

# THE CIRCULAR STAIRCASE

By **MARY ROBERTS RINEHART**  
ILLUSTRATIONS BY ROY WILKINSON  
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 fiance, 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. Paul Armstrong's death was announced. Halsey's fiance, 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. 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 stairway was burned, and in the dark Miss Innes shot an intruder. Halsey mysteriously disappeared. His auto was found wrecked by a freight train. He 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 visible 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. He stated that the Carrington woman had been killed, that Walker feared her, and that he believed that Paul Armstrong had been killed by a hand guided by Walker. Halsey was found in a distant hospital. Paul Armstrong was not dead. Miss Innes discovered secret rooms in which the Traders' bank treasure was believed to be. Mrs. Watson, dying, said she killed Arnold Armstrong who had been married her sister under the alias of Wallace. Lucien Wallace was born of the marriage.

## CHAPTER XXXIII.

### At the Foot of the Stairs.

As I drove rapidly up to the house from Casanova station in the hack, I saw the detective Burns loitering across the street from the Walker place. So Jamieson was putting the screws on—lightly now, but ready to give them a twist or two, I felt certain, very soon.

The house was quiet. Two steps of the circular staircase had been pried off without result, and beyond a second message from Gertrude that Halsey insisted on coming home and they would arrive that night there was nothing new. Mr. Jamieson, having failed to locate the secret room, had gone to the village. I learned afterwards that he called at Dr. Walker's, under pretense of an attack of acute indigestion, and before he left had inquired about the evening trains to the city. He said he had wasted a lot of time on the case, and a good bit of the mystery was in my imagination! The doctor was under the impression that the house was guarded day and night. "Well, give a place a reputation like that, and you don't need a guard at all—thus Jamieson. And sure enough, late in the afternoon, the two private detectives, accompanied by Mr. Jamieson, walked down the main street of Casanova and took a city-bound train.

That they got off at the next station and walked back again to Sunnyside at dusk was not known at the time. Personally, I knew nothing of either move, I had other things to absorb me at that time.

Liddy brought me some tea while I rested after my trip, and on the tray was a small book from the Casanova library. It was called "The Unseen World" and had a cheerful cover, on which a half-dozen sheeted figures linked hands around a headstone.

At this point in my story, Halsey always says: "Trust a woman to add two and two together, and make six." To which I retort that if two and two plus X makes six, then to discover the unknown quantity is the simplest thing in the world. That a houseful of detectives missed it entirely was because they were busy trying to prove that two and two make four.

The depression due to my visit to the hospital left me at the prospect of seeing Halsey again that night. It was about five o'clock when Liddy left me for a nap before dinner, having put me into a gray silk dressing-gown and a pair of slippers. I listened to her retreating footsteps, and as soon as she was safely below stairs I went up to the trunkroom. The place had not been disturbed, and I proceeded at once to try to discover the entrance to the hidden room. The openings on either side, as I have said, showed nothing but perhaps three feet of brick wall. There was no sign of an entrance—no levers, no hinges, to give a hint. Either the mantel or the roof, I decided, and after a half-hour at the mantel, productive of absolutely no result, I decided to try the roof.

I am not fond of a height. The few occasions on which I have climbed a step-ladder have always left me dizzy and weak in the knees. The top of the Washington monument is as impossible to me as the elevation to the presidential chair. And yet—I climbed out on the Sunnyside roof without a second's hesitation. Like a dog on a scent, like my bear-skin progenitor, with his spear and his wild boar, to me now there was the lust of the chase, the frenzy of pursuit, the dust of battle. I got quite a little of the latter on me as I climbed from the unfinished ballroom out through a window to the roof of the east wing of the building, which was only two stories in height.

Once out there, access to the top of the main building was rendered easy—at least it looked easy—by a small

vertical iron ladder, fastened to the wall outside of the ballroom, and perhaps 12 feet high. The 12 feet looked short from below, but they were difficult to climb. I gathered my silk gown around me, and succeeded finally in making the top of the ladder. Once there, however, I was completely out of breath. I sat down, my feet on the top rung, and put my hair-pins in more securely, while the wind belated my dressing-gown out like a sail. I had torn a great strip of the silk loose, and now I ruthlessly finished the destruction of my gown by jerking it free and tying it around my head.

