

THE CIRCULAR STAIRCASE

BY MARY
ROBERTS
RINEHART
ILLUSTRATIONS BY ROY WINTER
CAPTIONED AND BY GARRA-THURGOOD

SYNOPSIS.

Miss Innes, spinster and guardian of Gertrude and Halsey, established summer headquarters at Sunnyside. Arnold Armstrong was found shot to death in the hall. Gertrude and her fiancé, Jack Bailey, had conversed in the billiard room shortly before the murder. Detective Jamieson accused Miss Innes of holding back evidence. Cashier Bailey of Paul Armstrong's bank, defunct, was arrested for embezzlement. Halsey's damsel, Louise Armstrong, told Halsey that while she still loved him, she was to marry another man. Louise was found unconscious at the bottom of the circular staircase. She said something had brushed by her in the dark on the stairway and she fainted. Bailey is suspected of Armstrong's murder. Thomas, the lodgekeeper, was found dead with a note in his pocket bearing the name "Lucien Wallace." A ladder found out of place deepens the mystery. The stabiles were burned, and in the dark Miss Innes shot an intruder. Halsey mysteriously disappeared. His auto was found wrecked by a freight train. It developed Halsey had an argument in the library with a woman before his disappearance. New cork disappears. Miss Innes learned Halsey was alive.

CHAPTER XXVII.

Who is Nina Carrington?

The four days, from Saturday to the following Tuesday, we lived, or existed, in a state of the most dreadful suspense. We ate only when Liddy brought in a tray, and then very little. The papers, of course, had got hold of the story, and we were besieged by newspaper men. From all over the country false clews came pouring in and raised hopes that crumbled again nothing. Every morgue within 100 miles, every hospital, had been visited, without result.

The inaction was deadly. Liddy cried all day, and because she knew I objected to tears, sniffed audibly around the corner.

"For heaven's sake, smile!" I snapped at her. And her ghastly attempt at a grin, with her swollen nose and red eyes, made me hysterical. I laughed and cried together, and pretty soon, like the two old fools we were, we were sitting together weeping into the same handkerchief.

On Tuesday, then, I sent for the car and prepared to go out. As I waited at the porte-cochere I saw the undergardener, an inoffensive, gray-haired man, trimming borders near the house. The day detective was watching him, sitting on the carriage block. When he saw me, he got up.

"Miss Innes," he said, taking off his hat, "do you know where Alex, the gardener, is?"

"Why, no. Isn't he here?" I asked. "He has been gone since yesterday afternoon. Have you—employed him long?"

"Only a couple of weeks." "Is he efficient? A capable man?" "I hardly know," I said vaguely. "The place looks all right, and I know very little about such things. I know much more about boxes of roses than bushes of them."

"This man," pointing to the assistant, "says Alex isn't a gardener. That he doesn't know anything about plants."

"That's very strange," I said, thinking hard. "Why, he came to me from the Brays, who are in Europe."

"Exactly." The detective smiled. "Every man who cuts grass isn't a gardener, Miss Innes, and just now it is our policy to believe every person around here a rascal until he proves to be the other thing."

Warner came up with the car then, and the conversation stopped. As he helped me in, however, the detective said something further.

"Not a word or sign to Alex, if he comes back," he said cautiously.

I went first to Dr. Walker's. I was tired of beating about the bush, and I felt that the key to Halsey's disappearance was here at Casanova, in spite of Mr. Jamieson's theories.

The doctor was in. He came at once to the door of his consulting room, and there was no mask of cordiality in his manner.

"Please come in," he said curtly. "I shall stay here, I think, doctor." I did not like his face or his manner; there was a subtle change in both. He had thrown off the air of friendliness, and I thought, too, that he looked anxious and haggard.

"Dr. Walker," I said, "I have come to you to ask some questions. I hope you will answer them. As you know, my nephew has not yet been found."

