

THE CIRCULAR STAIRCASE

By MARY ROBERTS RINEHART
ILLUSTRATIONS BY ROY WILFONG
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SYNOPSIS.

Miss Innes, splendor and guardian of Gertrude and Liddy, 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. Unusually 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 hall. 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 Bailey, 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 responds 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 announced. Halsey's fiancée, 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 prowler was heard in the house. Louise was found at the bottom of the circular staircase.

CHAPTER XVI.—Continued.

"I was not sleeping well," she began, "partly, I think, because I had slept during the afternoon. Liddy brought me some hot milk at ten o'clock and I slept until 12. Then I awakened—and I got to thinking about things, and worrying, so I could not go to sleep."

"I was wondering why I had not heard from Arnold since—the since I saw him that night at the lodge. I was afraid he was ill, because—he was to have done something for me, and he had not come back. It must have been three when I heard some one rapping. I sat up and listened, to be quite sure, and the rapping kept up. I was cautious, and I was about to call Liddy. Then suddenly I thought I knew what it was. The east entrance and circular staircase were always used by Arnold when he was out late, and sometimes when he forgot his key, he would rap and I would go down and let him in. I thought he had come back to see me—I didn't think about the time, for his hours were always erratic. But I was afraid I was too weak to get down the stairs. The knocking kept up, and just as I was about to call Liddy, she ran through the room and out into the hall. I got up then, feeling weak and dizzy, and put on my dressing-gown. If it was Arnold, I knew I must see him."

"It was very dark everywhere, but, of course, I knew my way. I felt along for the stair-rail, and went down as quickly as I could. The knocking had stopped, and I was afraid I was too late. I got to the foot of the staircase and over to the door on to the east veranda. I had never thought of anything but that it was Arnold, until I reached the door. It was unlocked and opened about an inch. Everything was black; it was perfectly dark outside. I felt very queer and shaky. Then I thought perhaps Arnold had used his key; he did—strange things sometimes, and I turned around. Just as I reached the foot of the staircase I thought I heard some one coming. My nerves were going anyhow, there in the dark, and I could scarcely stand. I got up as far as the third or fourth step; then I felt that some one was coming toward me on the staircase. The next instant a hand met mine on the stair-rail. Some one brushed past me, and I screamed. Then I must have fainted."

That was Louise's story. There could be no doubt of its truth, and the thing that made it inexpressibly awful to me was that the poor girl had crept down to answer the summons of a brother who would never need her kindly offices again. Twice, now, without apparent cause, some one had entered the house by means of the east entrance; had apparently gone his way unhindered through the house, and gone out again as he had entered. Had this unknown visitor been there a third time, the night Arnold Armstrong was murdered? Or a fourth, the time Mr. Jamieson had locked some one in the clothes chute?

Sleep was impossible, I think, for any of us. We dispersed finally to bathe and dress, leaving Louise little the worse for her experience. But I determined that before the day was over she must know the true state of affairs. Another decision I made, and I put it into execution immediately after breakfast. I had one of the unused bedrooms in the east wing, back along the small corridor, prepared for occupancy, and from that time on Alex, the gardener, slept there. One man in that barn of a house was an absurdity, with things happening all the time, and I must say that Alex was as unobjectionable as any one could possibly have been.

The next morning, also, Halsey and I made an exhaustive examination of the circular staircase, the small entry at its foot, and the cardroom opening from it. There was no evidence of anything unusual the night before, and



"My Home Is in Englewood," the Doo for Began.

had we not ourselves heard the rapping noises, I should have felt that Louise's imagination had run away with her. The outer door was closed and locked, and the staircase curved above us, for all the world like any other staircase.

Halsey, who had never taken seriously my account of the night Liddy and I were there alone, was grave enough now. He examined the paneling of the wainscoting above and below the stairs, evidently looking for a secret door, and suddenly there flashed into my mind the recollection of a scrap of paper that Mr. Jamieson had found among Arnold Armstrong's effects. As nearly as possible I repeated its contents to him, while Halsey took them down in a note-book.

