THE CIRCULAR STAIRCASE

BY MARY ROBERTS RINEHART IL I USTRATIONS BY RAY WATERS

SYNOPSIS.

Miss Innes, spinster and guardian of Gertrude and Halsey, established summer headquarters at Sunnyside. Amidst numerous difficulties the servants deserted. As Miss Innes locked up for the night she was startled by a dark figure on the veranda. Unseemly noises disturbed her during the night. In the morning Miss Innes found a strange link cuff-button in a hamper. Gertrude and Halsey arrived with Jack Bailey. The house was awakened by a revolver shot and Arnold Armstrong was found shot to death in the hail. Miss Innes found Halsey's revolver on the lawn. He and Jack Bailey had disappeared. The link cuff-button mysteriously disappeared. Detective Jamieson arrived. Gertrude revealed she was engaged to Jack Railey, with whom she talked in the billiard room a few moments before the murder. Jamieson accused Miss Innes of holding back evidence. He imprisoned an intruder in an empty room. The prisoner escaped down a laundry chute. Gertrude was suspected. A negro found the other half of what proved to be Jack Bailey's cuff-button. Halsey reappears and says he and Bailey left in response to a telegram. Gertrude said she had given Bailey an unloaded revolver, fearing to give him a loaded weapon. Cashier Bailey of Paul Armstrong's bank, defunct, was arrested for embezzlement. Halsey said Armstrong wrecked his own bank and could clear Bailey. Paul Armstrong's death was anneunced. Halsey's fiancee, Louise Armstrong, was found at the lodge. The lodgekeeper said Louise and Arnold had a long talk the night of the murder. Louise was prostrated. Louise told Halsey. that while she still loved him she was to marry another, and that he would despise her when he learned the whole story. It developed that Dr. Walker and Louise were to be married. A prover was heard in the house. Louise was found at the bottom of the circular staircase. Louise were to be married. A prover was heard in the house, Louise was found at the bottom of the circular staircase. Louise were to be married a knock at the door and answered it. Something brushed past

CHAPTER XIX.-Continued.

"Why was Mr. Bailey not present at the inquest?"

The detective's expression was pe culiar.

"Because his physician testified that he is ill, and unable to leave his

"Ill!" I exclaimed. "Why, neither Halsey nor Gertrude has told me

"There are more things than that, Miss Innes, that are puzzling. Bailey gives the impression that he knew nothing of the crash at the bank until he read it in the paper Monday night, and that he went back and surrendered himself immediately. I do not believe it. Jonas, the watchman at the Traders' bank, tells a different story. He says that on the Thursday night before, about 8:30, Bailey went back to the bank. Jonas admitted him, and he says the cashier was in a state almost of collapse. Bailey worked until midnight, then he closed the vault and went away. The stared moodily ahead. Once he roused occurrence was so unusual that the watchman pondered over it all the departure. But he held off too long; he waited for something. My per-Miss Gertrude before flying from the country. Then, when he had shot had to choose between two evils. He surrendered himself, as an innocent half abashed. man. The strongest thing against him is his preparation for flight, and his deciding to come back after the It's about Thomas." murder of Arnold Armstrong. He was shrewd enough to disarm suspicion as to the graver charge."

The evening dragged along slowly. Mrs. Watson came to my bedroom before I went to bed and asked if I had any arnica. She showed me a badly swollen hand, with reddish streaks running toward the elbow; she said it was the hand she had hurt the night of the murder a week before, and that she had not slept well since. It looked down." to me as if it might be serious, and 1 told her to let Dr. Stewart see it.

The next morning Mrs. Watson went up to town on the 11 train and was admitted to the Charity hospital. She was suffering from blood-poisoning. I fully meant to go up and see her there, but other things drove her entirely from my mind. I telephoned to the hospital that day, however, and ordered a private room for her, and whatever comforts she might be al-

Mrs. Armstrong arrived Monday evening with her husband's body, and the services were set for the next day. The house on Chestnut street, in town, had been opened, and Tuesday morning Louise left us to go home. She sent for me before she

"How can I thank you, Miss Innes?" any questions. Some time, perhaps, I

I tried to tell her how glad I was to have had her, but there was somesaid it finally, when she had bade a to know and explain constrained good-by to Halsey and the car was waiting at the door.

