

THE CIRCULAR STAIRCASE

BY MARY ROBERTS RINEHART
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SYNOPSIS.

Miss Jones, spinster and guardian of Gertrude and Halsey, established summer headquarters at Sunnyside. The servants desert. Gertrude and Halsey arrive 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. Gertrude revealed that she was engaged to Jack Bailey, with whom she talked in the billiard room shortly before the murder. Detective Jamieson accused Miss Innes of holding back evidence. He imprisoned an intruder in an empty room. The prisoner escaped. Gertrude was suspected because of an injured foot. Halsey reappears and says he and Bailey were called away by a telegram. Cashier Bailey of Paul Armstrong's bank, defunct, was arrested for embezzlement. Paul Armstrong's death was announced. Halsey's business, Louise Armstrong, told Halsey that while she still loved him, she was to marry another. It developed that Dr. Walker was the man. Louise was found at the bottom of the circular staircase. Recovering consciousness, she said something had brushed by her on the stairway and she fainted. Bailey is suspected of Armstrong's murder. After "seeing a ghost," Thomas, the lodgekeeper, was found dead with a slip in his pocket bearing the name of "Lucien Wallace." Dr. Walker asked Miss Innes to vacate in favor of Mrs. Armstrong. She refused. A note from Bailey to Gertrude arranging a meeting at night was found. A ladder out of place deepens the mystery.

CHAPTER XXIII—Continued.

Apparently only a few minutes elapsed, during which my eyes were becoming accustomed to the darkness. Then I noticed that the windows were reflecting a faint pinkish light; Liddy noticed it at the same time, and I heard her jump up. At that moment Sam's deep voice boomed from somewhere just below.

"Fire!" he yelled. "The stable's on fire!"

I could see him in the glare dancing up and down on the drive, and a moment later Halsey joined him. Alex was awake and running down the stairs, and in five minutes from the time the fire was discovered three of the maids were sitting on their trunks in the drive, although, excepting a few sparks, there was no fire nearer than 100 yards.

Gertrude seldom loses her presence of mind, and she ran to the telephone. But by the time the Casanova volunteer fire department came tolling up the hill the stable was a furnace, with the Dragon Fly safe but blistered, in the road. Some gasoline exploded just as the volunteer department got to work, which shook their nerves as well as the burning building. The stable, being on a hill, was a torch to attract the population from every direction.

The stable was off the west wing. I hardly know how I came to think of the circular staircase and the unguarded door at its foot. Liddy was putting my clothes into sheets, preparatory to tossing them out the window, when I found her, and I could hardly persuade her to stop.

"I want you to come with me, Liddy," I said. "Bring a candle and a couple of blankets."

She lagged behind considerably when she saw me making for the east wing, and at the top of the staircase she balked.

"I am not going down there," she said firmly.

"There is no one guarding the door down there," I explained. "Who knows?—this may be a scheme to draw everybody away from this end of the house, and let some one in here."

The instant I had said it I was convinced I had hit on the explanation, and that perhaps it was already too late. It seemed to me as I listened that I heard stealthy footsteps on the east porch, but there was so much shouting outside that it was impossible to tell. Liddy was on the point of retreat.

"Very well," I said, "then I shall go down alone. Run back to Mr. Halsey's room and get his revolver. Don't shoot down the stairs if you hear a noise; remember—I shall be down there. And hurry."

I put the candle on the floor at the top of the staircase and took off my bedroom slippers. Then I crept down the stairs, going very slowly, and listening with all my ears. Just at the foot of the stairs I stubbed my toe against Halsey's big chair, and had to stand on one foot in a soundless agony until the pain subsided to a dull ache. And then—I knew I was right. Some one had put a key into the lock, and was turning it. For some reason it refused to work, and the key was withdrawn. There was a muttering of voices outside; I had only a second. Another trial, and the door would open. The candle above made a faint gleam down the well-like staircase, and at that moment, with a second, no more, to spare, I thought of a plan.

The heavy oak chair almost filled the space between the newel post and the door. With a crash it had turned it on its side, wedging it against the door, its legs against the stairs. I could hear a faint scream from Liddy at the crash and then she came down the stairs on a run, with the revolver held straight out in front of her.

