

# THE CIRCULAR STAIRCASE

By MARY ROBERTS RINEHART  
ILLUSTRATIONS BY ROY WATERS  
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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. The prisoner escaped. Gertrude was suspected because of an injured foot. Halsey reappears and says he and Bailey were called away by a telegram. 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 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 ship in his pocket bearing the name of "Lucien 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. A ladder out of place deepens the mystery.

## CHAPTER XXIII—Continued.

Apparently only a few minutes elapsed, during which my eyes were becoming accustomed to the darkness. Then I noticed that the windows were reflecting a faint pinkish light; Liddy noticed it at the same time, and I heard her jump up. At that moment Sam's deep voice boomed from somewhere just below.

"Fire!" he yelled. "The stable's on fire!"

I could see him in the glare dancing up and down on the drive, and a moment later Halsey joined him. Alex was awake and running down the stairs, and in five minutes from the time the fire was discovered three of the maids were sitting on their trunks in the drive, although, excepting a few sparks, there was no fire nearer than 100 yards.

Gertrude seldom loses her presence of mind, and she ran to the telephone. But by the time the Casanova volunteer fire department came tolling up the hill the stable was a furnace, with the Dragon Fly safe but blistered, in the road. Some gasoline exploded just as the volunteer department got to work, which shook their nerves as well as the burning building. The stable, being on a hill, was a torch to attract the population from every direction.

The stable was off the west wing. I hardly know how I came to think of the circular staircase and the unguarded door at its foot. Liddy was putting my clothes into sheets, preparatory to tossing them out the window, when I found her, and I could hardly persuade her to stop.

"I want you to come with me, Liddy," I said. "Bring a candle and a couple of blankets."

She lagged behind considerably when she saw me making for the east wing, and at the top of the staircase she balked.

"I am not going down there," she said firmly.

"There is no one guarding the door down there," I explained. "Who knows?—this may be a scheme to draw everybody away from this end of the house, and let some one in here."

The instant I had said it I was convinced I had hit on the explanation, and that perhaps it was already too late. It seemed to me as I listened that I heard stealthy footsteps on the east porch, but there was so much shouting outside that it was impossible to tell. Liddy was on the point of retreat.

"Very well," I said, "then I shall go down alone. Run back to Mr. Halsey's room and get his revolver. Don't shoot down the stairs if you hear a noise; remember—I shall be down there. And hurry."

I put the candle on the floor at the top of the staircase and took off my bedroom slippers. Then I crept down the stairs, going very slowly, and listening with all my ears. Just at the foot of the stairs I stubbed my toe against Halsey's big chair, and had to stand on one foot in a soundless agony until the pain subsided to a dull ache. And then—I knew I was right. Some one had put a key into the lock, and was turning it. For some reason it refused to work, and the key was withdrawn. There was a muttering of voices outside; I had only a second. Another trial, and the door would open. The candle above made a faint gleam down the well-like staircase, and at that moment, with a second, no more, to spare, I thought of a plan.

The heavy oak chair almost filled the space between the newel post and the door. With a crash I had turned it on its side, wedging it against the door, its legs against the stairs. I could hear a faint scream from Liddy at the crash and then she came down the stairs on a run, with the revolver held straight out in front of her.

"Thank God," she said, in a shaking voice. "I thought it was you."

I pointed to the door, and she understood.

"Call out of the windows at the other end of the house," I whispered. "Run. Tell them not to wait for anything."



It Went Off, Right Through the Door.

She went up the stairs at that, two at a time. Evidently she collided with the candle, for it went out, and I was left in darkness.

I was really astonishingly cool. I remember stepping over the chair and gluing my ear to the door, and I shall never forget feeling it give an inch or two there in the darkness, under a steady pressure from without. But the chair held, although I could hear an ominous cracking of one of the legs. And then, without the slightest warning, the cardroom window broke with a crash. I had my finger on the trigger of the revolver, and as I jumped it went off, right through the door. Some one outside swore roundly, and for the first time I could hear what was said.