"Miss Innes," she said in a low tone, "if they-if there is any attempt made to-to have you give up the house, do it, if you possibly can. I am afraid-to have you stay."

That was all. Gertrude went into town with her and saw her safely ness in the greeting between Louise



It Was Thomas.

arrangements for the funeral. Halsey and came home about nine that night, muddy and tired. As for Thomas, he saw the detective watching him closely at dinner. Even now I wondersuspect?

At ten o'clock the household had settled down for the night. Liddy, who was taking Mrs. Watson's place, had finished examining the tea-towels and the corners of the shelves in the cooling room, and had gone to bed. Alex, the gardener, had gone heavily up the circular staircase to his room, and Mr. Jamieson was examining the locks of the windows. Halsey dropped into a chair in the living room and "What sort of a looking chap is that

Walker, Gertrude?" he asked. rest of the night. What did Bailey "Rather tall, very dark, smooth do when he went back to the Knicker- shaven. Not bad looking," Gertrude bocker apartments that night? He said, putting down the book she had packed a suit-case ready for instant been pretending to read. Halsey kicked a taboret viciously.

"Lovely place this village must be sonal opinion is that he waited to see in the winter," he said irrelevantly.

"A girl would be buried alive here." It was then some one rapped at the down Arnold Armstrong that night, he knocker on the heavy front door. Halsey got up leisurely and opened it did the thing that would immediately admitting Warner. He was out of turn public opinion in his favor, and breath from running, and he looked

"I am sorry to disturb you," he said. "But I didn't know what else to do.

"What about Thomas?" I asked. Mr. Jamieson had come into the hall and we all stared at Warner

"He's acting queer," Warner exthe edge of the porch, and he says he has seen a ghost. The old man looks and taking his pipe went out on the bad, too; he can scarcely speak."

"He's as full of superstition as an egg is of meat," I said. "Halsey, bring some whisky and we will all go

No one moved to get the whisky, from which I judged there were three pocket flasks ready for emergency. Gertrude threw a shawl around my shoulders, and we all started down over the hill; I had made so many nocturnal excursions around the place that I knew my way perfectly. But Thomas was not on the veranda, nor was he inside the house. The men exchanged significant glances, and Warner got a lantern

"He can't have gone far," he said. 'He was trembling so that he couldn't stand when I left."

Jamleson and Halsey together made the round of the lodge, occasionally was an address in fresh ink: calling the old man by name. But there was no response. No Thomas came, bowing and showing his white went, and I saw she had been crying. teeth through the darkness. I began to be vaguely uneasy, for the first she said. "You have taken me on time. Gertrude, who was never nervfaith, and-you have not asked me ous in the dark, went alone down the drive to the gate, and stood there, can tell you; and when that time locking along the yellowish line of the comes, you will all despise me-Hal- road, while I waited on the tiny ver-

anda. Warner was puzzled. He came around to the edge of the veranda thing else she wanted to say. She and stood looking at it as if it ought

"He might have stumbled into the house," he said, "but he could not have climbed the stairs. Anyhow, he's not inside or outside, that I can see." The other members of the party had come back now, and no one had found any trace of the old man. His pipe, still warm, rested on the edge of the rail, and inside on the table his home. She reported a decided cool- old gray hat showed that its owner had not gone far.

and her mother, and that Dr. Walker He was not far, after all. From the

was there, apparently in charge of the j table my eyes traveled around the room, and stopped at the door of a disappeared shortly after Louise left closet. I hardly know what impulse moved me, but I went in and turned the knob. It burst open with the imwent around dejected and sad, and I petus of a weight behind it, and something fell partly forward in a heap on the floor. It was Thomas-Thomas what did Thomas know? What did he without a mark of injury on him, and dead.

