

THE CIRCULAR STAIRCASE

By MARY ROBERTS RINEHART
ILLUSTRATIONS BY ROY WALTERS
SYNOPSIS.

Mrs. 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 unreasoning 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. 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. Cashier Bailey of Paul Armstrong's bank, defunct, was arrested, charged with embezzlement. Halsey said Armstrong had wrecked his own bank, and was able to clear Bailey. A telegram contained news that Paul Armstrong was dead. Halsey trapped Mrs. Watson, the housekeeper, while she was stealing from the house.

CHAPTER XII.—Continued.

"I reckon you bettah come in Mis' Innes," he said, speaking cautiously. "It's got so I dunno what to do, and it's bound to come out some time er ruther."

He threw the door open then, and I stepped inside, Halsey close behind. In the sitting room the old negro turned with quiet dignity to Halsey.

"You bettah sit down, sah," he said. "It's a place for a woman, sah."

Things were not turning out the way Halsey expected. He sat down on the center-table, with his hands thrust in his pockets, and watched me as I followed Thomas up the narrow stairs. At the top a woman was standing, and a second glance showed me it was Rosie. She shrank back a little, but I said nothing. And then Thomas motioned to a partly open door, and I went in.

The lodge boasted of three bedrooms upstairs, all comfortably furnished. In this one, the largest and airiest, a night lamp was burning, and by its light I could make out a plain white metal bed. A girl was asleep there—or in a half stupor, for she muttered something now and then. Rosie had taken her courage in her hands, and coming in had turned up the light. It was only then that I knew. Fever-flushed, ill as she was, I recognized Louise Armstrong.

I stood gazing down at her in a stupor of amazement. Louise here, hiding at the lodge, ill and alone! Rosie came up to the bed and smoothed the white counterpane.

"I am afraid she is worse to-night," she ventured at last. I put my hand on the sick girl's forehead. It was burning with fever, and I turned to where Thomas lingered in the hallway.

"Will you tell me what you mean, Thomas Johnson, by not telling me this before?" I demanded indignantly. Thomas quailed.

"Mis' Louise wouldn't let me," he said earnestly. "I wanted to. She ought to 'a' had a doctor the night she came, but she wouldn't hear to it. Is she very bad, Mis' Innes?"

"Bad enough," I said coldly. "Send Mr. Innes up."

Halsey came up the stairs slowly, looking rather interested and inclined to be amused. For a moment he could not see anything distinctly in the darkened room; he stopped, glanced at Rosie and at me, and then his eyes fell on the restless head on the pillow. I think he felt who it was before he really saw her; he crossed the room in a couple of strides and bent over the bed.

"Louise!" he said softly, but she did not reply, and her eyes showed no recognition. Halsey was young, and illness was new to him. He straightened himself slowly, still watching her, and caught my arm.

"She's dyin', Aunt Ray!" he said huskily. "Dyin'! Why, she doesn't know me!"

"Fudge!" I snapped, being apt to grow irritable when my sympathies are aroused. "She's doing nothing of the sort—and don't pinch my arm. If you want something to do, go and choke Thomas."

But at that moment Louise roused from her stupor to cough, and at the end of the paroxysm, as Rosie laid her back, exhausted, she knew us. That was all Halsey wanted; to him consciousness was recovery. He dropped on his knees beside the bed, and tried to tell her she was all right, and we would bring her around in a hurry, and how beautiful she looked—only to break down utterly and have to stop. And at that I came to my senses, and put him out.

"This instant!" I ordered, as he hesitated. "And send Rosie here."

He did not go far. He sat on the top step of the stairs, only leaving to telephone for a doctor, and getting in everybody's way in his eagerness to fetch and carry. I got him away final-

ly, by sending him to fix up the car as a sort of ambulance, in case the doctor would allow the sick girl to be moved. He sent Gertrude down to the lodge loaded with all manner of impossible things, including an armful of Turkish towels and a box of mustard plasters, and as the two girls had known each other somewhat before, Louise brightened perceptibly when she saw Gertrude.

When the doctor from Englewood—the Casanova doctor, Dr. Walker, being away—had started for Sunnyside, and I had got Thomas to stop trying to explain what he did not understand himself, I had a long talk with the old man, and this is what I learned.

