

THE CIRCULAR STAIRCASE

BY MARY ROBERTS RINEHART
ILLUSTRATIONS BY ROY WINTER
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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. 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. Chaider 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. At the lodge Miss Innes and Halsey found Halsey's fiancée, Louise Armstrong, sister of the dead man. She was believed to be in California. The lodge keeper told Miss Innes that Louise and Arnold had had a long talk the night of the murder. Louise was prostrated.

CHAPTER XIII.—Continued.

The gardener mentioned by Halsey came out about two o'clock in the afternoon, and walked up from the station. I was favorably impressed by him. His references were good—he had been employed by the Brays' until they went to Europe, and he looked young and vigorous. He asked for one assistant, and I was glad enough to get off so easily. He was a pleasant-faced young fellow, with black hair and blue eyes, and his name was Alexander Graham. I have been particular about Alex, because, as I said before, he played an important part later.

That afternoon I had a new insight into the character of the dead banker. I had my first conversation with Louise. She sent for me, and against my better judgment I went.

She held out her hand and I took it between both of mine.

"What can I say to you, Miss Innes?" she said slowly. "To have come like this—"

I thought she was going to break down, but she did not.

"You are not to think of anything but of getting well," I said, patting her hand. "When you are better, I am going to scold you for not coming here at once. This is your home, my dear, and of all people in the world, Halsey's old aunt ought to make you welcome."

She smiled a little, sadly, I thought.

"I ought not to see Halsey," she said. "Miss Innes, there are a great many things you will never understand, I am afraid. I am an impostor on your sympathy, because I—stay here and let you lavish care on me, and all the time I know you are going to despise me."

"Nonsense!" I said briskly. "Why, what would Halsey do to me if I even ventured such a thing? He is so big and masterful that if I dared to be

anything but rapturous over you, he would throw me out of a window. Indeed, he would be quite capable of it."

She seemed scarcely to hear my facetious tone. She had eloquent brown eyes—the Inneses are fair, and prone to a grayish-green optic that is better for use than appearance—and they seemed now to be clouded with trouble.

"Poor Halsey!" she said softly.

"Miss Innes, I cannot marry him, and I am afraid to tell him. I am a coward—a coward!"

I sat beside the bed and stared at her. She was too ill to argue with, and, besides, sick people take queer fancies.

"We will talk about that when you are stronger," I said gently.

"But there are some things I must tell you," she insisted. "You must wonder how I came here, and why I stayed hidden at the lodge. Dear old



"I Am Very Sorry You Have Made This Decision," He Said.

Thomas has been almost crazy, Miss Innes. I did not know that Sunnyside was rented. I knew my mother wished to rent it, without telling my—stepfather, but the news must have reached her after I left. When I started east, I had only one idea—to be alone with my thoughts for a time, to bury myself here. Then, I—must have taken a cold on the train."

"You came east in clothing suitable for California," I said, "and like all young girls nowadays, I don't suppose you wear flannels." But she was not listening.

"Miss Innes," she said, "has my stepbrother Arnold gone away?"

"What do you mean?" I asked, startled. Louise was literal.

"He didn't come back that night," she said, "and it was so important that I should see him."

"I believe he has gone away," I replied uncertainly. "Isn't it something that we could attend to instead?"

But she shook her head. "I must do it myself," she said dully.

Halsey came to the door at that moment and I could hear him coaxing Liddy for admission to the sick room.

"Shall I bring him in?" I asked Louise, uncertain what to do.

The girl seemed to shrink back among her pillows at the sound of his voice. I was vaguely irritated with her; there are few young fellows like Halsey—straightforward, honest, and willing to sacrifice everything for the one woman. I knew one once, more than 30 years ago, who was like that; he died a long time ago. And sometimes I take out his picture, with its cane and its queer silk hat, and look at it. But of late years it has grown too painful; he is always a boy—and I am an old woman. I would not bring him back if I could.

Perhaps it was some such memory that made me call out sharply.

"Come in, Halsey." And then I took my sewing and went into the boudoir beyond, to play propriety. I did not try to hear what they said, but every word came through the open door with curious distinctness. Halsey had evidently gone over to the bed and I suppose he kissed her. There was silence for a moment, as if words were superfluous things.

"I have been almost wild, sweetheart," Halsey's voice. "Why didn't you trust me, and send for me before?"

"It was because I couldn't trust myself," she said in a low tone. "I am too weak to struggle to-day; oh, Halsey, how I have wanted to see you!"

There was something I did not hear, then Halsey again.