"Only a scratch. . . . Men are at the other end of the house. . . . Have the whole rat's nest on us." And a lot of profanity which I won't write down. The voices were at the broken window now, and although I was trembling violently, I was determined that I would hold them until help came. I moved up the stairs until I could see into the cardroom, or rather through it, to the window. As I looked a small man put his leg over the sill and stepped into the room. The curtain turned him for a moment; then he turned, not toward me, but toward the billiard room door. I fired again, and something that was glass or china crashed to the ground. Then I ran up the stairs and along the corridor to the main staircase. Gertrude was standing there, trying to locate the shots, and I must have been a peculiar figure, with my hair in curls, my dressing-gown flying, no slippers, and a revolver clutched in my hand. I had no time to talk. There was the sound of footsteps in the lower hall, and some one bounded up the stairs.

I had gone Berserk, I think. I leaned over the stair-rail and fired again. Halsey, below, yelled at me. "What are you doing up there?" he yelled. "You missed me by an inch." And then I collapsed and fainted. When I came around Liddy was rubbing my temples with eau de quinine, and the search was in full blast.

Well, the man was gone. The stable burned to the ground, while the crowd cheered at every falling rafter, and the volunteer fire department sprayed it with a garden hose. And in my house Alex and Halsey searched every corner of the lower floor, finding no one.

The truth of my story was shown by the broken window and the overturned chair. That the unknown had got upstairs was almost impossible. He had not used the main staircase, there was no way to the upper floor in the east wing, and Liddy had been at the window, in the west wing, where the servants' stair went up. But we did not go to bed at all. Sam Bannan and Warner helped in the search, and not a closet escaped scrutiny. Even the cellars were given a thorough overhauling, without result. The door in the east entry had a hole through it where my bullet had gone. The hole slanted downward, and the bullet was embedded in the porch. Some reddish stains showed it had done execution.

"Somebody will walk lame," Halsey said, when he had marked the course of the bullet. "It's too low to have hit anything but a leg or foot."

From that time on I watched every person I met for a limp, and to this day the man who halts in his walk is an object of suspicion to me. But Casanova had no lame men; the nearest approach to it was an old fellow who tended the safety gates at the railroad, and he, I learned on inquiry, had two artificial legs. Our man had

gone, and the large and expensive stable at Sunnyside was a heap of smoking rafters and charred boards. Warner swore the fire was incendiary, and in view of the attempt to enter the house, there seemed to be no doubt of it.

## CHAPTER XXIV.

### Flinders.

If Halsey had only taken me fully into his confidence through the whole affair it would have been much simpler. If he had been altogether frank about Jack Bailey, and if the day after the fire he had told me what he suspected, there would have been no harrowing period for all of us, with the boy in danger. But young people refuse to profit by the experience of their elders, and sometimes the elders are the ones to suffer.

I was much upset the day after the fire, and Gertrude insisted on my going out. The machine was temporarily out of commission, and the carriage horses had been sent to a farm for the summer. Gertrude finally got a trap from the Casanova liveryman, and we went out. Just as we turned from the drive into the road we passed a woman. She had put down a small valise, and stood inspecting the house and grounds minutely. I should hardly have noticed her had it not been for the fact that she had been horribly disfigured by smallpox.

"Light!" Gertrude said, when we had passed, "what a face! I shall dream of it to-night. Get up, Flinders."

"Flinders?" I asked. "Is that the horse's name?"

"It is." She flicked the horse's stubby mane with the whip. "He didn't look like a livery horse, and the liveryman said he had bought him from the Armstrongs when they purchased a couple of motors and cut down the stable. Nice Flinders—good old boy!"

Flinders was certainly not a common name for a horse, and yet the youngster at Richfield had named his prancing, curly-haired little horse Flinders! It set me to thinking.

At my request Halsey had already sent word of the fire to the agent from whom he had secured the house. Also, he had called Mr. Jamieson by telephone, and somewhat guardedly had told him of the previous night's events. Mr. Jamieson promised to come out that night, and to bring another man with him. I did not consider it necessary to notify Mrs. Armstrong, in the village. No doubt she knew of the fire, and in view of my refusal to give up the house an interview would probably have been unpleasant enough. But as we passed Dr. Walker's white and green house I thought of something.

