

# THE CIRCULAR STAIRCASE

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## SYNOPSIS.

Miss Innes, 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 fiancée, 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. The stables were burned. During the excitement a man stole into the house. A search failed to reveal him. Miss Innes shot an intruder. A man limping was seen on the road.

## CHAPTER XXIV—Continued.

"Did they go toward the club?" Gertrude asked suddenly, leaning forward.

"No, miss. I think they came into the village. I didn't get a look at their faces, but I know every chick and child in the place, and everybody knows me. When they didn't shout at me—in my uniform, you know—I took it they were strangers."

So all we had for our afternoon's work was this: Some one had been shot by the bullet that went through the door; he had not left the village, and he had not called in a physician. Also, Dr. Walker knew who Lucien Wallace was, and his very denial made me confident that, in that one direction at least, we were on the right track.

"Gertrude," I said, "I have been a very selfish old woman. You are going to leave this miserable house to-night. Annie Morton is going to Scotland next week, and you shall go right with her."

To my surprise, she flushed painfully.

"I don't want to go, Aunt Ray," she said. "Don't make me leave now."

"You are losing your health and your good looks," I said decidedly. "You should have a change."

"I shan't stir a foot." She was equally decided. Then, more lightly: "Why, you and Liddy need me to arbitrate between you every day in the week."

Perhaps I was growing suspicious of every one, but it seemed to me that Gertrude's gayety was forced and artificial. I watched her covertly during the rest of the drive, and I did not like the two spots of crimson in her pale cheeks. But I said nothing more about sending her to Scotland; I knew she would not go.

## CHAPTER XXV.

### A Visit from Louise.

That day was destined to be an eventful one, for when I entered the house and found Eliza ensconced in the upper hall on a chair, with Mary Anne doing her best to stifle her with household ammonia, and Liddy rubbing her wrists—whatever good that is supposed to do—I knew that the ghost had been walking again, and this time in daylight.

Eliza was in a frenzy of fear. She clutched at my sleeve when I went close to her, and refused to let go until she had told her story. Coming just after the fire, the household was demoralized, and it was no surprise to me to find Alex and the undergardener struggling downstairs with a heavy trunk between them.

"I didn't want to do it, Miss Innes," Alex said. "But she was so excited I was afraid she would do as she said—drag it down herself, and scratch the staircase."

I was trying to get my bonnet off and to keep the maids quiet at the same time. "Now, Eliza, when you have washed your face and stopped bawling," I said, "come into my sitting room and tell me what has happened."

Liddy put away my things without speaking. The very set of her shoulders expressed disapproval.

"Well," I said, when the silence became uncomfortable, "things seem to be warming up."

Silence from Liddy, and a long sigh. "If Eliza goes, I don't know where to look for another cook." More silence.

"Rosie is probably a good cook," I said.

"Liddy," I said at last, "don't dare to deny that you are having the time of your life. You positively gloat in this excitement. You never looked better. It's my opinion all this running around, and getting jolted out of a rut, has stirred up that torpid liver of yours."

"It's not myself I'm thinking about," she said, goaded into speech. "Maybe my liver was torpid, and maybe it wasn't; but I know this: I've got some feelings left, and to see you

standing at the foot of that staircase shootin' through the door—I'll never be the same woman again."

"Well, I'm glad of that—anything for a change," I said. And in came Eliza, flanked by Rosie and Mary Anne.

Her story, broken with sobs and corrections from the other two, was this: At two o'clock (2:15, Rosie insisted) she had gone upstairs to get a picture from her room to show Mary Anne. (A picture of a lady, Mary Anne interposed.) She went up the servants' staircase and along the corridor to her room, which lay between the trunk room and the unfinished bathroom. She heard a sound as she went down the corridor like some one moving furniture, but she was not nervous. She thought it might be men examining the house after the fire the night before, but she looked in the trunk room and saw nobody.

She went into her room quietly. The noise had ceased and everything was quiet. Then she sat down on the side of her bed, and, feeling faint—she was subject to spells—"I told you that

came to come up for two girls and their trunks I supposed there was something doing, and as this here woman had been looking for work in the village I thought I'd bring her along."