"I wish you had told me this before," he said, as he put the memorandum carefully away. We found nothing at all in the house, and I expected little from any examination of the porch and grounds. But as we opened the outer door something fell into the entry with a clatter. It was a cue from the billiard room.

Halsey picked it up with an exclamation. "That's careless enough," he said. "Some of the servants have been amusing themselves." I was far from convinced. Not one of the servants would go into that wing at night unless driven by dire necessity. And a billiard cue! As a weapon of either offense or defense it was an absurdity, unless one accepted Liddy's hypothesis of a ghost, and even then, as Halsey pointed out, a billiard-playing ghost would be a very modern evolution of an ancient institution.

That afternoon we, Gertrude, Halsey and I, attended the coroner's inquest in town. Dr. Stewart had been summoned also, it transpiring that in that early Sunday morning, when Gertrude and I had gone to our rooms, he had been called to view the body. We went, the four of us, in the machine, preferring the execrable roads to the matinee train, with half of Casanova staring at us. And on the way we decided to say nothing of Louise and her interview with her stepbrother the night he died. The girl was in trouble enough as it was.

CHAPTER XVII.

A Hint of Scandal.

In giving the gist of what happened at the inquest, I have only one excuse—to recall to the reader the events of the night of Arnold Armstrong's murder. Many things had occurred which were not brought out at the inquest and some things were told there that were new to me. Altogether, it was a gloomy affair, and the six men in the corner, who constituted the coroner's jury, were evidently the merest puppets in the hands of that all-powerful gentleman, the coroner.

Gertrude and I sat well back, with our veils down. There were a number of people I knew: Barbara Fitzhugh, in extravagant mourning—she always went into black on the slightest provocation, because it was becoming—and Mr. Jarvis, the man who had come over from the Greenwood club the night of the murder. Mr. Harton was there, too, looking impatient as the inquest dragged, but alive to every particle of evidence. From a corner Mr. Jamieson was watching the proceedings intently.

Dr. Stewart was called first. His evidence was told briefly, and amounted to this: On the Sunday morning previous, at a quarter before five, he had been called to the telephone. The message was from a Mr. Jarvis, who asked him to come at once to Sunnyside,

as there had been an accident there, and Mr. Arnold Armstrong had been shot. He dressed hastily, gathered up some instruments, and drove to Sunnyside.

He was met by Mr. Jarvis, who took him at once to the east wing. There, just as he had fallen, was the body of Arnold Armstrong. There was no need of the instruments; the man was dead. In answer to the coroner's question—no, the body had not been moved, save to turn it over. It lay at the foot of the circular staircase. Yes, he believed death had been instantaneous. The body was still somewhat warm and rigor mortis had not set in. It occurred late in cases of sudden death. No, he believed the probability of suicide might be eliminated; the wounds could have been self-inflicted, but with difficulty, and there had been no weapon found.

The doctor's examination was over, but he hesitated and cleared his throat.

"Mr. Coroner," he said, "at the risk of taking up valuable time, I would like to speak of an incident that may or may not throw some light on this matter."

The audience was alert at once. "Kindly proceed, doctor," the coroner said.

"My home is in Englewood, two miles from Casanova," the doctor began. "In the absence of Dr. Walker, a number of Casanova people have been consulting me. A month ago—five weeks, to be exact—a woman whom I had never seen came to my office. She was in deep mourning and kept her veil down, and she brought for examination a child, a boy of six. The little fellow was ill; it looked like typhoid, and the mother was frantic. She wanted a permit to admit the youngster to the Children's hospital in town here, where I am a member of the staff, and I gave her one. The incident would have escaped me, but for a curious thing. Two days before Mr. Armstrong was shot, I was sent for to go to the Country club; some one had been struck with a golf-ball that had gone wild. It was late when I left—I was on foot, and about a mile from the club, on the Clayburg road. I met two people. They were disputing violently, and I had no difficulty in recognizing Mr. Armstrong. The woman, beyond doubt, was the one who had consulted me about the child."