CHAPTER XX.

Dr. Walker's Warning.

Warner was on his knees in a moment, fumbling at the old man's collar to loosen it, but Halsey caught his hand.

"Let him alone," he said. "You can't help him; he is dead."

We stood there, each avoiding the other's eyes; we spoke low and reverently in the presence of death, and always had a bad heart." we tacitly avoided any mention of the suspicion that was in every mind. When Mr. Jamieson had finished his cursory examination, he got up and dusted the knees of his trousers.

"There is no sign of injury," he said, and I know I, for one, drew a long breath of relief. "From what Warner says and from his hiding in the closet, I should say he was scared to death. Fright and weak heart, together."

"But what could have done it?" Gertrude asked. "He was all right this evening at dinner. Warner, what did he say when you found him on the porch?

Warner looked shaken; his honest, boyish face was colorless

"Just what I told you, Miss Innes. He'd heen reading the paper downstairs; I had put up the car, and, feeling sleepy, I came down to the plained. "He's sitting down there on lodge to go to bed. As I went upstairs Thomas put down the paper porch. Then I heard an exclamation from him."

"Didn't he say anything you could understand?" I asked.

"He said something about the grave giving up its dead."

Mr. Jamieson was going through the old man's pockets, and Gertrude was composing his arms, folding them across his white shirt-bosom, always so spotless.

In the course of his investigations the detective had come to the inner pocket of the dead butler's black coat. Here he found some things that interested him. One was a small flat key, with a red cord tied to it, and the other was a bit of white paper, on which was written something in Thomas' cramped hand. Mr. Jamieson read it; then he gave it to me. It

LUCIEN WALLACE, 14 Elm Street, Richfield.

As the card went around, I think both the detective and I watched for any possible effect it might have, but, beyond perplexity, there seemed to be none

"Richfield!" Gertrude exclaimed. Why, Elm street is the main street; don't you remember. Halsey?" "Lucien Wallace!" Halsey said.

"That is the child Stewart spoke of at the inquest." Warner, with his mechanic's instinct, had reached for the key. What

he said was not a surprise. "Yale lock," he said. "Probably a

key to the east entry." There was no reason why Thomas, an old and trusted servant, should not have had a key to that particular door, although the servants' entry was in the west wing. But I had not known of this key, and it opened up meal before dining out?" a new field of conjecture. Just now, however, there were many things to tion to the management of the variou. be attended to, and, leaving Warner knives and forks."



with the body we all went back to the house. Mr. Jamleson walked with me, while Halsey and Gertrude fol-

"I suppose I shall have to notify the Armstrongs," I said. "They will know if Thomas had any people and how to reach them. Of course, I expect to defray the expenses of the funeral, but his relatives must be found. What do you think frightened him, Mr. Jamie-

"It is hard to say," he replied slowly, "but I think we may be certain it was fright, and that he was hiding from something. I am sorry in more than one way; I have always believed that Thomas knew something, or suspected something, that he would not tell. Do you know how much money there was in that worn-out wallet of his? Nearly \$100! Almost two months' wages-and yet those darkies seldom have a penny. Well-what Thomas knew will be buried with him."

With the death of Thomas, I felt that a climax had come in affairs at Sunnyside. The night that followed was quiet enough. Halsey watched at the foot of the staircase, and a complicated system of bolts on the other doors seemed to be effectual.

Once in the night I wakened and thought I heard the tapping again. But all was quiet, and I had reached the stage where I refused to be disturbed for minor occurrences.

The Armstrongs were notified of Thomas' death, and I had my first interview with Dr. Walker as a result. He came up early the next morning, just as we finished breakfast, in a professional looking car with a black hood

"I must make a double excuse for this early visit, Miss Innes," he said as he sat down. The chair was lower than he expected, and his dignity required collecting before he went on. My professional duties are urgent and long neglected, and"-a fall to the every-day manner-"something must be done about that body."

