

# THE CIRCULAR STAIRCASE

By MARY ROBERTS RINEHART  
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## 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 been 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. 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 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. Gertrude, 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 stables 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 cook disappears. Miss Innes learned Halsey was alive. Dr. Walker's face becomes livid at mention of the name of Nina Carrington. Evidence was secured from a tramp that a man, supposedly Halsey, had been bound and gagged and thrown into an empty box car. Gertrude was missing. Hunting for her, Miss Innes ran into a man and fainted. A confederate of Dr. Walker confessed his part in the mystery.

## CHAPTER XXIX.—Continued.

"She struck me as being an ugly customer, and when she left, about 11 o'clock, and went across to the Armstrong place, I was not far behind her. She walked all around the house first, looking up at the windows. Then she rang the bell, and the minute the door was opened she was through it, and into the hall."

"How long did she stay?"  
"That's the queer part of it," Riggs said eagerly. "She didn't come out that night at all. I went to bed at daylight, and that was the last I heard of her until the next day, when I saw her on a truck at the station, covered with a sheet. She'd been struck by the express and you would hardly have known her—dead, of course. I think she stayed all night in the Armstrong house, and the agent said she was crossing the track to take the up-train to town when the express struck her."

"Another circle!" I exclaimed.  
"Then we are just where we started." "Not so bad as that, Miss Innes," Riggs said eagerly. "Nina Carrington came from the town in California where Mr. Armstrong died. Why was the doctor so afraid of her? The Carrington woman knew something. I lived with Dr. Walker seven years, and I know him well. There are few things he is afraid of. I think he killed Mr. Armstrong out in the west somewhere, that's what I think. What else he did I don't know—but he dismissed me and pretty nearly throttled me— for telling Mr. Jamieson here about Mr. Innes' having been at his office the night he disappeared and about my hearing them quarrelling."

"What was it Warner overheard the woman say to Mr. Innes in the library?" the detective asked me.  
"She said 'I knew there was something wrong from the start. A man isn't well one day and dead the next without some reason.'"

How perfectly it all seemed to fit!

## CHAPTER XXX.

### When Churchyards Yawn.

It was on Wednesday Riggs told us the story of his connection with some incidents that had been previously unexplained. Halsey had been gone since the Friday night before, and with the passage of each day I felt that he might be carried thousands of miles in the box-car, locked in, perhaps, without water or food. I had read of cases where bodies had been found locked in cars on isolated sidings in the west, and my spirits went down with every hour.

His recovery was destined to be almost as sudden as his disappearance, and was due directly to the tramp Alex had brought to Sunnyside. It seems the man was grateful for his release, and when he learned something of Halsey's whereabouts from another member of his fraternity—for it is a fraternity—he was prompt in letting us know.

On Wednesday evening Mr. Jamieson, who had been down at the Armstrong house trying to see Louise—and failing—was met near the gate at Sunnyside by an individual precisely as repulsive and unkempt as the one Alex had captured. The man knew the detective, and he gave him a piece of dirty paper, on which was scrawled the words: "He's at City Hospital, Johnsville." The tramp who brought the paper pretended to know nothing, except this: The paper had been passed along from a "hobo" in Johnsville, who seemed to know the information would be valuable to us.

Again the long-distance telephone came into requisition. Mr. Jamieson called the hospital, while we crowded around him. And when there was no longer any doubt that it was Halsey, and that he would probably recover, we all laughed and cried together. I am sure I kissed Liddy, and I have had terrible moments since when I seem to remember kissing Mr. Jamieson, too, in the excitement.

Anyhow, by 11 o'clock that night Gertrude was on her way to Johnsville, 280 miles away, accompanied by

Rosie. The domestic force was now down to Mary Anne and Liddy, with the under-gardener's wife coming every day to help out. Fortunately, Warner and the detectives were keeping bachelor hall in the lodge. Out of deference to Liddy they washed their dishes once a day, and they concocted queer messes, according to their several abilities. They had one triumph that they ate regularly for breakfast, and that clung to their clothes and their hair the rest of the day. It was bacon, hardtack and onions, fried together. They were almost pathetically grateful, however, I noticed, for an occasional broiled tenderloin.

It was not until Gertrude and Rosie had gone and Sunnyside had settled down for the night, with Winters at the foot of the staircase, that Mr. Jamieson broached a subject he had evidently planned before he came.

"Miss Innes," he said, stopping me as I was about to go to my room upstairs, "how are your nerves to-night?"

"I have none," I said happily. "With Halsey found, my troubles have gone."

"I mean," he persisted, "do you feel as though you could go through with something rather unusual?"

"The most unusual thing I can think of would be a peaceful night. But if anything is going to occur, don't dare to let me miss it."

"Something is going to occur," he said. "And you're the only woman I can think of that I can take along." He looked at his watch. "Don't ask me any questions, Miss Innes. Put on

of headstones, and although, when I found myself last, I had an instinctive desire to keep looking back over my shoulder, I found that, the first uneasiness past, a cemetery at night is much the same as any other country place, filled with vague shadows and unexpected noises. Once, indeed—but Mr. Jamieson said it was an owl, and I tried to believe him.