"So I understand," stiffly. "I believe, if you would, you could help us, and that leads to one of my questions. Will you tell me what was the nature of the conversation you held with him the night he was attacked and carried off?"

"Attacked! Carried off!" he said, with pretended surprise. "Really, Miss Innes, don't you think you exaggerate? I understand it is not the first time Mr. Innes has—disappeared."

"You are quibbling, doctor. This is a matter of life and death. Will you answer my question?"

"Certainly. He said his nerves were bad, and I gave him a prescription for them. I am violating professional ethics when I tell you even as much as that."

I could not tell him he lied. I think I looked it. But I hazarded a random shot.

"I thought perhaps," I said, watching him narrowly, "that it might be about—Nina Carrington?"

For a moment I thought he was go-

ing to strike me. He grew livid, and a small crooked blood-vessel in his temple swelled and throbbled curiously. Then he forced a short laugh.

"Who is Nina Carrington?" he asked. "I am about to discover that," I replied, and he was quiet at once. It was not difficult to divine that he feared Nina Carrington a good deal more than he did the devil. Our leaving-taking was brief; in fact, we merely stared at each other over the waiting room table, with its litter of year-old magazines. Then I turned and went out.

"To Richfield," I told Warner, and on the way I thought, and thought hard.

"Nina Carrington, Nina Carrington," the roar and rush of the wheels seemed to sing the words. "Nina Carrington, N. C." And I then knew, knew as surely as if I had seen the whole thing. There had been an N. C. on the suit case belonging to the woman with the pitted face. How simple it all seemed. Mattie Bliss had been Nina Carrington. It was she Warner had heard in the library. It was something she had told Halsey that had taken him frantically to Dr. Walker's office, and from there perhaps to his death. If we could find the woman, we might find what had become of Halsey.

We were almost at Richfield now, so I kept on. My mind was not on my errand there now. It was back with Halsey on that memorable night. What was it he had said to Louise, that had sent her up to Sunnyside, half wild with fear for him? I made up my mind, as the car drew up before the Tate cottage, that I would see Louise if I had to break into the house at night.

Almost exactly the same scene as before greeted my eyes at the cottage. Mrs. Tate, the baby-carriage in the path, the children at the swing—all were the same.

She came forward to meet me, and I noticed that some of the anxious lines had gone out of her face. She looked young, almost pretty.

"I am glad you have come back," she said. "I think I will have to be honest and give you back your money."

"Why?" I asked. "Has the mother come?"

"No, but some one came and paid the boy's board for a month. She talked to him for a long time, but when I asked him afterward he didn't know her name."

"A young woman?"

"Not very young. About 40, I suppose. She was small and fair-haired, just a little bit gray, and very sad. She was in deep mourning, and, I think, when she came, she expected to go at once. But the child, Lucien, interested her. She talked to him for a long time, and, indeed, she looked much happier when she left."

"You are sure this was not the real mother?"

"O mercy, no! Why, she didn't know which of the three was Lucien. I thought perhaps she was a friend of yours, but, of course, I didn't ask."

"She was not—pock-marked?" I asked at a venture.

"No, indeed. A skin like a baby's. But perhaps you will know the initials. She gave Lucien a handkerchief and forgot it. It was very fine, black-bordered, and it had three hand-worked letters in the corner—F. B. A."

"No," I said with truth enough, "she is not a friend of mine." F. B. A. was Fanny Armstrong, without a chance of doubt.

With another warning to Mrs. Tate as to silence, we started back to Sun-

nyside. So Fanny Armstrong knew of Lucien Wallace, and was sufficiently interested to visit him and pay for his support. Who was the child's mother and where was she? Who was Nina Carrington? Did either of them know where Halsey was, or what had happened to him?

CHAPTER XXVIII.

A Tramp and the Toothache.

The bitterness toward the dead president of the Traders' bank seemed to grow with time. Never popular, his memory was execrated by people who had lost nothing, but who were filled with disgust by constantly hearing new stories of the man's grasping avarice.

