temple.

The Authority of Christ Challenged, and Christ's Answer.—Vs. 21-27. (Mark 11:27-33; Luke 20:1-8.) The Pharisees came to Jesus and demanded by what authority he took upon himself to drive out the money-changers, and the cattle, and the dealers in them from the temple. What authority had he to call himself the Messiah, and to oppose those who were the divinely appointed leaders in the ritual of a divinely authorized religion and temple?

It was useless to answer them by any statement of fact. They would have denied his authority, and made his claims a means of bringing him before the Roman court. His deeds and teachings were known, and they could have learned his authority. Jesus, therefore, refused to answer, but "said unto them, I also will ask you one thing," not to puzzle them, but to lead them to answer their own question in answering his.

25. The baptism of John, whence was it? from Heaven, or of men? That is, tell me what was John's authority for his teaching, represented by baptism, and I will tell you what mine is, for both are from the same source.

The rulers were afraid to express their opinion, and said they could not tell. They could not do so without making trouble for themselves, or answering themselves the question they asked Jesus. They were mere politicians and not statesmen, or patriots. Jesus therefore refused to answer their question, and they could not complain. It was very wise and true action on the part of Jesus.

The Parable of the Two Sons. Good Resolutions Versus Good Deeds.—Vs. 28-32. "But what think ye?" He would not answer their question, but he would give them a parable to think of, a mirror in which they could see their own characters, and be led to repentance. "A certain man," representing God, our Father in Heaven, had two sons. Compare Luke 15:11.

The First Son represented those who made no pretension to the service of God, but stood opposed to it in doctrine, in character and in life.

The Second Son represented those who had in form at least been carrying on the work of their Father, represented by the elder son in the parable of the Prodigal son. This class included the Jewish leaders, and all those who joined with them as representatives of the kingdom of God in the world, as his professed servants in upholding his true religion. They were particular about ritual and form and outward observances. They sat in the chief seats of the synagogue.

To both sons was given the same command, to cultivate their father's vineyard. All God's children are sent into this world to make it bring forth the fruits of the Spirit, to make it a Kingdom of Heaven, in their own souls and lives, and in the world as a whole.

The first son refused to obey. "He answered . . . I will not." Their whole conduct said "I will not." And this continued for ages. "But afterward he repented, and went." The second son "answered and said, I go, sir; and went not." Those whom this son represented had said by their actions and professions, "I go, sir."

Then, before they saw the application, Jesus asked them to decide— "Whether of them twain did the will of his father?"

"The only possible answer was, 'The first.'"

Then Jesus made the application, and they saw themselves as in a mirror.

The Parable of the Vineyard and the Husbandmen.—Vs. 33-41. The Vineyard represented the kingdom of God, which was entrusted to the Jews, planted by God with the rich and fruitful vines of the knowledge of God, his commandments, the institutions of religion, and his revealed word.

They Slay the Son, Their Only Hope. Because they wanted to keep their places, their honors, their wealth, their own pleasure.

The Result was that they lost all. They killed that they might possess; but it was the shortest road to entire loss. Those who reject Christ in order that they may keep possession of themselves, their pleasures and hopes, have taken the shortest and surest way to lose them.

LIVE WIRES.

The parables may seem far away from us, but from them there come live wires conveying living truths to our souls and to our nation today.

To go on in sin against all the moral laws of God, is to be like a grasshopper before a mowing machine. The laws of God will crush us unless we get out of their way, by obedience to his will.

"Though the mills of God grind slowly, yet they grind exceeding small. Though with patience he stands waiting, with exactness grinds he all."

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NO CHANCE TO GO WRONG

Statement of Beauty Doctor May Not Be True, but It Was Not Gallant.

William F. Oldham, bishop of Singapore, talked at a dinner, on his last visit, to New York, about missionary work.

"A certain type of man," he said, "goes about declaring that we dominant races civilize the savage out of existence—that we do them harm instead of good."

"Well, as a matter of fact, if these cavaliers knew what I know about some tribes, they would speak less confidently. Some tribes are so debased that to do them anything but good would hardly be possible. They are, in fact, just like the ugly woman who visited the beauty doctor."

"This woman was ugly in every feature, but her nose was particularly ugly. That, no doubt, was why she desired the beauty doctor to begin on it."

"I am willing," she said, "to pay you liberally, doctor, but I demand in return substantial results. We will start with my nose. Can you guarantee to make it ideally beautiful?"

"The doctor, after looking attentively at the woman's nose, replied:

"Well, madam, I can't say as to ideal beauty, but a nose like yours I couldn't help improving if I hit it with a mallet."

Not to Overdo It.
Lily—I've givine to a s'prise party tonight, Miss Sally.

Miss Sally—What will you take for a present?
Lily—Well, we didn't call 'em on takin' no present. Yo' see, we don't wan' to s'prise 'em too much.

Evidences of Wealth.
"I wish we had a piano; I'd like to impress those people."

"Show 'em the piece of beef you've got in the refrigerator."

Located.
Old Gentleman (to waiter)—Can you tell me if my wife is here?
Waiter—Yes, sir, eighth hat to the left.—Fliegende Blaetter.

Freedom is the only soil in which great and good men grow—freedom of mind and body.

Some men are self-made and some others are wife-made.

There Are Reasons

Why so many people have ready-at-hand a package of

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Mary Anne Had Gone White.