In the shadow of the Armstrong granite shaft we stopped. I think the doctor wanted to send me back.

"It's no place for a woman," I heard him protesting angrily. But the detective said something about witnesses, and the doctor only came over and felt my pulse.

"Anyhow, I don't believe you're any worse off here than you would be in that nightmare of a house," he said finally, and put his coat on the steps of the shaft for me to sit on.

There is a sense of desecration, of a reversal of the everlasting fitness of things, in resurrecting a body from its mother clay. And yet that night, in the Casanova churchyard, I sat quietly by, and watched Alex and Mr. Jamieson steaming over their work, without a single qualm, except the fear of detection.

The doctor kept a keen lookout, but no one appeared. Once in a while he came over to me, and gave me a reassuring pat on the shoulder.

"I never expected to come this," he said once. "There's one thing sure—I'll not be suspected of complicity. A doctor is generally supposed to be handier at burying folks than at digging them up."



"She Walked All Around the House First, Looking Up at the Windows."

heavy shoes, and some old dark clothes, and make up your mind not to be surprised at anything."

Liddy was sleeping the sleep of the just when I went upstairs, and I hunted out my things cautiously. The detective was waiting in the hall, and I was astonished to see Dr. Stewart with him. They were talking confidentially together, but when I came down they ceased. There were a few preparations to be made: the locks to be gone over, Winters to be instructed as to renewed vigilance, and then, after extinguishing the hall light, we crept, in the darkness, through the front door, and into the night.

I asked no questions. I felt that they were doing me honor in making me one of the party, and I would show them I could be as silent as they. We went across the fields, passing through the woods that reached almost to the ruins of the stable, going over stiles now and then, and sometimes stepping over low fences. Once only somebody spoke, and then it was an emphatic bit of profanity from Dr. Stewart when he ran into a wire fence.

We were joined at the end of five minutes by another man, who fell into step with the doctor silently. He carried something over his shoulder which I could not make out. In this way we walked for perhaps 20 minutes.

The doctor was puffing somewhat when we finally came to a halt. I confess that just at that minute even Sunnyside seemed a cheerful spot. We had paused at the edge of a level cleared place, bordered all around with primly trimmed evergreen trees. Between them I caught a glimpse of starlight shining down on rows of white headstones and an occasional more imposing monument or towering shaft. In spite of myself, I drew my breath in sharply. We were on the edge of the Casanova churchyard.

I saw now both the man who had joined the party and the implements he carried. It was Alex, armed with two long-handled spades. After the first shock of surprise, I flatter myself I was both cool and quiet. We went in single file between the rows

The uncanny moment came when Alex and Jamieson tossed the spades on the grass, and I confess I hid my face. There was a period of stress, I think, while the heavy coffin was being raised. I felt that my composure was going, and, for fear I would shriek, I tried to think of something else—what time Gertrude would reach Halsey—anything but the grisly reality that lay just beyond me on the grass.

And then I heard a low exclamation from the detective and I felt the pressure of the doctor's fingers on my arm.

"Now, Miss Innes," he said gently. "If you will come over—"

I held on to him frantically, and somehow I got there and looked down.



"But the Face That Showed in the Light—"

The lid of the casket had been raised and a silver plate on it proved we had made no mistake. But the face that showed in the light of the lantern was a face I had never seen before. The man who lay before us was not Paul Armstrong!



## CHAPTER XXXI.

### Between Two Fireplaces.

What with the excitement of the discovery, the walk home under the stars in wet shoes and draggled skirts, and getting upstairs and undressed without rousing Liddy, I was completely used up. What to do with my boots was the greatest puzzle of all, there being no place in the house safe from Liddy, until I decided to slip upstairs the next morning and drop them into the hole the "ghost" had made in the trunkroom wall.

I went asleep as soon as I reached this decision, and in my dreams I lived over again the events of the night. Again I saw the group around the silent figure on the grass, and again, as had happened at the grave, I heard Alex's voice, tense and triumphant:

"Then we've got them," he said. Only, in my dreams, he said it over and over until he seemed to shriek it in my ears.

I wakened early, in spite of my fatigue, and lay there thinking. Who was Alex? I no longer believed that he was a gardener. Who was the man whose body we had resurrected? And where was Paul Armstrong? Probably living safely in some extrajudicial country on the fortune he had stolen. Did Louise and her mother know of the shameful and wicked deception? What had Thomas known, and Mrs. Watson? Who was Nina Carrington?