Already I had acquired the true suburbanite ability to take servants on faith; I no longer demanded written and unimpeachable references. I, Rachel Innes, have learned not to mind if the cook sits down comfortably in my sitting room when she is taking the orders for the day, and I am grateful if the silver is not cleaned with scouring soap. And so that day I merely told Liddy to send the new applicant in. When she came, however, I could hardly restrain a gasp of surprise. It was the woman with the pitted face.

She stood somewhat awkwardly just inside the door, and she had an air of self-confidence that was inspiring. Yes, she could cook; was not a fancy cook, but could make good soups and desserts if there was any one to take charge of the salads. And so, in the end, I took her. As Halsey said, when



trude burst out, "tell us what is wrong. Halsey is not here. He has gone to the station for Mr. Jamieson. What has happened?"

"To the station, Gertrude? You are sure?"

"Yes," I said. "Listen. There is the whistle of the train now."

She relaxed a little at our matter-of-fact tone, and allowed herself to sink into a chair.

"Perhaps I was wrong," she said heavily. "He—will be here in a few moments if—everything is right."

We sat there, the three of us, without attempt at conversation. Both Gertrude and I recognized the futility of asking Louise any questions; her reticence was a part of a role she had assumed. Our ears were strained for the first throb of the motor as it turned into the drive and commenced the climb to the house. Ten minutes passed, 15, 20. I saw Louise's hands grow rigid as they clutched the arms of her chair. I watched Gertrude's bright color slowly ebbing away, and around my own heart I seemed to feel the grasp of a giant hand.

Twenty-five minutes, and then a sound. But it was not the chug of the motor; it was the unmistakable rumble of the Casanova hack. Gertrude drew aside the curtain and peered into the darkness.

"It's the hack, I am sure," she said, evidently relieved. "Something has gone wrong with the car, and no wonder—the way Halsey went down the hill."

It seemed a long time before the creaking vehicle came to a stop at the door. Louise rose and stood watching her hand to her throat. And then Gertrude opened the door, admitting Mr. Jamieson and a stocky, middle-aged man. Halsey was not with them. When the door had closed and Louise realized that Halsey had not come, her expression changed. From tense watchfulness to relief, and now again to absolute despair, her face was an open page.

"Halsey?" I asked unceremoniously, ignoring the stranger. "Did he—not meet you?"

"No," Mr. Jamieson looked slightly surprised. "I rather expected the car, but we got up all right."

"You didn't see him at all?" Louise demanded breathlessly.

Mr. Jamieson knew her at once, although he had not seen her before. She had kept to her rooms until the morning she left.

"No, Miss Armstrong," he said. "I saw nothing of him. What is wrong?" "Then we shall have to find him," she asserted. "Every instant is precious. Mr. Jamieson, I have reason for believing that he is in danger, but I don't know what it is. Only—he must be found."

The stocky man had said nothing. Now, however, he went quickly toward the door.

"I'll catch the hack down the road and hold it," he said. "Is the gentleman down in the town?"

"Mr. Jamieson," Louise said impulsively, "I can use the hack. Take my horse and trap outside and drive like mad. Try to find the Dragon Fly—it ought to be easy to trace. I can think of no other way. Only, don't lose a moment."

The new detective had gone, and a moment later Jamieson went rapidly down the drive, the cob's feet striking fire at every step. Louise stood looking after them. When she turned around she faced Gertrude, who stood indignant, almost tragic, in the hall.

"You know what threatens Halsey, Louise," she said accusingly. "I believe you know this whole horrible



"I Believe You Know This Whole Horrible Thing, This Mystery."

thing, this mystery that we are struggling with. If anything happens to Halsey, I shall never forgive you."

Louise only raised her hands despairingly and dropped them again.

(TO BE CONTINUED.)

Prompted by instinct.

There is a certain type of femininity which instinctively understands the prophecies of a buggy ride. Helen, aged three, cuddled up close to her father, this being her first ride with him unattended. As father tucked the robe about the dainty miss and chirped to his horse he asked: "What shall we talk about, dearie?" "Well, father," as she laid her little hand on his arm, "let's talk about loving each other."

