

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 numerous 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 clothes 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.

CHAPTER IV.—Continued.

"Especially what?"
"Especially since Jack Bailey and Arnold Armstrong were notoriously bad friends. It was Bailey who got Arnold into trouble last spring—something about the bank. And then, too—"

"Go on," I said. "If there is anything more, I ought to know."
"There's nothing more," he said evasively. "There's just one thing we may bank on, Miss Innes. Any court in the country will acquit a man who kills an intruder in his house at night. If Halsey—"

"Why, you don't think Halsey did it?" I exclaimed. There was a queer feeling of physical nausea coming over me.

"No, no, not at all," he said with forced cheerfulness. "Come, Miss Innes, you're a ghost of yourself, and I am going to help you upstairs and call your maid. This has been too much for you."

About six o'clock Gertrude came in. She was fully dressed, and I sat up nervously.

"Poor Aunt!" she said. "What a shocking night you have had!" She came over and sat down on the bed, and I saw she looked very tired and worn.

"Is there anything new?" I asked anxiously.

"Nothing. The car is gone, but Warner—he is the chauffeur—Warner is at the lodge and knows nothing about it."

"Well," I said, "if I ever get my hands on Halsey Innes I shall not let go until I have told him a few things. When we get this cleared up, I am going back to the city to be quiet. One more night like the last two will end me. The peace of the country—fiddlesticks!"

Whereupon I told Gertrude of the noises the night before, and the figure on the veranda in the east wing. As an afterthought I brought out the pearl cuff-link.

"I have no doubt now," I said, "that it was Arnold Armstrong the night before last, too. He had a key, no doubt, but why he should steal into his father's house I cannot imagine. He could have come with my permission easily enough. Anyhow, whoever it was that night left this little souvenir."

Gertrude took one look at the cuff-link and went as white as the pearls in it; she clutched at the foot of the bed and stood staring. As for me, I was quite as astonished as she was.

"Where did you find it?" she asked finally, with a desperate effort at calm. And while I told her she stood looking out of the window with a look I could not fathom on her face. It was a relief when Mrs. Watson tapped at the door and brought me some tea and toast. The cook was in bed, completely demoralized, she reported, and Liddy, brave with the daylight, was looking for footprints around the house. Mrs. Watson herself was a wreck; she was blue-white around the lips, and she had one hand tied up. She said she had fallen downstairs in her excitement. It was natural, of course, that the thing would shock her, having been the Armstrongs' housekeeper for several years and knowing Mr. Arnold well.

Gertrude had slipped out during my talk with Mrs. Watson, and I dressed and went downstairs. The billiard and card rooms were locked until the coroner and the detectives got there, and the men from the club had gone back for more conventional clothing.

I could hear Thomas in the pantry alternately wailing for Mr. Arnold, as he called him, and citing the tokens that had precurred the murder. The house seemed to choke me, and, slipping a shawl around me, I went out on the drive. At the corner by the east wing I met Liddy. Her skirts were dragged with dew to her knees and her hair was still in crimps.

"Go right in and change your clothes," I said sharply. "You're a sight, and at your age!"
She had a golf stick in her hand, and she said she had found it on the lawn. There was nothing unusual about it, but it occurred to me that a golf stick with a metal end might have been the object that had scratched the stairs near the cardroom. I took it from her, and sent her up for dry garments. Her daylight courage and self-importance, and her shuddering delight in the mystery, irritated me beyond words. After I left her I made a circuit of the building. Nothing seemed to be disturbed; the house looked as calm and peaceful in the morning sun as it had the day I had been coerced into taking it. There

was nothing to show that inside had been mystery and violence and sudden death.

In one of the tulip beds back of the house an early blackbird was pecking viciously at something that glittered in the light. I picked my way gingerly over through the dew and stooped down; almost buried in the soft ground was a revolver! I scraped the earth off it with the tip of my shoe, and, picking it up, slipped it into my pocket. Not until I had got into my bedroom and double-locked the door did I venture to take it out and examine it. One look was all I needed. It was Halsey's revolver. I had unpacked it the day before and put it on his shaving stand, and there could be no mistake. His name was on a small silver plate on the handle.

I seemed to see a network closing around my boy, innocent as I knew he was. The revolver—I am afraid of them, but anxiety gave me courage to look through the barrel—the revolver had still two bullets in it. I could only breathe a prayer of thankfulness that I had found the revolver before any sharp-eyed detective had come around.