All at this scandal, Mrs. Ogden Fitzhugh sat up very straight. Jamieson was looking slightly skeptical, and the coroner made a note.

"The Children's hospital, you say, doctor?" he asked.

"Yes. But the child, who was entered as Lucien Wallace, was taken away by his mother two weeks ago. I have tried to trace them and failed."

All at once I remembered the telegram sent to Louise by some one signed F. L. W.—presumably Dr. Walker. Could the veiled woman be the Nina Carrington of the message? But it was only idle speculation. I had no way of finding out, and the inquest was proceeding.

The report of the coroner's physician came next. The post-mortem examination showed that the bullet had entered the chest in the fourth left intercostal space and had taken an oblique course downward and backward, piercing both the heart and lungs. The left lung was collapsed, and the exit point of the ball had been found in the muscles of the back to the left of the spinal column. It was improbable that such a wound had been self-inflicted, and its oblique downward course pointed to the fact that the shot had been fired from above. In other words, as the murdered man had been found dead at the foot of a staircase, it was probable that the shot had been fired by



some one higher up on the stairs. There were no marks of powder. The bullet, a 38 caliber, had been found in the dead man's clothing, and was shown to the jury.

Mr. Jarvis was called next, but his testimony amounted to little. He had been summoned by telephone to Sunnyside, had come over at once with the steward and Mr. Winthrop, at present out of town. They had been admitted by the housekeeper, and had found the body lying at the foot of the staircase. He had made a search for a weapon, but there was none around. The outer entry door in the east wing had been unfastened and was open about an inch.

I had been growing more and more nervous. When the coroner called Mr. John Bailey, the room was filled with suppressed excitement. Mr. Jamieson went forward and spoke a few words to the coroner, who nodded. Then Halsey was called.

"Mr. Innes," the coroner said, "will you tell under what circumstances you saw Mr. Arnold Armstrong the night he died?"

"I saw him first at the Country club," Halsey said quietly. He was rather pale, but very composed. "I stopped there with my automobile for gasoline. Mr. Armstrong had been playing cards. When I saw him there he was coming out of the cardroom talking to Mr. John Bailey."

"The nature of the discussion—was it amicable?"

Halsey hesitated. "They were having a dispute," he said. "I asked Mr. Bailey to leave the club with me and come to Sunnyside over Sunday."

"Isn't it a fact, Mr. Innes, that you took Mr. Bailey away from the clubhouse because you were afraid there would be blows?"

"The situation was unpleasant," Halsey said evasively.

"At that time had you any suspicion that the Traders' bank had been wrecked?"

"No."

"What occurred next?"

"Mr. Bailey and I talked in the billiard room until 2:30."

"And Mr. Arnold Armstrong came there, while you were talking?"

"Yes. He came about half-past two. He rapped at the east door, and I admitted him."

The silence in the room was intense. Mr. Jamieson's eyes never left Halsey's face.

"Will you tell us the nature of his errand?"

"He brought a telegram that had come to the club for Mr. Bailey."

"He was sober?"

"Perfectly, at that time. Not earlier."

"Was not his apparent friendliness a change from his former attitude?"

"Yes. I did not understand it."

"How long did he stay?"

"About five minutes. Then he left by the east entrance."

"What occurred then?"

"We talked for a few minutes, discussing a plan Mr. Bailey had in mind. Then I went to the stables, where I kept my car, and got it out."

"Leaving Mr. Bailey alone in the billiard room?"

"My sister was there."

Mrs. Ogden Fitzhugh had the courage to turn and eye Gertrude through her lorgnon.

"And then?"

"I took the car along the lower road, not to disturb the household. Mr. Bailey came down across the lawn, through the hedge, and got into the car on the road."

"Then you know nothing of Mr. Armstrong's movements after he left the house?"

"Nothing. I read of his death Monday evening for the first time."

"Mr. Bailey did not see him on his way across the lawn?"

"I think not. If he had seen him he would have spoken of it."

"Thank you. That is all. Miss Gertrude Innes."