"Thank God," she said, in a shaking voice. "I thought it was you."

I pointed to the door, and she understood.

"Call out of the windows at the other end of the house," I whispered. "Run. Tell them not to wait for anything."



It Went Off, Right Through the Door.

She went up the stairs at that, two at a time. Evidently she collided with the candle, for it went out, and I was left in darkness.

I was really astonishingly cool. I remember stepping over the chair and gluing my ear to the door, and I shall never forget feeling it give an inch or two there in the darkness, under a steady pressure from without. But the chair held, although I could hear an ominous cracking of one of the legs. And then, without the slightest warning, the cardroom window broke with a crash. I had my finger on the trigger of the revolver, and as I jumped it went off, right through the door. Some one outside swore roundly, and for the first time I could hear what was said.

"Only a scratch. . . . Men are at the other end of the house. . . . Have the whole rat's nest on us." And a lot of profanity which I won't write down. The voices were at the broken window now, and although I was trembling violently, I was determined that I would hold them until help came. I moved up the stairs until I could see into the cardroom, or rather through it, to the window. As I looked a small man put his leg over the sill and stepped into the room. The curtain confused him for a moment; then he turned, not toward me, but toward the billiard room door. I fired again, and something that was glass or china crashed to the ground. Then I ran up the stairs and along the corridor to the main staircase. Gertrude was standing there, trying to locate the shots, and I must have been a peculiar figure, with my hair in curls, my dressing-gown flying, no slippers, and a revolver clutched in my hand. I had no time to talk. There was the sound of footsteps in the lower hall, and some one bounded up the stairs.

I had gone Berserk, I think. I leaned over the stair-rail and fired again. Halsey, below, yelled at me. "What are you doing up there?" he yelled. "You missed me by an inch." And then I collapsed and fainted. When I came around Liddy was rubbing my temples with eau de quinine, and the search was in full blast.

Well, the man was gone. The stable burned to the ground, while the crowd cheered at every falling rafter, and the volunteer fire department sprayed it with a garden hose. And in the house Alex and Halsey searched every corner of the lower floor, finding no one.

The truth of my story was shown by the broken window and the overturned chair. That the unknown had got upstairs was almost impossible. He had not used the main staircase, there was no way to the upper floor in the east wing, and Liddy had been at the window, in the west wing, where the servants' stair went up. But we did not go to bed at all. Sam, Bohannon and Warner helped in the search, and not a closet escaped scrutiny. Even the collars were given a thorough overhauling, without result. The door in the east entry had a hole through it where my bullet had gone. The hole slanted downward, and the bullet was embedded in the porch. Some reddish stains showed it had done execution.

"Somebody will walk lame," Halsey said, when he had marked the course of the bullet. "It's too low to have hit anything but a leg or foot."

From that time on I watched every person I met for a limp, and to this day the man who halts in his walk is an object of suspicion to me. But Casanova had no lame men; the nearest approach to it was an old fellow who tended the safety gates at the railroad, and he, I learned on inquiry, had two artificial legs. Our man had

gone, and the large and expensive stable at Sunnyside was a heap of smoking rafters and charred boards. Warner swore the fire was incendiary, and in view of the attempt to enter the house, there seemed to be no doubt of it.

CHAPTER XXIV.

Flinders.

If Halsey had only taken me fully into his confidence through the whole affair it would have been much simpler. If he had been altogether frank about Jack Bailey, and if the day after the fire he had told me what he suspected, there would have been no harrowing period for all of us, with the boy in danger. But young people refuse to profit by the experience of their elders, and sometimes the elders are the ones to suffer.

I was much used up the day after the fire, and Gertrude insisted on my going out. The machine was temporarily out of commission, and the carriage horses had been sent to a farm for the summer. Gertrude finally got a trap from the Casanova liveryman, and we went out. Just as we turned from the drive into the road we passed a woman. She had put down a small valise, and stood inspecting the house and grounds minutely. I should hardly have noticed her had it not been for the fact that she had been horribly disfigured by smallpox.