"Stop here, Gertrude," I said. "I am going to get out."

"To see Louise?" she asked.

"No, I want to ask this young Walker something."

She was curious, I knew, but I did not wait to explain. I went up the walk to the house, where a brass sign at the side announced the office, and went in. The reception room was empty, but from the consultation room beyond came the sound of two voices, not very audible.

"It is an outrageous figure," some one was storming. Then the doctor's quiet tone, evidently not arguing, merely stating something. But I had not time to listen to some person probably disputing his bill, so I coughed. The voices ceased at once; a door closed somewhere, and the doctor entered from the hall of the house. He looked sufficiently surprised at seeing me.

"Good afternoon, Doctor," I said formally. "I shall not keep you from



your patient. I wish merely to ask a question."

"Won't you sit down?"

"It will not be necessary. Doctor, has any one come to you, either early this morning or to-day, to have you treat a bullet wound?"

"Nothing so startling has happened to me," he said. "A bullet wound! Things must be lively at Sunnyside."

"I didn't say it was at Sunnyside. But as it happens, it was. If any such case comes to you, will it be too much trouble for you to let me know?"

"I shall be only too happy," he said. "I understand you have had a fire up there, too. A fire and shooting in one night is rather lively for a quiet place like that."

"It is as quiet as a boiler-shop," I replied, as I turned to go.

"And you are still going to stay?"

"Until I am burned out," I responded. And then, on my way down the steps, I turned around suddenly.

"Doctor," I asked at a venture, "have you ever heard of a child named Lucien Wallace?"

Clever as he was, his face changed and stiffened. He was on his guard again in a moment.

"Lucien Wallace?" he repeated. "No, I think not. There are plenty of Wallaces around, but I don't know any Lucien."

I was as certain as possible that he did. People do not lie readily to me, and this man lied beyond a doubt. But there was nothing to be gained now; his defenses were up, and I left, half irritated and wholly baffled.

Our reception was entirely different at Dr. Stewart's. Taken into the bosom of the family at once, Flinders tied outside and nibbling the grass at the roadside, Gertrude and I drank some home-made elderberry wine and told briefly of the fire. Of the more serious part of the night's experience, of course, we said nothing. But when at last we had left the family on the porch and the good doctor was untying our steed, I asked him the same question I had put to Dr. Walker.

"Shot?" he said. "Bless my soul, no. Why, what have you been doing up at the big house, Miss Innes?"

"Some one tried to enter the house during the fire, and was shot and slightly injured," I said hastily. "Please don't mention it; we wish to make as little of it as possible."

There was one other possibility, and we tried that. At Casanova station I saw the station master, and asked him if any trains left Casanova between one o'clock and daylight. There was none until 6 a. m. The next question required more diplomacy.

"Did you notice on the six o'clock train any person—any man—who limped a little?" I asked. "Please try to remember; we are trying to trace a man who was seen loitering around Sunnyside last night before the fire."

He was all attention in a moment. "I was up there myself at the fire," he said volubly. "I'm a member of the volunteer company. First big fire we've had since the summer house burned over to the club golf links. My wife was sayin' the other day, 'Dave, you might as well 'a' saved the money in that there helmet and shirt.' And here last night they came in handy. Rang that bell so hard I hadn't time scarcely to get 'em on."

"And—did you see a man who limped?" Gertrude put in, as he stopped for breath.

"Not at the train, ma'am," he said. "No such person got on here to-day. But I'll tell you where I did see a man that limped. I didn't wait till the company left; there's a fast freight goes through at 4:45, and I had to get down to the station. I seen there wasn't much more to do anyhow at the fire—we'd got the flames under control"—Gertrude looked at me and smiled—"so I started down the hill. There was folk here and there goin' home, and along by the path to the Country Club I seen two men. One was a short fellow. He was sitting on a big rock, his back to me, and he had something white in his hand, as if he was tying up his foot. After I'd gone on a piece I looked back, and he was hobbling on and—excuse me, miss—he was swearing something sickenin'."