Gertrude's replies were fully as concise as Halsey's. Mrs. Fitzhugh connected her to a close inspection, commencing with her hat and ending with her shoes. I flatter myself she found nothing wrong with either her gown or her manner, but poor Gertrude's testimony was the reverse of comforting. She had been summoned, she said, by her brother, after Mr. Armstrong had gone. She had waited in the billiard room with Mr. Bailey until the automobile had been ready. Then she had locked the door at the foot of the staircase, and, taking a lamp, had accompanied Mr. Bailey to the main entrance of the house, and had watched him cross the lawn. Instead of going at once to her room, she had gone back to the billiard room for something which had been left there. The cardroom and billiard room were in darkness. She had groped around, found the article she was looking for, and was on the point of returning to her room, when she had heard some one fumbling at the lock at the east outer door. She had thought it was probably her brother, and had been about to go to the door, when she heard it open. Almost immediately there was a shot, and she had run panic-stricken through the drawing room and had roused the house.

(TO BE CONTINUED.)

MAKES A DISCOVERY

PIPPIN GETS WISE TO CAUSE OF BUTTONING TROUBLES.

Finds That His Wife's Dresses Button the Wrong Way and Attributes His Awkwardness to This Fact.

"I suppose you'll be late as usual," observed Mrs. Pippin, when she noted that the Pippin was still cocked back in the big chair with his newspapers. "Yes, it looks as if you would wait until I'm all dressed before you start, just as you always do when we're going to the theater." She talked as she stood preening herself in front of the mirror.

After those observations of hers Pippin started in and got busy at the quick-change work. Even after giving Mrs. Pippin a half hour's handicap, he'd have overtaken her—except for one thing. Mrs. Pippin asked him to button her dress up the back. It always upsets Pippin, a job like that. This time it was a particularly technical task, because there was a layer of stuff that had to be hooked, then a row of something like 61 buttons no larger than a cross section of a pea to be jabbed into as many buttonholes that were even smaller.

Pippin always trembles at the possibility, that when he thinks he's all through the buttons and buttonholes may not come out even, and he will have to go through the entire French maid job again from the beginning. This time he was careful enough to overcome that danger, but Mrs. Pippin made several disparaging remarks about the clumsiness of masculine fingers, and Pippin felt deep mortification because he realized that there was truth in what the good wife said. He was awkward. He wondered why it was that he could button his own shirts, and other garments, so dexterously, and that his present work seemed so baffling.

Then he noticed something. "Turn around a minute," he told Mrs. Pippin suddenly. "Now back again." He walked around her two or three times sizing her up, as if she were something he was thinking of buying. Then he'd look at his own clothes and back at his wife's.

"Sure they're wrong!" he exclaimed, elated by the joy of discovery. "They're been wrong for years. All women's clothes button wrong. That's why it's been a matter of common jest for all these years that a man's awkward when it comes to fastening up female garb. Look at the buttons on my coat. Do they button up on the left hand side? Of course they don't. They button up on the right side just as the Almighty intended things to button. Now look at yours. Look at any outfit you've got in the house and you'll find it buttons up on the left-hand side—and wrong side. No wonder you call men awkward. And what's more, the buttonholes run up and down instead of crosswise. Well, I'm glad I happened to notice it at last."

"Waste of Money.

The telephone bell rang loudly in the silent watches of the night in one of the larger hospitals of New York recently and one of the young internes, who was doing duty in the office at the time, answered. "Is dis der hospittle?" came a female voice in a strong German accent. "Yes," said the doctor. "I want to speag to der doctor." "The voice." "This is one of the doctors," said the interne. "What is it you want?" "I wishes to inkvire," said the voice, "how iss Rosa Schmid?" "It happened that this was the name of one of his recent patients. "Rosa Schmid?" he said. "Why, Rosa Schmid was discharged four days ago as cured. She is not here any longer."

"Ach, Gott!" came the voice in a tone of profound vexation. "A nickel gone!"

Freckles to Tan.