Luckily, the roof was flat, and I was able to go over every inch of it. But the result was disappointing; no trap-door revealed itself, no glass window; nothing but a couple of pipes two inches across, and standing perhaps 18 inches high and three feet apart, with a cap to prevent rain from entering and raised to permit the passage of air. I picked up a pebble from the roof and dropped it down, listening with my ear at one of the pipes. I could hear it strike on something with a sharp, metallic sound, but it was impossible for me to tell how far it had gone.

I gave up finally and went down the ladder again, getting in through the ballroom window without being observed. I went back at once to the trunkroom, and sitting down on a box, gave my mind, as consistently as I could, to the problem before me. If the pipes in the roof were ventilators to the secret room, and there was no trap-door above, the entrance was probably in one of the two rooms between which it lay—unless, indeed, the room had been built, and the opening closed with a brick and mortar wall.

The mantel fascinated me. Made of wood and carved, the more I looked the more I wondered that I had not noticed before the absurdity of such a mantel in such a place. It was covered with scrolls and panels, and finally, by the merest accident, I pushed one of the panels at the side. It moved easily, revealing a small brass knob.

It is not necessary to detail the fluctuations of hope and despair, and not a little fear of what lay beyond, with which I twisted and turned the knob. It moved, but nothing seemed to happen, and then I discovered the trouble. I pushed the knob vigorously to one side, and the whole mantel swung loose from the wall almost a foot, revealing a cavernous space beyond.

I took a long breath, closed the door from the trunkroom into the hall—thank heaven, I did not lock it—and pulling the mantel-door wide open, I stepped into the chimney-room. I had time to get a hazy view of a small portable safe, a common wooden table and a chair—then the mantel door swung to, and clicked behind me. I stood quite still for a moment, in the darkness, unable to comprehend what had happened. Then I turned and beat furiously at the door with my fists. It was closed and locked again, and my fingers in the darkness slid over a smooth wooden surface without a sign of a knob.

I was furiously angry—at myself, at the mantel-door, at everything. I did not fear suffocation; before the thought had come to me I had already seen a gleam of light from the two small ventilating pipes in the roof. They supplied air, but nothing else. The room itself was shrouded in blackness.

I must have dozed off. I am sure I did not faint. I was never more composed in my life. I remember

planning, if I were not discovered, who would have my things. I knew Liddy would want my heliotrope poplin, and she's a fright in lavender. Once or twice I heard mice in the partitions, and so I sat on the table, with my feet on the chair. I imagined I could hear the search going on through the house, and once some one came into the trunkroom; I could distinctly hear footsteps.

"In the chimney! In the chimney!" I called with all my might, and was rewarded by a piercing shriek from Liddy and the slam of the trunkroom door.

I felt easier after that, although the room was oppressively hot and enervating. I had no doubt the search for me would now come in the right direction, and after a little, I dropped into a doze. How long I slept I do not know.

It must have been several hours, for I had been tired from a busy day, and I waked stiff from my awkward position. I could not remember where I was for a few minutes, and my head felt heavy and congested. Gradually I roused to my surroundings, and to the fact that in spite of ventilators, the air was bad and growing worse. I was breathing long, gasping respirations, and my face was damp and clammy. I must have been there a long time, and the searchers were probably hunting outside the house, dredging the creek, or beating the woodland. I knew that another hour or two would find me unconscious, and with my inability to cry out would go my only chance of rescue. It was the combination of bad air and heat, probably, for some inadequate ventilation was coming through the pipes. I tried to retain my consciousness by walking the length of the room and back, over and over, but I had not the strength to keep it up, so I sat down on the table again, my back against the wall.

The house was very still. Once my straining ears seemed to catch a footfall beneath me, possibly in my own room. I groped for the chair from the table, and pounded with it frantically on the floor. But nothing happened; I realized bitterly that if the sound was heard at all, no doubt it was classed with the other rappings that had so alarmed us recently.

And then—I heard sounds from below me, in the house. There was a peculiar throbbing, vibrating noise that I felt rather than heard, much like the pulsing beat of fire engines in the city. For one awful moment I thought the house was on fire, and every drop of blood in my body gathered around my heart; then I knew. It was the engine of the automobile, and Halsey had come back. Hope sprang up afresh. Halsey's clear head and Gertrude's intuition might do what Liddy's hysteria and three detectives had failed in.