But, like everything else those days, the bank failure was almost forgotten by Gertrude and myself. We did not mention Jack Bailey; I had found nothing to change my impression of his guilt, and Gertrude knew how I felt. As for the murder of the bank president's son, I was of two minds. One day I thought Gertrude knew or at least suspected that Jack had done it; the next I feared that it had been Gertrude herself, that night alone on the circular staircase. And then the mother of Lucien Wallace would obtrude herself, and an almost equally good case might be made against her. There were times, of course, when I was disposed to throw all those suspicions aside, and fix definitely on the unknown, whoever that might be.

I had my greatest disappointment when it came to tracing Nina Carrington. The woman had gone without leaving a trace. Marked as she was, it should have been easy to follow her, but she was not to be found. A description to one of the detectives, on my arrival at home, had started the ball rolling. But by night she had not been found. I told Gertrude, then, about the telegram to Louise when she had been ill before; and my visit to Dr. Walker, and my suspicions that Mattie Bliss and Nina Carrington were the same. She thought, as I did, that there was little doubt of it.

I said nothing to her, however, of the detective's suspicions about Alex. Little things that I had not noticed at the time now came back to me. I had an uncomfortable feeling that perhaps Alex was a spy, and that by taking him into the house I had played into the enemy's hands. But at eight o'clock that night Alex himself appeared, and with him a strange and repulsive individual. They made a queer pair, for Alex was almost as disreputable as the tramp, and he had a badly swollen eye.

Gertrude had been sitting listlessly waiting for the evening message from Mr. Jamieson, but when the singular pair came in, as they did, without ceremony, she jumped up and stood staring. Winters, the detective who watched the house at night, followed them, and kept his eyes sharply on Alex's prisoner. For that was the situation as it developed.

He was a tall lanky individual, ragged and dirty, and just now he looked both terrified and embarrassed. Alex was too much engrossed to be either, and to this day I don't think I ever asked him why he went off without permission the day before.

"Miss Innes," Alex began abruptly, "this man can tell us something very important about the disappearance of Mr. Innes. I found him trying to sell this watch."

He took a watch from his pocket and put it on the table. It was Halsey's watch. I had given it to him on the



twenty-first birthday; I was dumb with apprehension.

"He says he had a pair of cuff-links also, but he sold them—"

"For a dollar'n half," put in the disreputable individual hoarsely, with an eye on the detective.

"He is not—dead?" I implored. The tramp cleared his throat.

"No'm," he said huskily. "He was used up pretty bad, but he weren't dead. He was comin' to himself when I—he stopped and looked at the detective. 'I didn't steal it, Mr. Winters,' he whined. 'I found it in the road, honest to God, I did.'"

Mr. Winters paid no attention to him. He was watching Alex.

"I'd better tell what he told me," Alex broke in. "It will be quicker. When Jamieson—when Mr. Jamieson calls up we can start him right. Mr. Winters, I found this man trying to sell that watch on Fifth street. He offered it to me for \$3."

"How did you know the watch?" Winters snapped at him.

"I had seen it before, many times. I used it at night when I was watching at the foot of the staircase." The detective was satisfied. "When he offered the watch to me, I knew it, and I pretended I was going to buy it. We went into an alley and I got the watch." The tramp shivered. It was plain how Alex had secured the watch.

"Then—I got the story from this fellow. He claims to have seen the whole affair. He says he was in an empty car—in the car the automobile struck."

The tramp broke in here and told his story, with frequent interpretations by Alex and Mr. Winters. He used a strange medley, in which familiar words took unfamiliar meanings, but it was gradually made clear to us.

On the night in question the tramp had been "pounding his ear"—this struck me as being graphic—in an empty box-car along the siding at Casanova. The train was going west, and due to leave at dawn. The tramp and the "brakey" were friendly, and things going well. About ten o'clock, perhaps earlier, a terrific crash against the side of the car roused him. He tried to open the door, but could not move it. He got out of the other side, and just as he did so, he heard some one groan.