## NEBRASKA IN BRIEF.

### News Notes of Interest From Various Sections.

Lincoln police are congratulating themselves that fair week came and went without any pickpockets showing any success.

Fire, which originated in a clothes closet at the home of George Marshall, north of Humboldt, completely destroyed the house and all its contents, except a few pieces of furniture.

The dead body of William H. Brice, a homesteader, was found on the prairie twenty-five miles northeast of Alliance. His death was caused by the accidental discharge of a 22-caliber rifle which he carried with him.

In an attempt to jump from a moving freight train at Mullen, Verne Reynolds was thrown under the train and had his right leg amputated and otherwise was so badly injured that he died.

Three of the best business places of the town of Murdock were practically destroyed by fire which started at an early hour in the morning, and for a time threatened the business section of the place.

The proposition to vote bonds in the sum of \$8,000 for a school building in the Second ward in Neligh carried by a vote of 181 to 62. More room has been absolutely necessary for the past two years.

Work is being rapidly pushed on the new Odd Fellows' state home at York. The contractors hope that within the time limit they will be able to turn over to the trustees the new home that is considered one of the largest, most sanitary and best equipped Odd Fellows' homes in the west.

The management of the Johnson county fair has decided to mix a little politics with the annual show. Hon. C. H. Aldrich of David City, republican candidate for governor, has been invited to speak on the grounds on Thursday, September 29, the second day of the fair, and has accepted the invitation. Mayor James Dahlman of Omaha, democratic candidate for governor has been invited to speak on the day following.

With his arms and legs wound round with baling wire and brake irons bound to his feet, the body of a man was found in the Missouri river at Bellevue. The body is that of a white man, aged about 30, five feet, eight inches in height, weighing 150 pounds, and of smooth face. Nothing was found by which to identify him.

The dead body of an elderly man was found in Riverview park at Omaha. The man was evidently 65 to 70 years of age and his height was 5 feet, 11 inches. He wore long gray hair and a blue serge suit, black derby hat, pink and white shirt, black felt shoes, white yarn socks and dark trousers. The man had in his possession an expressman's badge.

The county division question of Custer county, to divide the county into four counties will be voted upon at the general election in November. The new counties as now proposed, if the proposition carries, will be Corn county, with Sargent as the county seat; Arbor county, with Callaway the county seat; Albany county, with Oconto the county seat, and either Merna or Anselmo as ultimately the county seat of Custer county.

Gage County—Robbers made an unsuccessful attempt to raid the Bank of Barneston, but were evidently frightened away as they failed to get into the safe after blowing up the vault with four charges of nitro-glycerine. Mrs. Brown and daughter, who are in charge of the telephone station at that place, were awakened by the explosion and were in the act of turning in an alarm when two of the robbers covered them with revolvers and forced them to retire under penalty of death. They then escaped.

A man from Wayne county arrived in Omaha and soon betook himself to a third parlor. On the way over he encountered a couple of men who charged him with having found a pocketbook which belonged to them. He made denial and handed them his roll to inspect. They quickly examined it and apparently satisfied handed it back. A little later the man examined his money and found that instead of his \$16 he had a \$1 bill rolled around a wad of paper.

The Nebraska Bankers' association will hold its annual meeting in Omaha September 26-28.

Six miles north of Tecumseh Mrs. Goodenkauf was engaged in putting up fruit, working over a hot kitchen stove. In some way her clothing became ignited from the stove and before she discovered the fact her body was almost completely enveloped in the flames. She screamed for help and her twelve-year-old adopted son, Guy, came to her rescue, but could do practically nothing. The clothing was all burned from her body and she died soon after the accident.

The official board of the First Methodist church makes objection to the repeated visits of carnival companies to Fremont and the inclination of the city officials to wink and let them come, while the enforcement of the ordinance calling for a heavy license fee would keep them out.

Bowlsby was up before the York county board of insanity to inquire into his mental condition. He is the man arrested for contemplating wrecking the Northwestern train a short time ago. He was allowed to go.

# AFTER DOCTORS FAILED

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