We hymned the freckle a year ago. In lyric periods we demonstrated that it is a beauty spot on the face of mankind. What words are left to sing of tan? For tan is to the freckle as an apple orchard in bloom is to a single blossom, as the ocean is to one white-cap, as the firmament to a single star. Tan is the freckle expanded, sublimated, softened, raised to the tenth degree. How mysterious is its creation—"beginning doubtfully and far away. . . . First, guessed by faint auroral blushes." Like all things beautiful, tan springs from the travail of pain. It blossoms from the "burn," the first result of the sun's rays. It is as if the sun first tested the temper of the individual whom he is soon to lacquer with his unapproachable pigment. Who would think that first blush—blazing face, crimson neck, scarlet ear tips—could ever lead to beauty?—Collier's.

Cook a Professor of History.

Moscow university has a professor of history who is only a cook. The university telegraphed to the minister of education in St. Petersburg for a cook to be hurried to Moscow. The operator made a mistake in sending the message and the cook was a professor of history when he arrived at Moscow. He protested to the faculty that he knew nothing but pots and pans, but while the Russian red tape is being unwound he still holds his professorship, though no one attends his lectures.

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. Mrs. George LaJole, 162 W. Gamble St., Caro, Mich., says: "I had lost in flesh until I was a mere shadow of my former self, and too weak to stand more than a few minutes at a time. My rest was broken and my nervous system shattered. Had Doan's Kidney Pills not come to my attention, I firmly believe I would be in my grave. They cured me after doctors had failed."

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

There Should. Fritz the gardener was a stolid German who was rarely moved to extraordinary language. Even the most provocative occasions only caused him to remark mildly on his ill-luck. Not long ago he came back from the city in the late evening after a hard day in the market place. He was sleepy, and the train being crowded, the baggageman gave him a chair in his roomy car.

Finally the train reached Bloomfield. Fritz still slept as it pulled in and his friend had to shake him and tell him where he was.

"I tanks you," said Fritz, as he rose slowly to his feet. The open door of the car was directly in front of him. He walked straight out of it.

The baggageman sprang to look after him. Fritz slowly picked himself up from the sand by the side of the track, looked up at the door, and said with no wrath in his voice: "There should here be some steps!" —St. Paul Dispatch.

Clever Joke of Kind King.

King Edward's great nature was illustrated the other night by a London correspondent at the Press club in New York.

"The king," said the correspondent, "was visiting Rufford Abbey, one morning, in company with his host, Lord Arthur Savile, he took a walk over the preserves."

"Suddenly Lord Arthur, a big burly man, rushed forward and seized a shabby fellow with a dead peasant protruding from the breast of his coat."

"Sir," said Lord Arthur to the king, "this fellow is a bad egg. This is the second time I've caught him poaching."

"But the king's handsome face beamed, and he laughed his gay and tolerant laugh.

"Oh, let him go," he said. "If he really were a bad egg, you know, he wouldn't poach."

Yes, Indeed.

Hostess (at party)—Why, so silent, Miss De Muir? You've scarcely said a word since you came.

Youthful Guest—Really, Mrs. Leader, I am having a very enjoyable time, but my father has told me 100 times never to say anything unless I have something to say, and I suppose—

Hostess—But, my dear child, think what a stupid and tiresome thing society would be if everybody followed that advice!

Mathematical Request.

Little Mary, seven years old, was saying her prayers. "And, God," she petitioned at the close, "make seven times six forty-eight."

"Why, Mary, why did you say that?" asked her mother.

"Cause that's the way I wrote it in zamination in school today, and I want it to be right."—Lippincott's.

If black could not be made to look like white, toasted cheese would not have so much drawing power toward the mouse trap.

After a dog has indulged in short pants he usually goes in swimming.

Hungry Little Folks

find delightful satisfaction in a bowl of toothsome

Post Toasties

When the children want lunch, this wholesome nourishing food is always ready to serve right from the package without cooking, and saves many steps for mother.

Let the youngsters have Post Toasties—superb summer food.

"The Memory Lingers"

Postum Cereal Co., Limited, Battle Creek, Mich.