(TO BE CONTINUED.)

Marvels of Modern Surgery. Knife operations on the stomach have given a death rate of from one to 20 per cent, against 20 to 40 per cent. ten years ago. Cutting open the upper abdomen, splitting the stomach open and turning it wrong side out, searching for cancers and ulcers, has become a not uncommon operation, often followed by great cures and benefits, and is largely an American specialty. — New York Press.

Philatelist His Hobby. State Senator Ernest R. Ackerman, of New Jersey, who is now enjoying his annual trip abroad, is one of the best known and most enthusiastic collectors of postage stamps in this country. So large is his collection that he has set apart one room in his home in Plainfield as a stamp room, in which are some of the rarest of stamps, so dear to the heart of the philatelist.

## THE KING'S MARRIAGE FEAST

Sunday School Lesson for Sept. 11, 1910  
Specially Arranged for This Paper

LESSON TEXT.—Matthew 22:1-14. Memory verses 8, 9.

GOLDEN TEXT.—"Many are called, but few are chosen."—Matthew 22:14.

TIME.—Tuesday, April 4, A. D. 30. Three days before the Crucifixion.

PLACE.—The Temple court at Jerusalem.

Suggestion and Practical Thought.

The Kingdom of Heaven Like a Wedding Feast.—Vs. 1, 2. And Jesus answered the unspoken needs, desires, and questions of the people. By parables, the most picturesque method, compelling attention, but not antagonistic. The enemy could not easily attack it, while to those who wished to know it was full of light.

The kingdom of heaven, the new order which he came to establish on earth, in which each citizen lived according to the laws of heaven. The king represented God. The son was Jesus Christ.

This feast represents all the blessings which God has provided in his gospel, enjoyed in large measure here, and perfected in heaven. The emphasis is on the marriage, the union between Christ and his people. It is the highest ideal of love and friendship. It expresses intimate fellowship with God, the mutual love and delight in one another, the protecting care on the one hand and perfect trust on the other, the unity of purpose, of character, of hope, the abiding forever in one perfect home, all of which belong to the union of Christ with believers.

The Invitation.—Vs. 3, 4. And sent forth his servants to call them that were bidden. Literally, "to call the called," to summon those who had previously been invited; because they had no timepieces, and the hour when the feast could be ready was very uncertain. This custom is not now observed "very strictly among the common people, nor in cities where western manners have greatly modified the Oriental; but in Lebanon it still prevails. If a sheik begs, or enoer invites, he always sends a servant to call you at the proper time. These having refused to come, he sent forth other servants, who were 'not merely to invite to, but to command the feast, with a view to create a desire.' Behold, I have prepared my dinner; my oxen and my fatlings, i. e., smaller animals, as lambs, calves, specially fed for the occasion. All things are ready; come."

How the Invitation Was Received.—Vs. 3-6. They refused without giving any reason, they would not come. They simply did not regard the invitation as worth attending to. They treated it with indifference. They plead other interests. Their farm duties, their business gains, weighed more than their king's service and good will. Others displayed active opposition.

The King . . . was wroth. Any ordinary earthly king would be angry at the insult, and indignant at the folly of those that refused, and would feel the necessity of punishing those who openly rebelled in the act of refusing. There was no other way of preserving his kingdom. God's "anger" is never passion, never desire to harm even the worst of beings, but a burning indignation against wrong.

Go yet therefore into the highways. Or, "the partings of the highways," the cross-roads, the places where great numbers meet, "the broad, well-trodden ways of the world."

Gather together all . . . both bad and good, whoever was willing to come and by that very act showed that they wanted to be good.