I decided to keep what clues I had, the cuff-link, the golf stick and the revolver, in a secure place until I could see some reason for displaying them. The cuff-link had been dropped into a little filigree box on my toilet table. I opened the box and felt around for it. The box was empty—the cuff-link had disappeared!

CHAPTER V.

Gertrude's Engagement.

At ten o'clock the Casanova back brought up three men. They introduced themselves as the coroner of the county and two detectives from

his father's house two nights in succession, stealing in like a thief, when he needed only to ask entrance to be admitted.

The coroner was a very silent man; he took some notes after this, but he seemed anxious to make the next train back to town. He set the request for the following Saturday, gave Mr. Jamieson, the younger of the two detectives, and the more intelligent looking, a few instructions, and, after regretting the unfortunate affair, took his departure, accompanied by the other detective.

I was just beginning to breathe freely when Mr. Jamieson, who had been standing by the window, came over to me.

"The family consists of yourself alone, Miss Innes?"

"My niece is here," I said.

"There is no one but yourself and your niece?"

"My nephew." I had to moisten my lips.

"Oh, a nephew. I should like to see him, if he is here."

"He is not here just now," I said as quietly as I could. "I expect him—at any time."

"He was here yesterday evening, I believe?"

"No—yes."

"Didn't he have a guest with him? Another man?"

"He brought a friend with him to stay over Sunday, a Mr. Bailey."

"Mr. John Bailey, the cashier of the Traders' bank, I believe." And I knew that some one at the Greenwood club had told. "When did they leave?"

"Very early—I don't know at just what time."

Mr. Jamieson turned suddenly and looked at me.



"One Look Was All I Needed."

the city. The coroner led the way at once to the locked wing, and with the aid of one of the detectives examined the rooms and the body. The other detective, after a short scrutiny of the dead man, busied himself with the outside of the house. It was only after they had got a fair idea of things as they were that they sent for me.

I received them in the living room, and I had made up my mind exactly what to tell. I had taken the house for the summer, I said, while the Armstrongs were in California. In spite of a rumor among the servants about strange noises—I cited Thomas—nothing had occurred the first two nights. On the third night I believed that some one had been in the house; I had heard a crashing sound, but being alone with one maid had not investigated. The house had been locked in the morning and apparently undisturbed.

Then, as clearly as I could, I related how, the night before, a shot had roused us; that my niece and I had investigated and found a body; that I did not know who the murdered man was until Mr. Jarvis from the club informed me, and that I knew of no reason why Mr. Arnold Armstrong should steal into his father's house at night. I should have been glad to allow him entrance there at any time.

"Have you reason to believe, Miss Innes," the coroner asked, "that any member of your household, imagining Mr. Armstrong was a burglar, shot him in self-defense?"

"I have no reason for thinking so," I said quietly.

"Your theory is that Mr. Armstrong was followed here by some enemy and shot as he entered the house?"

"I don't think I have a theory," I said.

"The thing that has puzzled me is why Mr. Armstrong should enter

"Please try to be more explicit," he said. "You say your nephew and Mr. Bailey were in the house last night, and yet you and your niece, with some women servants, found the body. Where was your nephew?"

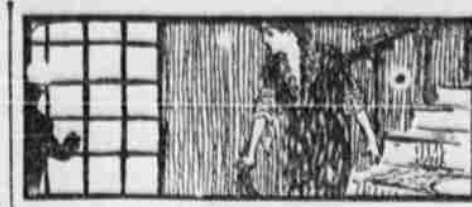
I was entirely desperate by that time.

"I do not know," I cried, "but be sure of this: Halsey knows nothing of this thing, and no amount of circumstantial evidence can make an innocent man guilty."

"Sit down," he said, pushing forward a chair. "There are some things I have to tell you, and, in return, please tell me all you know. Believe me, things always come out. In the first place, Mr. Armstrong was shot from above. The bullet was fired at close range, entered below the shoulder and came out, after passing through the heart, well down the back. In other words, I believe the murderer stood on the stairs and fired down. In the second place, I found on the edge of the billiard table a charred cigar which had burned itself partly out, and a cigarette which had consumed itself to the cork tip. Neither one had been more than lighted, then put down and forgotten. Have you any idea what it was that made your nephew and Mr. Bailey leave their cigars and their game, take out the automobile without calling the chauffeur, and all that at—let me see—certainly before three o'clock in the morning?"