"We could go away," he was saying. "What does it matter about any one in the world but just the two of us? To be always together, like this, hand in hand; Louise—don't tell me it isn't going to be. I won't believe you."

"You don't know; you don't know," Louise repeated dully. "Halsey, I care—you know that—but not enough to marry you."

"That is not true, Louise," he said sternly. "You cannot look at me with your honest eyes and say that."

"I cannot marry you," she repeated miserably. "It's bad enough, isn't it? Don't make it worse. Some day, before long, you will be glad."

"Then it is because you have never loved me." There were depths of hurt pride in his voice. "You saw how much I loved you, and you let me think you cared—for a while. No—that isn't like you, Louise. There is something you haven't told me. Is it—because there is some one else?"

"Yes," almost inaudibly.

"Louise! Oh, I don't believe it!"

"It is true," she said sadly. "Halsey, you must not try to see me again. As soon as I can, I am going away from here—where you are all so much kind-

er than I deserve. And whatever you hear about me, try to think as well of me as you can. I am going to marry—another man. How you must hate me—hate me!"

I could hear Halsey cross the room to the window. Then, after a pause, he went back to her again. I could hardly sit still; I wanted to go in and give her good shaking.

"Then it's all over," he was saying with a long breath. "The plans we made together, the hopes, the—all of it—over! Well, I'll not be a baby, and I'll give you up the minute you say 'I don't love you and I do love—some one else!'"

"I can not say that," she breathed, "but, very soon, I shall marry—the other man."

I could hear Halsey's low triumphant laugh.

"I defy him," he said. "Sweetheart, as long as you care for me, I am not afraid."

The wind slammed the door between the two rooms just then, and I could hear nothing more, although I moved my chair quite close. After a discreet interval, I went into the other room and found Louise alone.

She was staring with sad eyes at the cherub painted on the ceiling over the bed, and because she looked tired I did not disturb her.

CHAPTER XIV.

An Egg-Nog and a Telegram.

We had discovered Louise at the lodge Tuesday night. It was Wednesday I had my interview with her. Thursday and Friday were uneventful, save as they marked improvement in our patient. Gertrude spent almost all the time with her, and the two had grown to be great friends. But certain things hung over me constantly; the coroner's inquest on the death of Arnold Armstrong, to be held Saturday, and the arrival of Mrs. Armstrong and young Dr. Walker, bringing the body of the dead president of the Traders' bank. We had not told Louise of either death.

Then, too, I was anxious about the children. With their mother's inheritance swept away in the wreck of the bank, and with their love affairs in a disastrous condition, things could scarcely be worse. Added to that, the cook and Liddy had a flare up over the proper way to make beef-tea for Louise, and, of course, the cook left.

Mrs. Watson had been glad enough, I think, to turn Louise over to our care, and Thomas went upstairs night and morning to greet his young mistress from the doorway. Poor Thomas! He had the faculty—found still in some old negroes, who cling to the traditions of slavery days—of making his employer's interest his. It was always "we" with Thomas. I miss him sorely; pipe-smoking, obsequious, not over reliable, kindly old man!

On Thursday Mr. Harton, the Armstrongs' legal adviser, called up from town. He had been advised, he said, that Mrs. Armstrong was coming east with her husband's body and would arrive Monday. He came with some hesitation, at last, to the fact that he had been further instructed to ask me to relinquish my lease on Sunnyside, as it was Mrs. Armstrong's desire to come directly there.

I was aghast.

"Here!" I said. "Surely you are mistaken, Mr. Harton. I should think, after—what happened here only a few days ago, she would never wish to come back."

"Nevertheless," he replied, "she is most anxious to come. This is what she says: 'Use every possible means to have Sunnyside vacated. Must go there at once.'"

"Mr. Harton," I said testily, "I am not going to do anything of the kind.



I and mine have suffered enough at the hands of this family. I rented the house at an exorbitant figure and I have moved out here for the summer. My city home is dismantled and in the hands of decorators. I have been here one week, during which I have had not a single night of uninterrupted sleep, and I intend to stay until I have recuperated. Moreover, if Mr. Armstrong died insolvent, as I believe was the case, his widow ought to be glad to be rid of so expensive a piece of property."

The lawyer cleared his throat.

"I am very sorry you have made this decision," he said. "Miss Innes, Mrs. Fitzhugh tells me Louise Armstrong is with you."

"She is."

"Has she been informed of this—double bereavement?"

"Not yet," I said. "She has been very ill; perhaps to-night she can be told."

"It is very sad; very sad," he said. "I have a telegram for her, Miss Innes. Shall I send it out?"