After a time I thought I had been right. There was certainly something going on down below; doors were slamming, people were hurrying through the halls, and certain high notes of excited voices penetrated to me shrilly. I hoped they were coming closer, but after a time the sounds died away below, and I was left to the silence and heat, to the weight of the darkness, to the oppression of walls that seemed to close in on me and stifle me.

The first warning I had was a stealthy fumbling at the lock of the mantel-door. With my mouth open to scream, I stopped. Perhaps the situation had rendered me acute, perhaps it was instinctive. Whatever it was, I sat without moving, and some one outside, in absolute stillness, ran his fingers over the carving of the



mantel and—found the panel.

Now the sounds below redoubled; from the clatter and jarring I knew that several people were running up the stairs, and as the sounds approached, I could even hear what they said.

"Watch the end staircases!" Jamieson shouted. "Damnation—there's no light here!" And then a second later, "All together now. One—two—three—"

The door into the trunkroom had been locked from the inside. At the second that it gave, opening against the wall with a crash and evidently tumbling somebody into the room, the stealthy fingers beyond the mantel-door gave the knob the proper impetus, and—the door swung open, and closed again. Only—and Liddy always screams and puts her fingers in her ears at this point—only now I was not alone in the chimney room. There was some one else in the darkness, some one who breathed hard, and who was so close I could have touched him with my hand.

I was in a paralysis of terror. Outside there were excited voices and incredulous oaths. The trunks were being jerked around in a frantic search, the windows were thrown open, only to show a sheer drop of 40 feet. And the man in the room with me leaned against the mantel-door and listened. His pursuers were plainly baffled; I heard him draw a long breath, and turn to grope his way through the blackness. Then—he touched my hand, cold, clammy, death-like.

A hand in an empty room! He drew in his breath, the sharp intaking of horror that fills lungs suddenly collapsed. Beyond jerking his hand away instantly, he made no movement. I think absolute terror had him by the throat. Then he stepped back, without turning, retreating foot by foot from The Dread in the corner, and I do not think he breathed.

Then, with the relief of space between us, I screamed, ear-splittingly, madly, and they heard me outside.

"In the chimney!" I shrieked. "Behind the mantel! The mantel!"

With an oath the figure hurled itself across the room at me, and I screamed again. In his blind fury he had missed me; I heard him strike the wall. That one time I eluded him; I was across the room, and I had got the chair. He stood for a second, listening, then—he made another rush and I struck out with my weapon. I think it stunned him, for I had a second's respite when I could hear him breathing, and some one shouted outside: "We—can't—get—in. How—does—it open?"

But the man in the room had changed his tactics. I knew he was creeping on me, inch by inch, and I could not tell from where. And then—he caught me. He held his hand over my mouth, and I bit him. I was helpless, strangled—and some one was trying to break in the mantel from outside. It began to yield somewhere, for a thin wedge of yellowish light was reflected on the opposite wall. When he saw that, my assailant dropped me with a curse; then—the opposite wall swung open noiselessly, closed again without a sound, and I was alone. The intruder was gone.

"In the next room!" I called wildly. "The next room!" But the sound of blows on the mantel drowned my voice. By the time I had made them understand, a couple of minutes had elapsed. The pursuit was taken up then, by all except Alex, who was determined to liberate me. When I stepped out into the trunkroom a free woman again I could hear the chase far below.

I must say, for all Alex's anxiety to set me free, he paid little enough attention to my plight. He jumped through the opening into the secret room and picked up the portable safe.

"I am going to put this in Mr. Halsey's room, Miss Innes," he said, "and I shall send one of the detectives to guard it."

I hardly heard him. I wanted to laugh and cry in the same breath—to crawl into bed and have a cup of tea, and scold Liddy, and do any of the thousand natural things that I had never expected to do again. And the air! The touch of the cool night air on my face!

(TO BE CONTINUED.)

### Worried Over His Trousers.

The humors and tragedies of New York East side life are delineated by Frank Marshall White in an article in Harper's Weekly. Master Jacob Rosenberg, eleven or twelve years of age, was suffering from a broken leg. "His supreme agony came, however, when Dr. M. ripped up one side of the juvenile trousers with a pair of scissors to make room for bandages. "My new pants! My new pants! He's cutting my new pants!" Jacob shrieked, and almost wriggled himself out of the grasp of the policeman and the driver in his efforts to prevent the mutilation of his raiment. All the way to his home in the ambulance the boy bewailed his mangled trousers more than he did his broken leg.