On Saturday evening before, about ten o'clock, he had been reading in the sitting room downstairs, when someone rapped at the door. The old man was alone, Warner not having arrived, and at first he was uncertain about opening the door. He did so finally, and was amazed at being confronted by Louise Armstrong. Thomas was an old family servant, having been with the present Mrs. Armstrong since she was a child, and he was overwhelmed at seeing Louise. He saw that she was excited and tired, and he drew her into the sitting room and made her sit down. After a while he went to the house and brought Mrs. Watson, and they talked until late. The old man said Louise was in trouble, and seemed frightened. Mrs. Watson made some tea and took it to the lodge, but Louise made them both promise to keep her presence a secret. She had not known that Sunnyside was rented, and whatever her trouble

her stepfather and the prospect of the immediate return of the family, things had become more and more impossible. I gathered that Thomas was as relieved as I at the turn events had taken. No, she did not know of either of the deaths in the family.

Taken all around, I had only substituted one mystery for another. If I knew now why Rosie had taken the basket of dishes, I did not know who had spoken to her and followed her along the drive. If I knew that Louise was in the lodge, I did not know why she was there. If I knew that Arnold Armstrong had spent some time in the lodge the night before he was murdered, I was no nearer the solution of the crime. Who was the midnight intruder who had so alarmed Liddy and myself? Who had fallen down the clothes chute? Was Gertrude's lover a villain or a victim? Time was to answer all these things.

CHAPTER XIII.

Louise.

The doctor from Englewood came very soon, and I went up to see the sick girl with him. Halsey had gone to supervise the fitting of the car with blankets and pillows, and Gertrude was opening and airing Louise's own rooms at the house. Her private sitting room, bedroom and dressing room were as they had been when we came. They occupied the end of the east wing, beyond the circular staircase, and we had not even opened them.

The girl herself was too ill to notice what was being done. When, with the help of the doctor, who was a fa-



Amazed at Being Confronted by Louise Armstrong.

was, this complicated things. She seemed puzzled. Her stepfather and her mother were still in California—that was all she would say about them. Why she had run away no one could imagine. Mr. Arnold Armstrong was at the Greenwood club, and at last Thomas, not knowing what else to do, went over there along the path. It was almost midnight. Part way over he met Armstrong himself and brought him to the lodge. Mrs. Watson had gone to the house for some bed linen. It having been arranged that under the circumstances Louise would be better at the lodge until morning, Arnold Armstrong and Louise had a long conference, during which he was heard to storm and become very violent. When he left it was after two. He had gone up to the house—Thomas did not know why—and at three o'clock he was shot at the foot of the circular staircase.

The following morning Louise had been ill. She had asked for Arnold, and was told he had left town. Thomas had not the moral courage to tell her of the crime. She refused a doctor, and shrank morbidly from having her presence known. Mrs. Watson and Thomas had had their hands full, and at last Rosie had been enlisted to help them. She carried necessary provisions—little enough—to the lodge, and helped to keep the secret.

Thomas told me quite frankly that he had been anxious to keep Louise's presence hidden for this reason: They had all seen Arnold Armstrong that night, and he, himself, for one, was known to have had no very friendly feelings for the dead man. As to the reason for Louise's flight from California, or why she had not gone to the Fitzhughs', or to some of her people in town, he had no more information than I had. With the death of

therly man with a family of girls at home, we got her to the house and up the stairs into bed, she dropped into a feverish sleep, which lasted until morning. Dr. Stewart—that was the Englewood doctor—stayed almost all night, giving the medicine himself, and watching her closely. Afterward he told me that she had had a narrow escape from pneumonia, and that the cerebral symptoms had been rather alarming. I said I was glad it wasn't an "itis" of some kind, anyhow, and he smiled solemnly.

He left after breakfast, saying that he thought the worst of the danger was over, and that she must be kept very quiet.

"The shock of two deaths, I suppose, has done this," he remarked, picking up his case. "It has been very deplorable."

I hastened to set him right. "She does not know of either, doctor," I said. "Please do not mention them to her."

He looked as surprised as a medical man ever does.

"I do not know the family," he said, preparing to get into his top buggy. "Young Walker, down in Casanova, has been attending them. I understand he is going to marry this young lady."

"You have been misinformed," I said stiffly. "Miss Armstrong is going to marry my nephew."

The doctor smiled as he picked up the reins. "Young ladies are changeable these days," he said. "We thought the wedding was to occur soon. Well, I will stop in this afternoon to see how my patient is getting along."

Some time about noon of that day, Wednesday, Mrs. Ogden Fitzhugh telephoned me. I have the barest acquaintance with her—she managed to be put on the governing board of the



Old Ladies' home and ruins their digestion by sending them ice cream and cake on every holiday. Beyond that, and her reputation at bridge, which is insufferably bad—she is the worst player at the bridge club—I know little of her. It was she who had taken charge of Arnold Armstrong's funeral, however, and I went at once to the telephone.