The habits of a lifetime made him cautious. He slipped on to the bumper of a car and peered through. An automobile had struck the car and stood there on two wheels. The tail lights were burning, but the headlights were out. Two men were stooping over some one who lay on the ground. Then the taller of two started on a dog-trot along the train looking for an empty. He found one four cars away and ran back again. The two lifted the unconscious man into the empty box-car, and getting in themselves, stayed for three or four minutes. When they came out, after closing the sliding door, they cut up over the railroad embankment toward the town. One, the short one, seemed to limp.

The tramp was wary. He waited for ten minutes or so. Some women came down a path to the road and inspected the automobile. When they had gone, he crawled into the box-car and closed the door again. Then he lighted a match. The figure of a man, unconscious, gagged, and with his hands tied, lay far at the end. The tramp lost no time; he went through his pockets, found a little money and the cuff-links, and took them. Then he loosened the gag—it had been cruelly tight—and went his way, again closing the door of the box-car. Outside on the road he found the watch. He got on the fast freight east, some time after, and rode into the city. He had sold the cuff-links, but on offering the watch to Alex he had been "copped."

The story, with its cold recital of villainy, was done. I hardly knew if I were more anxious, or less. That it was Halsey, there could be no doubt. How badly he was hurt, how far he had been carried, were the questions that demanded immediate answer. But it was the first real information we had had; my boy had not been murdered outright. But instead of vague terrors there was now the real fear that he might be lying in some strange hospital receiving the casual attention commonly given to the charity cases. Even this, had we known it, would have been paradise to the terrible truth. I wake yet and feel my self cold and trembling with the horror of Halsey's situation for three days after his disappearance.

(TO BE CONTINUED.)

Labor That Aids the World.

It is true that all wealth comes from labor, but not necessarily from labor by the hands. The thinkers of the world have added inestimably to its development. It was a portrait painter who invented the telegraph, a college professor who produced the telephone, and the list might be extended almost indefinitely. It is well that to-day, with all our indulgence in rest and play, that we remember that it is intelligently directed energy of whatever kind which makes man better and helps along the world to the millennial dawn.

PROPOSE ON KNEES

ALSO KISS YOUR LADY LOVE'S HAND.

Fashion in Vogue in the Early Victorian Period Is Revived in England After a Lapse of 70 Years.

Young men intending to propose should do so on their knees—if they wish to follow fashion's dictates.

They should also, when meeting women in the drawing room, lightly kiss their hands and perform other courtesies of the early Victorian period. Such is the new style of manners which are becoming fashionable again in England, or at least in London society, after a lapse of 60 or 70 years.

One of the most beautiful women in London, and well known in the social world, has just confessed that her fiancé proposed to her on his knees.

"The act was so gracefully done that I could not refuse him," she told a friend.

"Other girl friends of mine have told me of similar experiences. What can possibly have influenced the young man of the present day to act in such a manner? Brusque, unconventional, almost rude manners have hitherto distinguished him. These gentle courtesies and old-fashioned graces make a woman's life doubly happy. I hope every man will follow the example of my fiancé and otherwise improve his manners."

A well-known expert on dramatic art said she certainly agreed that the manners of men were improving.

"It must be admitted," she continued, "that there is room for improvement. For several years past the attitude of young men toward women has been almost disrespectful. Only a few days ago I had a pleasant surprise. A young man meeting me gracefully kissed my hand. He did it in a quiet, unobtrusive way, as nicely as if he had been a gallant of a century ago."

"I have noticed similar signs of improvement among other young men, in what one might call 'School for Scandal' manners. In that play the gallantry of the men toward the women is an object lesson to all. A man who proposes on his knees—a form of proposal which is stated to be reviving—is doing the natural thing. He is asking a great favor of the lady—a favor so great that unconsciously takes the form of a prayer."