The fullness of the time had come. The preparations were complete. Everything was prepared for the redemption of man—heaven, love, the atonement, the strongest motives, the power of the Holy Spirit. The world was in the best condition for the coming of Christ. Never before or since has there been so fitting a time—one government, one language, peace, roads, synagogues of the Jews everywhere. The slaying of the animals is an allusion to sacrifice. Only when the Lamb was slain on Calvary were all things ready for the marriage. The long preparations for the Gospel were completed; the forerunner had done his work; Jesus himself had come from Heaven, and had taught the Jews the divine message.

The leading Jews had very much at stake—their country, their holy city, their temple, their synagogues, their rank and wealth, their leadership of the people. They were so busy with these, they were so afraid they would lose them if they accepted the humble Nazarene as their teacher, and obeyed his precepts, that they were unwilling even to consider his claims.

The kingdom of God was transferred from the Jewish nation to the Gentiles. The Jews henceforth, instead of being the people and kingdom of God, would be a mere Semitic nationality. Many of them then and since belong to the kingdom of the Messiah. The Messianic kingdom is today the mightiest power on earth.

There has never been a king on earth with a title of the power and influence, and of the number of subjects which King Jesus today possesses.

The world is still full of excuses for not coming, many of them mere excuses, but we must look much deeper for the real reasons. And we should be far more careful to understand and remove the reasons than to try to answer their excuses. It is for this reason that much of the arguing with irreligious men is so useless. It is like scraping the furred tongue, but leaving the fever.

## A MARVELOUS RECOVERY.

How a Chronic Invalid Regained Perfect Health.

Mrs. Ray Trusnor, 30 West Third St., New Albany, Ind., says: "Kidney disease had rendered me a chronic invalid. I lay in bed unable to move hand or foot. My right limb was swollen to twice normal size. I looked the picture of death and my case puzzled the doctors. The kidney secretions were highly colored and scalded terribly. Marked improvement followed the use of Doan's Kidney Pills. In six weeks I was a well woman. My friends and relatives marvel at my recovery." Remember the name—Doan's. For sale by all dealers. 50 cents a box. Foster-Milburn Co., Buffalo, N. Y.

Talking to the Child.  
"Mrs. X— talks to little Midge just as Mr. X— talks to their dog," said a little girl of a neighboring family. And it was indeed true. Mrs. X— is a very well-meaning woman and would be greatly surprised if she should hear the foregoing statement. She has simply unconsciously acquired a harsh tone of voice in dealing with her children. This is altogether unnecessary and is not, as many mothers seem to think, a mark of good discipline. The mother whose manner is quiet but firm is generally a much more successful disciplinarian than the harsh-voiced mother who issues her commands in a dictatorial manner. Kindness never spoils children. It is flabby indecision, sometimes mistaken for kindness, which spoils them.

## HOW A DOCTOR CURED SCALP DISEASE

"When I was ten or twelve years old I had a scalp disease, something like scald head, though it wasn't that. I suffered for several months, and most of my hair came out. Finally they had a doctor to see me and he recommended the Cuticura Remedies. They cured me in a few weeks. I have used the Cuticura Remedies, also, for a breaking out on my hands and was benefited a great deal. I haven't had any more trouble with the scalp disease. Miss Jessie F. Buchanan, R. F. D. 3, Hamilton, Ga., Jan. 7, 1909."

Kept with Barnum's Circus.  
P. T. Barnum, the famous circus man, once wrote: "I have had the Cuticura Remedies among the contents of my medicine chest with my shows for the last three seasons, and I can cheerfully certify that they were very effective in every case which called for their use."

Got Stung, All Right.  
Bill—This paper says that bees were unknown to the Indians.  
Jill—Yes, I believe it was the traders who used to sting them.—Yonkers Statesman.

Dr. Pierce's Pleasant Pellets regulate and invigorate stomach, liver and bowels. Sugar-coated, tiny granules, easy to take as candy.

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Don't Take Chances of having a sick spell by delay, when you notice the first sign of Stomach, Liver or Bowel weakness. Act promptly and get a bottle of Hostetter's Stomach Bitters. You are then on the safe side because it quickly restores things to a normal condition. It is for Poor Appetite, Cramps, Heartburn, Indigestion, Costiveness, Malaria, Fever and Ague. Get



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