"I don't know," I said, "but depend on it, Mr. Jamieson, Halsey will be back himself to explain everything."
"I sincerely hope so," he said. "Miss Innes, has it occurred to you that Mr. Bailey might know something of this?"

Gertrude had come downstairs and just as he spoke she came in. I saw



her stop suddenly, as if she had been struck.

"He does not," she said in a tone that was not her own. "Mr. Bailey and my brother know nothing of this. The murder was committed at three. They left the house at a quarter before three."

"How do you know that?" Mr. Jamieson asked oddly. "Do you know at what time they left?"

"I do," Gertrude answered firmly. "At a quarter before three my brother and Mr. Bailey left the house, by the main entrance. I—was—there."

"Gertrude," I said excitedly, "you are dreaming! Why, at a quarter to three—"

"Listen," she said. "At half-past two the downstairs telephone rang. I had not gone to sleep, and I heard it. Then I heard Halsey answer it, and in a few minutes he came upstairs and knocked at my door. We—talked for a minute, then I put on my dressing gown and slippers, and went downstairs with him. Mr. Bailey was in the billiard room. We—we all talked together for perhaps ten minutes. Then it was decided that—that they should both go away—"

"Can't you be more explicit?" Mr. Jamieson asked. "Why did they go away?"

"I am only telling you what happened, not why it happened," she said evenly. "Halsey went for the car, and instead of bringing it to the house and rousing people, he went by the lower road from the stable. Mr. Bailey was to meet him at the foot of the lawn. Mr. Bailey left—"

"Which way?" Mr. Jamieson asked sharply.

"By the main entrance. He left—it was a quarter to three. I know exactly."

"The clock in the hall is stopped, Miss Innes," said Jamieson. Nothing seemed to escape him.

"He looked at his watch," she replied, and I could see Mr. Jamieson's eyes snap, as if he had made a discovery. As for myself, during the whole recital I had been plunged into the deepest amazement.

"Will you pardon me for a personal question?" The detective was a youngish man, and I thought he was somewhat embarrassed. "What are your—your relations with Mr. Bailey?"

Gertrude hesitated. Then she came over and put her hand lovingly in mine.

"I am engaged to marry him," she said simply.

I had grown so accustomed to surprises that I could only gasp again, and as for Gertrude, the hand that lay in mine was burning with fever.

"And—after that," Mr. Jamieson went on, "you went directly to bed?"

Gertrude hesitated.

"No," she said finally. "I—I am not nervous, and after I had extinguished the light, I remembered something I had left in the billiard room, and I felt my way back there through the darkness."

"Will you tell me what it was you had forgotten?"

"I cannot tell you," she said slowly. "I—I did not leave the billiard room at once—"

"Why?" The detective's tone was imperative. "This is very important, Miss Innes."

"I was crying," Gertrude said in a low tone. "When the French clock in the drawing room struck three I got up and then—I heard a step on the east porch, just outside the cardroom. Some one with a key was working with the latch, and I thought, of course, of Halsey. When we took the house he called that his entrance, and he had carried a key for it ever since. The door opened and I was about to ask what he had forgotten, when there was a flash and a report. Some heavy body dropped, and, half crazed with terror and shock, I ran through the drawing room and got upstairs—I scarcely remember how."

She dropped into a chair, and I thought Mr. Jamieson must have fished. But he was not through.

"You certainly clear your brother and Mr. Bailey admirably," he said. "The testimony is invaluable, especially in view of the fact that your brother and Mr. Armstrong had, I believe, quarreled rather seriously some time ago."

"Nonsense," I broke in. "Things are bad enough, Mr. Jamieson, without inventing bad feeling where it doesn't exist. Gertrude, I don't think Halsey knew the—the murdered man, did he?"

But Mr. Jamieson was sure of his ground.

(TO BE CONTINUED.)

A New Sun-Defying Cloth.

A new cloth is being made in Calcutta, India, which is manufactured on scientific principles to conform to nature's plan of warding off the sun's rays, as exemplified in the color of the skin and the pigments under the skin. It is the belief of physicians that one of the chief reasons for the many deaths recorded in hot weather is that of improper clothing. The designers of what we must wear to be of the elect may ordain a color or texture thoroughly unsuited to the prevailing climatic conditions, and safety and comfort are often jeopardized in consequence.—Van Norden Magazine.