"Yes," I said, "this is Miss Innes." "Miss Innes," she said volubly. "I have just received a very strange telegram from my cousin, Mrs. Armstrong. Her husband died yesterday in California and—wait, I will read you the message."

I knew what was coming, and I made up my mind at once. If Louise Armstrong had a good and sufficient reason for leaving her people and coming home, a reason, moreover, that kept her from going at once to Mrs. Ogden Fitzhugh, and brought her to the lodge at Sunnyside instead, it was not my intention to betray her. Louise herself must notify her people. I do not justify myself now, but remember, I was in a peculiar position toward the Armstrong family. I was connected most unpleasantly with a cold-blooded crime, and my niece and nephew were practically beggared, either directly or indirectly, through the head of the family.

Mrs. Fitzhugh had found the message.

"Paul died yesterday. Heart disease," she read. "Wire at once if Louise is with you. You see, Miss Innes, Louise must have started east, and Fanny is alarmed about her."

"Yes," I said. "Louise is not here," Mrs. Fitzhugh went on, "and none of her friends—the few who are still in town—have seen her. I called you because Sunnyside was not rented when she went away, and Louise might have gone there."

"I am sorry, Mrs. Fitzhugh, but I cannot help you," I said, and was immediately filled with compunction. Suppose Louise grew worse? Who was I to play Providence in this case? The anxious mother certainly had a right to know that her daughter was in good hands. So I broke in on Mrs. Fitzhugh's voluble excuses for disturbing me.

"Mrs. Fitzhugh," I said. "I was going to let you think I knew nothing about Louise Armstrong, but I have changed my mind. Louise is here, with me." There was a clatter of ejaculations at the other end of the wire. "She is ill, and not able to be moved. Moreover, she is unable to see any one. I wish you would wire her mother that she is with me, and tell her not to worry. No, I do not know why she came east."

"But my dear Miss Innes!" Mrs. Fitzhugh began. I cut in ruthlessly. "I will send for you as soon as she can see you," I said. "No, she is not in a critical state now, but the doctor says she must have absolute quiet."

When I had hung up the receiver, I sat down to think. So Louise had fled from her people in California, and had come east alone! It occurred to me that Dr. Walker might be concerned in it, might possibly have bothered her with unwelcome attentions; but it seemed to me that Louise was hardly a girl to take refuge in flight under such circumstances. She had always been high-spirited, with the well-poised head and buoyant step of the outdoors girl. It must have been much more in keeping with Louise's character, as I knew it, to resent vigorously any unwelcome attentions from Dr. Walker. It was the suitor whom I should have expected to see in headlong flight, not the lady in the case.

The puzzle was no clearer at the end of the half hour. I picked up the morning papers, which were still full of the looting of the Traders' bank, the interest at fever height again, on account of Paul Armstrong's death. The bank examiners were working on the books, and said nothing for publication; John Bailey had been released on bond. The body of Paul Armstrong would arrive Sunday and would be buried from the Armstrong town house. There were rumors that the dead man's estate had been a comparatively small one. The last paragraph was the important one.

Walter P. Broadhurst of the Marine bank had produced 200 American Traction bonds, which had been placed as security with the Marine bank for a loan of \$100,000, made to Paul Armstrong, just before his California trip. The bonds were a part of the missing traction bonds from the Traders' bank! While this involved the late president of the wrecked bank, to my mind it by no means cleared its cashier.

(TO BE CONTINUED.)

Why He Did Not Come.

"Why didn't you come, Bobby, when I first called to you?" asked a mother of her six-year-old son.

"Because you told me last week, mamma," replied Bobby shrewdly, "never to accept an invitation unless it was repeated. So many people invite you once out of politeness but really don't want you to come."

Metropolis of the Azores.

Ponta Delgada, with a population of 23,000, is the largest city in the Azores islands.

GOT PHOTOGRAPH OF PANTHER

Exciting Experience Which Few Members of the Party Care to Go Through Again.

A panther is not easily killed, and will often revive with very unpleasant results, as on a certain occasion in the Decatur. He appeared to be quite dead, and one of the spectators rushed up with a camera on a stand to obtain a picture of the supreme moment. He got his photograph, and, strange to say, it survived what followed; but no sooner had he taken it than the panther revived, tore himself loose, and went for the photographer. Somehow the man escaped, but the camera was sent flying, and, disconcerted by his encounter with it, the panther turned and made for the nearest tree, up which he went as quickly as a monkey. Now, the tree was crowded with interested spectators, and for three or four strenuous seconds (until the panther was shot) we enjoyed a spectacle of natives dropping to earth with loud thuds like ripe plums from a jungle tree as the panther approached them.—Wide World Magazine.