"I have often heard it remarked that 'stage' proposals—where a man falls on his knees before the woman he loves—are not true to life. But more men propose on their knees nowadays than people dream of. The casual offhand proposals, which are stated to be common, are dying out. And Londoners so badly need a return of fine manners! It is not merely the fault of the men. Women, by competing with men and standing up for their 'rights' are liable to lose their privileges and sanctity as women."

The Power of Good Cooking.

If the girls who desire faithful husbands only knew it, the culinary art is the surest road to domestic bliss.

Poor cooking has broken up many a home and severed many a marital bond. No man who is fed upon indigestible, ill-cooked food can wear a pleasant smile or exercise that optimism which is the strongest influence for success. Nor can he do himself justice in his daily task, be it physical or mental.

Every girl should learn to cook. She may wed a man who can provide her with servants, so that she never need put a finger to a feather duster, let alone a frying pan, but her table will never be as well served if she leaves everything to them as it will be if she can detect the cause of poor cooking and teach her servants to remedy it.

The poor man's wife can effect great economies by knowing food values and the best way to convert them into the human system. The rich man's wife can win fame among her friends by a little study of the finer points of cooking.

Tower Built by One Man.

Standing on the banks of the River Awberg, between Mallow and Fermoy, County Cork, Ireland, is a remarkable edifice known as "Johnny Roche's Tower." The whole tower was built by the labor of one man, who subsequently resided in it. This individual, who received no education whatever, also erected a mill, constructing the water wheel after a special design of his own. Long before the introduction of the bicycle he went about the country on a wheeled vehicle of his own construction, propelled by foot power. His last feat was to build his tomb in the middle of the river bed. John Roche died about 20 years ago, but was not interred in this strange burying place which he selected for himself, his less original relatives deeming such a mode of sepulcher unchristian.

Great, Indeed.

"I would like to ask you one more question," said the youth.

"Let it come," rejoined the home-grown philosopher.

"When," queried the youth, "would you say that a man has achieved greatness?"

"When he deserves his own opinion of himself," answered the h. g. p.

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The Explanation.

Old Podkins lay back in his chair in calm content, and though his wife was quite near him he was happy, for she had not broken the silence for nearly five minutes.

He had been married for five-and-twenty long years, and Mrs. Podkins, almost daily during 24 of them, had disturbed the domestic peace by a too full exercise of her tongue.

"My dear," broke in Mrs. P.—"thinking it time she said something to interrupt the quiet, 'I see by the papers that a petrifed jaw two yards long has been found in Cornwall.'"

"What!" cried Podkins, starting up. "Now I know your secret. But you never told me your ancestors came from that part of the world!"

NO HEALTHY SKIN LEFT

"My little son, a boy of five, broke out with an itching rash. Three doctors prescribed for him, but he kept getting worse until we could not dress him any more. They finally advised me to try a certain medical college, but its treatment did no good. At the time I was induced to try Cuticura he was so bad that I had to cut his hair off and put the Cuticura Ointment on him on bandages, as it was impossible to touch him with the bare hand. There was not one square inch of skin on his whole body that was not affected. He was one mass of sores. The bandages used to stick to his skin and in removing them it used to take the skin off with them, and the screams from the poor child were heart-breaking. I began to think that he would never get well, but after the second application of Cuticura Ointment I began to see signs of improvement, and with the third and fourth applications the sores commenced to dry up. His skin peeled off twenty times, but it finally yielded to the treatment. Now I can say that he is entirely cured, and a stronger and healthier boy you never saw than he is today, twelve years or more since the cure was effected. Robert Wattam 1148 Forty-eighth St., Chicago, Ill. Oct. 2, 1909."

The Part of It.

"I wonder if that sour Miss Oldgirl ever had any salad days?" "I am sure she had the vinegar and peppery part of them."

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