"Ugh!" Gertrude said, when we had passed, "what a face! I shall dream of it to-night. Get up, Flinders."

"Flinders?" I asked. "Is that the horse's name?"

"It is." She flicked the horse's stubby mane with the whip. "He didn't look like a livery horse, and the liveryman said he had bought him from the Armstrongs when they purchased a couple of motors, and cut down the stable. Nice Flinders—good old boy!"

Flinders was certainly not a common name for a horse, and yet the youngster at Richfield had named his prancing, curly-haired little horse Flinders! It set me to thinking.

At my request Halsey had already sent word of the fire to the agent from whom he had secured the house. Also, he had called Mr. Jamieson by telephone, and somewhat guardedly had told him of the previous night's events. Mr. Jamieson promised to come out that night, and to bring another man with him. I did not consider it necessary to notify Mrs. Armstrong, in the village. No doubt she knew of the fire, and in view of my refusal to give up the house an interview would probably have been unpleasant enough. But as we passed Dr. Walker's white and green house I thought of something.

"Stop here, Gertrude," I said. "I am going to get out."

"To see Louise?" she asked.

"No. I want to ask this young Walker something."

She was curious, I knew, but I did not wait to explain. I went up the walk to the house, where a brass sign at the side announced the office, and went in. The reception room was empty, but from the consultation room beyond came the sound of two voices, not very amicable.

"It is an outrageous figure," some one was storming. Then the doctor's quiet tone, evidently not arguing, merely stating something. But I had not time to listen to some person probably disputing his bill, so I coughed. The voices ceased at once; a door closed somewhere, and the doctor entered from the hall of the house. He looked sufficiently surprised at seeing me.

"Good afternoon, Doctor," I said formally. "I shall not keep you from



your patient. I wish merely to ask a question."

"Won't you sit down?"

"It will not be necessary. Doctor, has any one come to you, either early this morning or to-day, to have you treat a bullet wound?"

"Nothing so startling has happened to me," he said. "A bullet wound! Things must be lively at Sunnyside."

"I didn't say it was at Sunnyside. But as it happens, it was. If any such case comes to you, will it be too much trouble for you to let me know?"

"I shall be only too happy," he said. "I understand you have had a fire up there, too. A fire and shooting in one night is rather lively for a quiet place like that."

"It is as quiet as a boiler-shop," I replied, as I turned to go.

"And you are still going to stay?"

"Until I am burned out," I responded. And then, on my way down the steps, I turned around suddenly.

"Doctor," I asked at a venture, "have you ever heard of a child named Lucien Wallace?"

Clever as he was, his face changed and stiffened. He was on his guard again in a moment.

"Lucien Wallace?" he repeated. "No, I think not. There are plenty of Wallaces around, but I don't know any Lucien."

I was as certain as possible that he did. People do not lie readily to me, and this man lied beyond a doubt. But there was nothing to be gained now; his defenses were up, and I left, half irritated and wholly baffled.

Our reception was entirely different at Dr. Stewart's. Taken into the bosom of the family at once, Flinders tied outside and nibbling the grass at the roadside, Gertrude and I drank some home-made elderberry wine and told briefly of the fire. Of the more serious part of the night's experience, of course, we said nothing. But when at last we had left the family on the porch and the good doctor was untying our steed, I asked him the same question I had put to Dr. Walker.

"Shot!" he said. "Bless my soul, no. Why, what have you been doing up at the big house, Miss Innes?"

"Some one tried to enter the house during the fire, and was shot and slightly injured," I said hastily. "Please don't mention it; we wish to make as little of it as possible."

There was one other possibility, and we tried that. At Casanova station I saw the station master, and asked him if any trains left Casanova between one o'clock and daylight. There was none until 6 a. m. The next question required more diplomacy.

"Did you notice on the six o'clock train any person—any man—who limped a little?" I asked. "Please try to remember; we are trying to trace a man who was seen loitering around Sunnyside last night before the fire."

He was all attention in a moment. "I was up there myself at the fire," he said volubly. "I'm a member of the volunteer company. First big fire we've had since the summer house burned over to the club golf links. My wife was sayin' the other day, 'Dave, you might as well 'a' saved the money in that there helmet and shirt.' And here last night they came in handy. Rang that bell so hard I hadn't time scarcely to get 'em on."