We think that preachers ought to say more about hell fire and brimstone; people are feeling altogether too easy about themselves.

## NEBRASKA IN BRIEF.

News Notes of Interest From Various Sections.

The scarlet fever season has been revived at Sutton by reason of new cases.

The corn show at North Bend was a great success and the attendance was good.

Sheriff James Chirside of Jefferson county prevented several prisoners in the county jail from breaking out.

Peru now has a jail, which has just been completed. It is built of cement blocks, with a steel door, concrete floor and reinforced concrete roof.

The Monte Christo cafe, one of McCook's well known hotels, passed from Mrs. Viola Bailew's management into the management of S. D. McClain.

The bricklayers of Alma have just about finished their work on the \$18,000 Everson block and will begin work on the Carnegie library building next week.

Henry McCullom of Alma, who was shot by a drunken man on the train at Chester, while en route home from Iowa, is recovering and will be brought home near Alma, soon.

A petition signed by 434 names has been filed with the county clerk of York county asking that a vote be taken at the coming election to change the county government from commissioner system.

Mayor Henry Schuff has recently opened the New Vienna in Grand Island, which is one of the finest European houses in the state, having a seating capacity for 125 guests, divided in three apartments.

While ditching for tiling purposes on the George C. Blessing farm north of Homer, the workmen excavated a skeleton of a large elk. The bones were in a perfect state of preservation and were found at a depth of seven feet.

John Lieb of Pender has been arrested for attempted criminal assault. He is accused of taking two little daughters of C. Bowling into an empty ice house and making indecent proposals to them. Pending a hearing, he is out on bail of \$2,500.

J. W. Bergers of Omaha has appealed to the supreme court from the judgment of \$10,000 against him, awarded F. N. Phelps for the alienation of his wife's affections. All of the parties to the suit reside in Omaha. Phelps sued for \$25,000, and was given \$16,667. This was afterwards reduced by the court to \$10,000.

Roy Chadwick, of St. Joseph, was placed under peace bonds at Kearney upon complaint of his wife and when he could not find bondsmen to go the \$500 bond was sent to jail for one year. Chadwick recently came to Nebraska in search of his wife, who is teaching school near Miller and after locating her threatened her life.

Coroner Peters of Springfield took charge of the body of John Shimm, who committed suicide by hanging himself in a barn about a mile south of Bellevue, Sarpy county. The body was found dangling from the rafters in the barn of Richard Vals, by a couple of boys. Shimm had been living on an island in Papio creek, farming and fishing for a living.

Sheriff Walter Cammons and Deputy Sheriff Bede Laughton of Buffalo county arrested four men, all strangers in Kearney, for stealing dry goods from a local merchant. The men were found in the possession of \$119 worth of silk goods, suits and overcoats. They were shadowed for two days before being arrested and were then trapped and evidence against them secured.

John Wehmer, the six-year-old son of Mr. and Mrs. Fred Wehmer, who live one mile west of Sterling, died as a result of an accident which befell him. The boy had climbed upon a corner and a board broke, allowing him to fall to the ground. He alighted upon his right arm, breaking the member in three places, the bone protruding through the flesh. Blood poisoning ended his life.

William Wilhelmly has prepared a large tract of land near Nebraska City which he will devote to the raising of ginseng. He claims that as much as \$100 per acre can be made in raising the plant, the dried root of which is sold to the Chinese as their cure-all and it demands a big price.

Dave Gourlay, a prosperous ranchman near Rushville, had a close call from being buried alive. He was working in a ditch eight feet deep in the yard of his new residence property, when the ditch caved in as he was stooping down. He was buried three feet under the dirt, but was dug out before life was gone.

Copies of general order No. 20 were received at Beatrice from Adjutant General Hartigan of the Nebraska national guards by commanders of the local military organizations, commanding Vernon H. Randall of Company C and Glen Beaver of the first machine gun company to appear before the general court martial which will convene at Lincoln, November 15, to answer charges of disobedience, and violation of orders and absence without leave from the recent military encampment at Fort Riley, Kas.