"Yes," I said, sitting on the edge of my chair. "I merely wished the address of Thomas' people. You might have telephoned, if you were busy."

He smiled.

"I wished to see you about something else," he said. "As for Thomas, it is Mrs. Armstrong's wish that you allow her to attend to the expense. About his relatives. I have already notified his brother, in the village. It was heart disease, I think. Thomas

"Heart disease and fright," I said, still on the edge of my chair. But the loctor had no intention of leaving

"I understand you have a ghost up here, and that you have the house filled with detectives to exorcise it," he said.

For some reason I felt I was being 'pumped," as Halsey says. "You have been misinformed," I replied. "What, no ghost, no detectives!" he

said, still with his smile. "What a disappointment to the village!" I resented his attempt at playful-

ness. It had been anything but a joke "Dr. Walker," I said tartly, "I fail

to see any humor in the situation. Since I came here, one man has been shot, and another one has died from shock. There have been intruders in the house, and strange noises. If that is funny, there is something wrong with my sense of humor."

"You miss the point," he said, still good naturedly. "The thing that is funny to me is that you insist on remaining here, under the circumstances. I should think nothing would keep you."

"You are mistaken. Everything that occurs only confirms my resolution to

stay until the mystery is cleared." "I have a message for you, Miss Innes," he said, rising at last. "Mrs. Armstrong asked me to thank you for your kindness to Louise, whose whim, occurring at the time it did, put her to great inconvenience. Also-and this is a delicate matter-she asked me to appeal to your natural sympathy for her, at this time, and to ask you if you will not reconsider your decision about the house. Sunnyside is her home; she loves it dearly, and just now she wishes to retire here for quiet and peace."

She must have had a change of heart." I said, ungraciously enough. Louise told me her mother despised the place. Besides, this is no place for quiet and peace just now. Any how, doctor, while I don't care to force an issue, I shall certainly remain here, for a time at least." "For how long?" he asked.

"My lease is for six months. I shall stay until some explanation is found for certain things. My own family is implicated now, and I shall do everything to clear the mystery of Arnold Armtsrong's murder.' The doctor stood looking down, slap

ping his gloves thoughtfully against the palm of a well-looked-after hand. "You say there have been intruders in the house?" he asked. "You are sure of that, Miss Innes?"

(TO BE CONTINUED.)

One Thing at a Time. "Why do you always eat a square

"So that I can give my entire atten

ITALY'S PUBLIC LAUNDRIES

the Small Cities Many of the Housewives Use the Wash Tub In Common.

Naples .- Apparently there are as many ways of getting the weekly wash clean and in shape to use again as there are nations of people. The women of each country seem to have a system peculiarly their own, by reason of inheritance. In this land of invention, where everything must be accomplished with no loss of time, the women who do not send the soiled clothes of the household to the laun-



An Italian Laundry-Woman.

dries to be made fresh and white, employ some one to do the work in their homes, or get busy themselves, and, with the aid of washing machines or stationary tubs, manage to do their own laundry work.

In the smaller cities of Italy there are public laundries at which the women of the place congregate, coming from all directions, each with her basket of soiled clothes balanced on her head. At these laundries there are long stone basins filled with water, and there side by side the women and young girls stand, sometimes protected by a roof, but quite as often in the open air. All through the process of rubbing and rinsing and beating the articles on the stone side of the basin, the voluble Italians carry on a lively conversation, exchanging the news of the day with as much gusto as do the females of our acquaintance who gather around the card ta-

As much of the clothing of the town-folk is washed in the one long basin, the water early becomes-well, the opposite of clean-and when the last drop is squeezed from the garments and they are carried home to dry they are in no condition to be used as advertisements for washing powder. Passing through the towns, the tourist often finds the quaint homes and beautiful landscape adorned with these not overly white articles of dress, as the Italian housewife has not the slightest compunction in hanging the garments from her windows, or any other available place. The river bank furnishes a convenient place for those living near it, and in Naples there is always more or less clothing spread out to dry on the stone wall which guards the fashionable driveway from the beautiful bay.

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