"Better open it and read it to me," I suggested. "If it is important, that will save time."

There was a pause while Mr. Harton opened the telegram. Then he read it slowly, judicially.

"Watch for Nina Carrington Home Monday. Signed F. L. W."

"Hum!" I said. "Watch for Nina Carrington Home Monday." Very well, Mr. Harton, I will tell her, but she is not in condition to watch for any one."

"Well, Miss Innes, if you decide to—er—relinquish the lease, let me know," the lawyer said.

"I shall not relinquish it," I replied, and I imagined his irritation from the way he hung up the receiver.

I wrote the telegram down word for word, afraid to trust my memory, and decided to ask Dr. Stewart how soon Louise might be told the truth. The closing of the Traders' bank I considered unnecessary for her to know, but the death of her stepfather and stepbrother must be broken to her soon, or she might hear it in some unexpected and shocking manner.

Dr. Stewart came about four o'clock, bringing his leather satchel into the house with a great deal of care, and opening it at the foot of the stairs to show me a dozen big yellow eggs nesting among the bottles.

"Real eggs," he said proudly. "None of your anemic store eggs, but the real thing—some of them still warm. Feel them! Egg-nog for Miss Louise!"

He was beaming with satisfaction, and before he left, he insisted on going back to the pantry and making an egg-nog with his own hands. Somehow, all the time he was doing it, I had a vision of Dr. Willoughby, my nerve specialist in the city, trying to make an egg-nog. I wondered if he ever prescribed anything so plebeian—and so delicious. And while Dr. Stewart whisked the eggs he talked.

"I said to Mrs. Stewart," he confided, a little red in the face from the exertion, "after I went home the other day, that you would think me an old gossip, for saying what I did about Walker and Miss Louise."

"Nothing of the sort," I protested.

"The fact is," he went on, evidently justifying himself, "I got that piece of information just as we get a lot of things, through the kitchen end of the house. Young Walker's chauffeur—Walker's more fashionable than I am, and he goes around the country in a Stanhope car—well, his chauffeur comes to see our servant girl, and he told her the whole thing. I thought it was probable, because Walker spent a lot of time up here last summer, when the family was here, and besides, Riggs, that's Walker's man, had a very pat little story about the doctor's building a house on this property, just at the foot of the hill. The sugar, please."

The egg-nog was finished. Drop by drop the liquor had cooked the egg, and now, with a final whisk, a last toss in the shaker, it was ready, a symphony in gold and white. The doctor sniffed it.

"Real eggs, real milk, and a touch of real Kentucky whisky," he said.

He insisted on carrying it up himself, but at the foot of the stairs he paused.

"Riggs said the plans were drawn for the house," he said, harking back to the old subject. "Drawn by Huston in town. So I naturally believed him."

When the doctor came down, I was ready with a question.

"Doctor," I asked, "is there any one in the neighborhood named Carrington?"

"Carrington?" He wrinkled his forehead. "Carrington? No, I don't remember any such family. There used to be Covingtons down the creek."

"The name was Carrington," I said, and the subject lapsed.

(TO BE CONTINUED.)

Woman a Rural Mail Carrier.

Mrs. Carrie Doherty King, of Crystal Springs, Miss., is the only woman mail carrier in her state. She delivers mail on a rural route, making a circuit of about 25 miles a day. In her girlhood she won many trophies for her horsemanship, an accomplishment that is now of great service to her.

CARING FOR FLOORS

MUCH WORK TO KEEP THE HARDWOOD VARIETY IN ORDER.

They Are Recognized as the Best for the Average House, But Daily Wiping and Almost Constant Polishing Are Necessary.

Undoubtedly the best floors for the average house are hardwood, but to keep them in order requires work. Daily wiping and polishing are necessary, but the beauty resultant more than repays the trouble, and such floors, unless they are abused, wear well. Their expensiveness differs according as to whether or not they are parquetry or plain. If drawing and living room floors can be finished with a border they are more effective, but even in those places design is not necessary. What is required is perfect position of the boards, that is, close together and smooth, so they can be kept in the highest state of polish and cleanliness.

When a house that is occupied the entire year is fitted with hardwood floors the problem of carpeting is solved, for in the winter rugs can be used, while in the summer the boards may be left uncovered. The latter effect is cool and pretty.

For general durability there are coverings which conceal unfinished flooring and are more easily kept clean than carpeting. In these days of frequent moving, when housekeepers do not like to have carpets and matting cut to fit rooms, rugs of endless variety and material come in prices which are equally varied. A wilton or tapestry carpet cut like a large rug and finished with a wide border is practical in many different places, and a rough floor may have a border stained to make a suitable finish.