Unflattering Truth.

A Chicago physician gleefully tells a child story at his own expense. The five children of some faithful patients had measles, and during their rather long stay in the improvised home hospital they never failed to greet his daily visit with pleased acclamation. The good doctor felt duly flattered, but rashly pressed the children, in the lulls of convalescence, for the reason of this sudden affection. At last the youngest and most indiscreet let slip the better truth.

"We felt so sick that we wanted awfully to do something naughty, but we were afraid to be bad for fear you and the nurse would give us more horrid medicine. So we were awfully glad to see you, always, 'cause you made us stick out our tongues. We stuck 'em out awful far!"

What's the Answer?

We're ready to quit! After sending two perfectly rhymed, carefully scanned, pleasurable sentimental pieces of poetic junk to seventeen magazines and having them returned seventeen times, we turn to the current issue of a new monthly and find a "pome" modeled after Kipling's "Vampire," and in which homo is supposed to rhyme with alone, run on page eleven with all the swell curlycues ordinarily surrounding a piece of real art. If poetizing is a gift we are convinced that this poet's must have been. As for us, we are on our way to the woodshed to study the psychology of the ax or any other old thing that hasn't to do with selling poetry to magazines.

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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 inflamed 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.

"Foot-Tabs for Foot-Tubs."

Tactful.

A woman with a pronounced squint went to a fashionable photographer. He looked at her and she looked at him and both were embarrassed.

He spoke first.

"Won't you permit me," he said, "to take your portrait in profile? There is a certain shyness about one of your eyes which is as difficult in art as it is fascinating in nature." Beacon.

Trying to Satisfy Him.

Squeamish Guest (as waiter places water before him)—Walter, are you sure this is boiled distilled water? Water—I am positive, sir. Squeamish Guest (putting it to his lips)—But it seems to taste pretty hard for distilled water. Water—That's because it's hard-boiled distilled water, sir.

Important to Mothers

Examine carefully every bottle of CASTORIA, a safe and sure remedy for infants and children, and see that it bears the Signature of *Dr. J. C. Watson*. In Use For Over 30 Years. The Kind You Have Always Bought.

Coming Down to Earth.

"Happiness," declaimed the philosopher, "is in the pursuit of something, not in the catching of it." "Have you ever," interrupted the plain citizen, "chased the last car on a rainy night?"

Hot-Headed If You Mention It.

Scott—Jones is a cool-headed chap. Mott—Naturally! He's as bald as a door knob.

Silence!

The instinct of modesty natural to every woman is often a great hindrance to the cure of womanly diseases. Women shrink from the personal questions of the local physician which seem indelicate. The thought of examination is abhorrent to them, and so they endure in silence a condition of disease which surely progresses from bad to worse.

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You can't afford to accept a secret nostrum as a substitute for this non-alcoholic medicine of KNOWN COMPOSITION.

The Lost Chords. The village concert was to be a great affair. They had the singers, they had the program sellers, they had the doorkeepers and they would doubtless have the audience. All they needed was the piano, but that they lacked. Nor could they procure one anywhere.

At last the village organist learned that one was possessed by Farmer Hayseed, who lived "at the top o' the 'ill." Forthwith he set out with two men and a van.

"Take it, an' welcome," said Hayseed cordially. "I've no objections s'long as ye put 'Pyenner by Hayseed' on the program."

"An' I wish 'em joy of it," murmured Mrs. Hayseed, as the van disappeared from sight.

"Wish 'em joy of it," repeated Hayseed. "What d'ye mean?"

"Well, I mean I only 'ope they'll find all the notes they want," replied the good woman. "'Cos, ye see, when I wanted a bit o' wire I allus went to the old planner for it."

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Household Consternation.

"Charley, dear!" exclaimed young Mrs. Torkins, "the baby has swallowed a gold dollar!"

"Great heavens! Something must be done. There will be no end to the cost of living if he gets habits like that!"

For Red, Itching Eyelids, Crusts, Styes, Falling Eyelashes and All Eyes That Need Care Try Murine Eye Salve, Aseptic Tubes—Trial Size—25c. Ask Your Druggist or Write Murine Eye Remedy Co., Chicago.

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