"And—did you see a man who limped?" Gertrude put in, as he stopped for breath.

"Not at the train, ma'am," he said. "No such person got on here to-day. But I'll tell you where I did see a man that limped. I didn't wait till the company left; there's a fast freight goes through at 4:45, and I had to get down to the station. I seen there wasn't much more to do anyhow at the fire—we'd got the flames under control"—Gertrude looked at me and smiled—"so I started down the hill. There was folk here and there goin' home, and along by the path to the Country club I seen two men. One was a short fellow. He was sitting on a big rock, his back to me, and he had something white in his hand, as if he was tying up his foot. After I'd gone on a piece I looked back, and he was hobbling on and—excuse me, miss—he was swearing something sickenin'."

(TO BE CONTINUED.)

Marvels of Modern Surgery.
Knife operations on the stomach have given a death rate of from one to 20 per cent., against 20 to 40 per cent. ten years ago. Cutting open the stomach upper and turning it wrong side out, searching for cancers and ulcers, has become a not uncommon operation, often followed by great cures and benefits, and is largely an American specialty. — New York Press.

Philatelist His Hobby.
State Senator Ernest R. Ackerman, of New Jersey, who is now enjoying his annual trip abroad, is one of the best known and most enthusiastic collectors of postage stamps in this country. So large is his collection that he has set apart one room in his home in Plainfield as a stamp room, in which are some of the rarest of stamps, so dear to the heart of the philatelist.

TURTLE VERY HARD TO KILL

One Found Alive Embedded In Clay, but Glacial Period Theory Was Disputed.

The weekly meeting of the Faunal Naturalists' club of West Hurley, N. Y., was enlivened by a debate on the subject, "Resolved, That the turtle is a insect." The negative got the decision, holding that it is a parable.

The members of the club work on the Ashokan dam. They were ten feet down in a seam of clay when one of them came upon a rock. With difficulty he persuaded the other men to quit work long enough to look at it. After they had viewed it they called the engineers. These men made the laborers dig further; then it was seen that one side of the rock was marked like a turtle shell.

When the caked clay had been removed from the other side of the rock the engineers were satisfied that they had found a petrified turtle. They put it into a pall of hot water. By and by one man said sadly that he guessed "petrified" should begin with "p-u" instead of "p-e."

The author of this suggestion upset the pall with his foot, and soon the turtle himself settled the question. A seamed and wrinkled head, in which a pair of white eyes blinked, was shoved out from the shell, and then a foot appeared. The other feet came into view within a few moments, and the turtle crawled painfully away.

The F. N. club eagerly seized upon the discovery as a topic for its next meeting. The members were tired of hearing essays on the hydra-headed monster, which has figured so much in the affairs of the Ashokan dam, and the presiding officer had trouble in keeping the debates in order when the new subject was declared open.

One engineer told the club that the turtle had probably become imbedded in the clay in the glacial period and had been caught in a nap in the winter of, say, 34,672 B. C.

The argument that won the debate for the negative, however, was that the turtle had been caught the winter before work was started on the Ashokan project. Every requirement of antiquity being met by this theory, which had the added virtue of symbolizing the rate of progress on the dam work, the judges found accordingly.

Cause of the Tides.

The tides are due wholly to the attractive force of the sun and moon. Every particle of matter composing the earth gravitates toward the moon inversely as the square of its distance.

By the law of gravity the attractive force of the sun and moon decreases with the square of the distance. For that reason the nearer surface of the earth is attracted with greater force and the further surface with lesser force than the center. The resultant effect is to cause a tendency to recede from the earth's center in parts immediately under the sun or moon and also on the side most remote from them.

The waters of the ocean are free to yield to this tendency and hence they tend to be heaped up into four tidal waves a day—two lunar and two solar. The lunar tides greatly predominate, the others being observable chiefly by their action in reinforcing or diminishing them.

As the earth turns on its axis these waves cause two principal alternations of high and low water every twenty-four hours in every part of the ocean, called flood tide and ebb tide.