For summer, or to use all the year in bedrooms, mats of straw are extremely pretty. They come in straw colored grounds with designs of various sizes. They wear well and are easily kept clean.

Nothing could be prettier than some of the hand woven rag rugs. They have the merit of washing, when soiled, and have sufficient warmth to be good for the winter and yet light enough for summer wear. In many summer houses they are used exclusively in the upstairs rooms and large ones are exceedingly nice in dining rooms. They can be woven to order and for dining rooms round ones showing a border of contrasting color are both effective and durable.

Rag carpeting also comes now by the yard and by many persons is preferred to matting because of the way dust sifts through the latter. Rag stair carpeting is extremely pretty.

A floor covering which has cork in its composition has come into favor for bed and billiard rooms as well as dining rooms. It is rather thick and has some "give" and may be washed with soap and water as a bare floor. It is the common covering in many English nurseries owing to its hygienic qualities. The stuff comes in only a few plain colors and may serve as a background for rugs.

Carving Meat.

To successfully carve meat one must know how to control the knife. When carving a slice of meat, after the first incision has been made, the angle at which the knife is held must never be altered, or a jagged slice will be the result.

The cut should be direct, sharp and incisive. The saw-like motion should not enter into the operation.

As a rule the knife should be held firmly but applied lightly, so that too much juice will not be squeezed out from the meat. By using the point of the knife lightly as a wedge and the fork as a lever, even a big fowl may be easily jointed, provided the carver is aware of how the joint is exactly situated and held together.

Saimon, Epicurean Style.

Put two heaping tablespoonfuls of butter into a saucepan, add a sliced onion, sliced carrot, bunch of parsley and stalk of celery. Fry, and when slightly brown add two cupfuls of water, two cupfuls of white wine, and when boiling put in two pounds of salmon to boil till ready. Take out the fish, remove the skin from it, coat with melted butter and fine bread crumbs and set in a hot oven to brown a little. Meanwhile reduce the liquor in which it was boiled, then strain it and thicken with flour and butter, season with salt and pepper and serve separately with the fish.

Caramel Pie.

Brown three-fourths of a cup of sugar, and a pint of sweet milk in which are dissolved two tablespoonfuls of flour, and stir until smooth. Whip in the well-beaten yolks of two eggs, and a tablespoonful of melted butter. Stir until thick, then take from the fire. Add vanilla to taste and pour into an open crust that has been already baked. When the filling is baked drop on top of the pie spoonfuls of the whites that have been whipped light with a little sugar. The effect is pretty.

Bananas a La West.

Strip the peel from any number of bananas, being careful to remove all the fine bitter strings. Halve each crosswise, dip into sweetened lemon juice, then roll in finely-chopped nuts. Lay on a buttered pan and bake in a very hot oven until they can be easily pierced with a fork; this will take about twelve minutes. Serve either hot or cold.

WEAK KIDNEYS WEAKEN THE WHOLE BODY.

No chain is stronger than its weakest link. No man is stronger than his kidneys. Overwork, colds, strains, etc., weaken the kidneys and the whole body suffers. Don't neglect the slightest kidney ailment. Begin using Doan's Kidney Pills at once. They are especially for sick kidneys.

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Remember the name—Doan's. For sale by all dealers. 50 cents a box. Foster-Milburn Co., Buffalo, N. Y.

Aims and the Man.

"Sure Father Flaherty was a good man," Mr. Murphy said of the deceased parish priest. "He hated sin but he loved the sinner, and he was all compassion and patience and wisdom. There never was another like 'im 'r holdin' up hope to th' poor battered man that had anny desire fr good."

"Faith," said he to Con Meehan, th' toime th' bh'y was down an' out, 'faith, this soide av paradise 'tist all beginnin' again, over an' over, an' tin toimes over!"

"An' that keen," continued Mr. Murphy, "'twas niver worth while to keep back part av th' price av th' land! Wid a twinkle in his eye he'd see clean through anny Ananias that liver walked."

"An' gin'rons!" Mr. Murphy's voice dropped to a lower key and his eyes were wet as he added, "His hand was always in his pocket, an' whin they prepared him fr burial they found his right arm longer than his left wid stretchin' it out to th' poor."—Youth's Companion.

A Mean Man.

"Is your wife going to Europe this summer?"

"No. I've bribed a fortune teller to warn her to watch for a slim blonde woman who is coming into my life."

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