NEBRASKA IN BRIEF

NEWS NOTES OF INTEREST FROM VARIOUS SECTIONS.

ALL SUBJECTS TOUCHED UPON

Religious, Social, Agricultural, Political and Other Matters Given Due Consideration.

Joseph Carpenter of Franklin county celebrated his ninety-second birthday anniversary at his home in Franklin.

Bancroft will celebrate the Fourth of July this year. It has become the custom of the neighboring towns to alternate on this occasion. This year it is up to Bancroft.

F. J. Hinzle, representing the G. V. Brecht Butcher Supply company of St. Louis, committed suicide in his room at the Meridian hotel in Columbus by cutting his throat with a knife.

Will White, aged about 20 years, son of James R. White, a prominent farmer residing near Sunderland, committed suicide by taking carbolic acid. The body was found in the haymow. No cause given.

William L. Geddes Camp No. 5, United Spanish War Veterans, was organized and mustered at Alliance by Department Commander E. H. Phelps of Lincoln, who visited there.

Albert Craig of O'Dell, Gage county, who was arrested at Summerfield, Kans., recently on the charge of bootlegging, pleaded guilty in the district court and was sentenced to sixty days in the county jail.

Petitions in the line of municipal reform are being circulated in West Point and are meeting with strong support. It is proposed to regulate the hours of closing of the pool rooms of the town and also to prohibit the moving picture theaters from giving their performances on Sundays.

The Valentine Junior State Normal will open in Valentine June 6. The faculty for this year has been selected from among the strongest educators of the state and provision has been made for special instruction in all important lines of teachers work.

The big steel bridge that the Northwestern has been building across the Niobrara river at Valentine is now completed and all trains have been running over it. The bridge has been over a year in being built and is 1,300 feet long and 141 feet high.

Eb. Johns who was convicted in the district court, on the charge of burglarizing the slaughter house of Walter Mitchell at Germantown and stealing fifteen hives therefrom, was sentenced by Judge Corcoran to a term of two and a half years in the penitentiary.

The soldiers of the Spanish war, in conjunction with the Grand Army of the Republic, held memorial services

Fire destroyed the Cox Lumber company yard, the Godbey residence, the Elmer Hathaway office building, the Murphy and Moline real estate offices and William Smith's restaurant at Morrill. The total loss was \$50,000 with insurance of \$30,000.

The crop conditions over this section of the state, says a Cambridge dispatch, are excellent. More than one inch of rain fell here during last week. The farmers have about completed corn planting.

The census department is still gathering up and collating the scattered returns for the Omaha census district, and the final report may not be sent in until after the middle of June.

A reception attended by practically all of the people of Madison and vicinity, was held at the new Union Pacific station from 7:30 to 8:30 p. m., when the depot was formally opened and dedicated. Mayor W. L. Dowling welcomed the officials on the part of the Commercial club and the citizens of Madison, to whom Nelson H. Loomis, general solicitor, made response.

Miss Sarah E. Peck of College View, who three times refused to tell the census enumerator how old she was, and to give him other information he desired, pleaded guilty in federal court to the charge of refusing the information and was fined \$10.

The jury in the case of W. D. Tully against the Grand Island Telephone company, the Grand Island Electric company and the Fairmont Creamery company for damages in the sum of \$13,700 for the death of Stewart Tully, one of the plaintiffs, has returned a verdict of \$2,000 against the defendants in common.

Goldie Morton, a country girl attending the Lyons High school, was successful in carrying off the \$100 prize scholarship, which is offered by the Associated Colleges of the state. She was the valedictorian and was considered the best among eleven of the 1910 class. This will enable her to attend her choice of several colleges in the state.

Valentine has decided to celebrate the Fourth of July this year in a good old rousing celebration.

Bretena Field has brought suit in the district court of Boone county against August Lachnit and August Peterson, saloon keepers at Humphrey, Neb., and John Kasperek, a saloon keeper at Albion, and the Lyon Bonding and Surety company of Omaha, asking for \$10,000 damages, the petition alleging that by reason of sales of liquor to her husband, Martin S. Field, he has failed to support her and she has been damaged in said amount.

GOOD AND WARM.



First Office Boy—I hear your boss made it hot for you yesterday.
Second Office Boy—Yes; he fired me.

Not His Fault.
"I refuse to accept these photographs," said an irate woman to a photographer; "my husband looks like a baboon!"
"I can't help it, madam," replied the photographer; "you chose him, didn't?"

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