When the solar and lunar tides are in conjunction the maximum, or spring, tide takes place. When they are 90 degrees apart there occurs the minimum tide.

Some Speed.

Mayor George W. Tiedman of Savannah, condemning a municipal bill that he deemed too hastily drafted, said to a reporter:

"Why, they drafted this bill the way the old-time Georgia editor used to perform his wedding ceremonies."

"The old-time editor of Georgia was usually mayor as well. He was also justice of the peace, conveyancer and real estate agent, deacon of the church, leading lawyer and head of the building and loan."

"As one of these editors was writing a two-column editorial on the tariff a Georgia couple came in to be married. The editor, without once looking up, without slacking the steady movement of his pen, said:

"Time's money. Want her?"

"Yes," said the youth.

"Want him?" the editor continued, nodding toward the girl.

"Yes," she replied.

"Man and wife," pronounced the editor, his pen traveling smoothly and rapidly. "One dollar. Bring a load of wool for it—one-third pin, balance oak."

Advising the Mothers.

Miss Winifred Gibbs gives lectures to poor women in New York under the auspices of the Society for Improving the Condition of the Poor. She tells them how to buy at the markets, what to buy, and gives them menus for the children. The lectures are all in the simplest language in order that the most uneducated woman may understand.

Asking Advice.

"Professor, as you know, I was the champion debater of 1910."

"Quite so, my boy."

"As such a champion, is there any ethical reason why I shouldn't start a school?"

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WHERE HE SAVED MONEY.



"You say it costs less to run this automobile than that trotting horse you owned?"

"Yes; I used to bet on the trotting horse."

Opportunity of Suffragist.

Baroness Aletta Korff tells in one of the magazines how the women of Finland came to vote. The fact is that women had to show that they could meet an emergency before the vote came to them. They have not had many opportunities to take the initiative in the world's history and they have not always responded when the opportunity came, but when a crisis, such as that in 1904, when the strike and the revolutionary outbreak in Russia took place at the same time, occurred, they proved they could make peace by doing it. Not until England and the United States find the women helping them to bear some great trouble will they give them the right to vote.

Try to Come Back.

Not long ago Lord Kinnaird, who is always actively interested in religious work, paid a surprise visit to a mission school in the east end of London and told a class of boys the story of Samson. Introducing his narrative, his lordship added:

"He was strong, became weak, and then regained his strength, enabling him to destroy his enemies. Now, boys, if I had an enemy, what would you advise me to do?"

A little boy, after meditating on the secret of that great giant's strength, shot up his hand and exclaimed: "Get a bottle of 'air restorer.'"

Very, Very Easy.

Patience—You can't do anything without money?
Patrice—Oh, yes, you can. You can run in debt.

"NO FRILLS"

Just Sensible Food Cured Him.

Sometimes a good, healthy commercial traveler suffers from poorly selected food and is lucky if he learns that Grape-Nuts food will put him right.

A Cincinnati traveler says: "About a year ago my stomach got in a bad way. I had a headache most of the time and suffered misery. For several months I ran down until I lost about 20 pounds in weight and finally had to give up a good position and go home. Any food that I might use seemed to nauseate me."

"My wife, hardly knowing what to do, one day brought home a package of Grape-Nuts food and coaxed me to try it. I told her it was no use but finally to humor her I tried a little, and they just struck my taste. It was the first food I had eaten in nearly a year that did not cause any suffering."

"Well, to make a long story short, I began to improve and stuck to Grape-Nuts. I went up from 135 pounds in December to 194 pounds the following October."

"My brain is clear, blood all right and appetite too much for any man's pocketbook. In fact, I am thoroughly made over, and owe it all to Grape-Nuts. I talk so much about what Grape-Nuts will do that some of the men on the road have nicknamed me 'Grape-Nuts,' but I stand today a healthy, rosy-cheeked man—a pretty good example of what the right kind of food will do."

"You can publish this if you want to. It is a true statement without any 'frills.'"

Read the little book, "The Road to Wellville," in pkgs. "There's a Reason." Ever read the above letter? A new one appears from time to time. They are genuine, true, and full of human interest.