This last question, it seemed to me, was answered. In some way the woman had learned of the substitution, and had tried to use her knowledge for blackmail. Nina Carrington's own story died with her, but, however it happened, it was clear that she had carried her knowledge to Halsey the afternoon Gertrude and I were looking for clues to the man I had shot on the east veranda. Halsey had been half crazed by what he heard; it was evident that Louise was marrying Dr. Walker to keep the shameful secret, for her mother's sake. Halsey, always reckless, had gone at once to Dr. Walker and denounced him. There had been a scene, and he left on his way to the station to meet and notify Mr. Jamieson of what he had learned. The doctor was active mentally and physically. Accompanied perhaps by Riggs, who had shown himself not ever scrupulous until he quarreled with his employer, he had gone across to the railroad embankment, and, by jumping in front of the car, had caused Halsey to swerve. The rest of the story we knew.

That was my reconstructed theory of that afternoon and evening; it was almost correct—not quite.

There was a telegram that morning from Gertrude.

Halsey conscious and improving. Probably home in day or so.

With Halsey found and improving in health, and with at last something to work on, I began that day, Thursday, with fresh courage. As Mr. Jamieson had said, the lines were closing up. That I was to be caught and almost finished in the closing was happily unknown to us all.

It was late when I got up. I lay in my bed, looking around the four walls of the room, and trying to imagine behind what one of them a secret chamber might lie. Certainly, in daylight, Sunnyside deserved its name; never was a house more cheery and open, less sinister in general appearance. There was not a corner apparently that was not open and above-board, and yet, somewhere behind its handsomely papered walls I believed firmly that there lay a hidden room, with all the possibilities it would involve.

I made a mental note to have the house measured during the day to discover any discrepancy between the outer and inner walls, and I tried to recall again the exact wording of the paper Jamieson had found.

(TO BE CONTINUED.)

### At the Half-Century Mark.

Youth is eternal to him who believes in eternity. To me youth means any where from eight onward. I was an exceedingly old person at eight and I trust I violate no confidence when I confess a youthful exuberance now that I have bumped against the half-way post. Fifty is a splendid time for youthful expansion; one's fancy still retains all its ingenuity while one's judgment is bettered by experience. When sitting on the 50 milestone the vane of man's vision points southward to the past and northward to the future with a minimum of oscillation. Rancorous thought and splenic expression give way to quieter nerves and calmer view, and the mellow lighted vista of the years that have gone soften the heart of the youth of a half century of years.—John Philip Sousa in the Circle.

### Different.

"I wrote him that I was ready to come home."  
"Was he glad?"  
"He wrote me that he would have to borrow money to pay my fare."  
"What did you do?"  
"I asked him what I should do, and he said he would borrow money enough for me to stay there a while longer."

## INFLUENCE OF THE MOTHER

Well to Remember That She is Ever a Model of Behavior to the Children.

"It is hard for a young mother, who has not yet overcome the wayward tendencies of her own youthful nature, to realize the influence she exerts over her little one. She is constantly surrounded by critical imitators who copy her morals and manners."

As the mother is, so are her sons and daughters. If a family of children are blessed with an intelligent mother, who is dainty and refined in her manner, and does not consider it necessary to be one woman in the drawing room and an entirely different person in her everyday life, but who is a true mother and always a tender, charming woman, she will invariably see her habits of speech and perfect manners repeated in her children.

Great, rough men and noisy, busy boys will always tone down their voices and step quietly and try to be more mannerly when she stops to give them a kind word and a pleasant smile. For a true woman will never fail to say and do all the kind, pleasant things she can that will in any way help to lift up and cheer those whose lives are shaded with care and toil. The mother of today rules the world of tomorrow.

### Queer Questions.

Queer questions come over the telephone to the newspaper offices. Here was one that the man who chanced to answer the phone had put up to him the other day:

"Say," began the unknown seeker after the truth, "do you—do you remember who it was that killed Abel?"

"Why, Cain, of course," replied the newspaper man, who put in several years at Sunday school. "Who'd you suppose?"

"Well," observed the man at the other end in an annoyed tone, "doggon if I ain't gone and made a fool of myself. Course it was Cain, now that you mention it, but I made a two to one bet with a fellow that 'twas Gollath, and now I'll have to go without a new overcoat. I reckon, this next winter."—Cleveland Plain Dealer.

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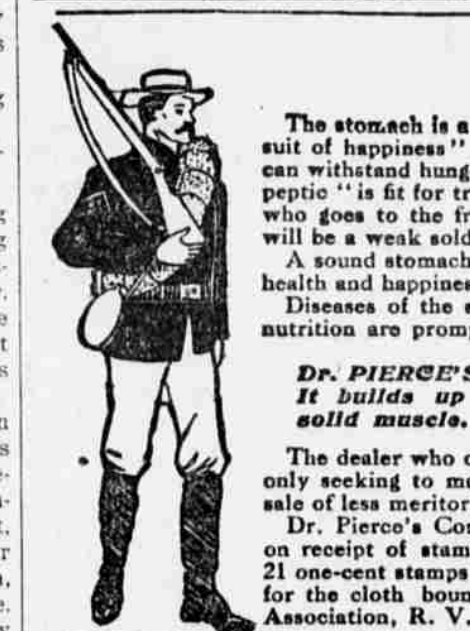
If it had not been for his lantern and the tub he lived in, probably Diogenes would never have been heard of.

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