The Syracuse Woman's club had an unusual program for its meeting the other day, styled "Political day." County option and initiative and referendum were discussed and a regular primary election was held, using sample ballot to vote, with judges, clerks and booths.

Nicholas M. Farrard of Burt county was granted an unconditional pardon by Governor Shallenberger. Farrard was sent to the penitentiary for manslaughter. He was convicted on circumstantial evidence entirely. He has served eleven months in prison and has an excellent record.

## RHEUMATISM



I want every chronic rheumatic to throw away all medicines, all treatments, all blisters, and give MURPHY'S RHEUMATISM REMEDY a trial. No matter what your doctor may say, no matter what your friends may say, no matter how prejudiced you may be against all advertised remedies, go at once to your drug store and get a bottle of the RHEUMATISM REMEDY. If it fails to give satisfaction, I will refund your money.—Murphy's Remedy. Remember this remedy contains no salicylic acid, no opium, cocaine, morphine or other harmful drugs. It is put up under the guarantee of the Pure Food and Drug Act. For sale by all druggists. Price, 25c.

## Make the Liver Do its Duty

Nine times in ten when the liver is right the stomach and bowels are right.

### CARTER'S LITTLE LIVER PILLS

gently but firmly compel a lazy liver to do its duty.

Cures Constipation, Indigestion, Sick Headache, and Distress After Eating.

Small Pill, Small Dose, Small Price

Genuine must bear Signature

Wm. Wood

True happiness is found in great love manifesting itself in service.—Thoreau.

Pettit's Eye Salve Restores. No matter how badly the eyes may be diseased or injured. All druggists or Howard Bros., Buffalo, N. Y.

Now He Knows.

"On what grounds does your father object to me?" he asked. "On any grounds within a mile of our house," she answered.

Important to Mothers

Examine carefully every bottle of CASTORIA, a safe and sure remedy for infants and children, and see that it bears the

Signature of *Wm. Wood* In Use For Over 30 Years. The Kind You Have Always Bought

The Difference.

"I don't see any difference between you and a trained nurse except the uniform," said her sick husband. "And the salary," she added, thoughtfully.—Harper's Bazar.

The Family Growler.

"Why are you weeping, little boy?" "I broke de pitcher." "Well, there's no use crying over split milk." "G'wan! Dis wuz beer."—Louisville Courier-Journal.

Easy for Her.

An extremely corpulent old lady was entertaining her grandchild at luncheon when she found occasion to reprimand the little girl for dropping some food on the tablecloth.

"You don't see grandma dropping anything on the table," she said. "Of course not," replied the child; "God gave you something in front to stop it."

Deadlock.

"Who is that man who has been sitting behind the bar day after day?" inquired the stranger in Crimson Gulch.

"That's Stage Coach Charley. He's in a peculiar predicament. He went to town last week and got his teeth fixed. Then he came here, and, being broke, ran up a bill on the strength of his seven dollars' worth of gold fillin'. Charley won't submit to havin' the nuggets pried out an' the proprietor won't let him git away with the collateral, and there you are!"

WISE WORDS. A Physician on Food.

A physician, of Portland, Oregon, has views about food. He says:

"I have always believed that the duty of the physician does not cease with treating the sick, but that we owe it to humanity to teach them how to protect their health, especially by hygienic and dietetic laws.

"With such a feeling as to my duty I take great pleasure in saying to the public that in my own experience and also from personal observation I have found no food equal to Grape-Nuts, and that I find there is almost no limit to the great benefits this food will bring when used in all cases of sickness and convalescence.

"It is my experience that no physical condition forbids the use of Grape-Nuts. To persons in health there is nothing so nourishing and acceptable to the stomach, especially at breakfast, to start the machinery of the human system on the day's work.

"In cases of indigestion I know that a complete breakfast can be made of Grape-Nuts and cream and I think it is not advisable to overload the stomach at the morning meal. I also know the great value of Grape-Nuts when the stomach is too weak to digest other food.

"This is written after an experience of more than 20 years, treating all manner of chronic and acute diseases, and the letter is written voluntarily on my part without any request for it." Read the little book, "The Road to Wellville," in pkgs. "There's a Reason."



No Trap-Door Revealed Itself.