

THE CIRCULAR STAIRCASE

By MARY ROBERTS RINEHART
Illustrations by Rex Waters
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. 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 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 deepened the mystery. The stairs were burned, and in the dark Miss Innes shot an intruder. Halsey mysteriously disappeared. His auto was 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. 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 years before had married her sister under the alias of Wallace. Lucien Wallace was born of the marriage. Miss Innes discovered a secret panel to the mysterious room and unwittingly locked herself within. During the hunt for her the searchers ran across Paul Armstrong. Armstrong pitched forward down the circular staircase, breaking his neck. In the secret room was found the Traders' bank loot, which Armstrong had taken.

CHAPTER XXXIII.—Continued.

As Alex and I reached the second floor, Mr. Jamieson met us. He was grave and quiet, and he nodded comprehendingly when he saw the safe.

"Will you come with me for a moment, Miss Innes?" he asked soberly, and on my assenting, he led the way to the east wing. There were lights moving around below, and some of the maids were standing gaping down. They screamed when they saw me, and drew back to let me pass. There was a sort of hush over the scene; Alex, behind me, muttered something I could not hear, and brushed past me without ceremony. Then I realized that a man was lying doubled up at the foot of the staircase, and that Alex was stooping over him.

As I came slowly down, Winters stepped back, and Alex straightened himself, looking at me across the body with impenetrable eyes. In his hand he held a shaggy gray wig, and before me on the floor lay the man whose headstone stood in Casanova churchyard—Paul Armstrong.

Winters told the story in a dozen words. In his headlong flight down the circular staircase, with Winters just behind, Paul Armstrong had pitched forward violently, struck his head against the door to the east veranda, and probably broken his neck. He had died as Winters reached him.

As the detective finished, I saw Halsey, pale and shaken, in the cardroom doorway, and for the first time that night I lost my self-control. I put my arms around my boy, and for a moment he had to support me. A second later, over Halsey's shoulder, I saw something that turned my emotion into other channels, for behind him, in the shadowy cardroom, were Gertrude and Alex, the gardener, and—there is no use mincing matters—he was kissing her!

I was unable to speak. Twice I opened my mouth; then I turned Halsey around and pointed. They were quite unconscious of us; her head was on his shoulder, his face against her hair. As it happened, it was Mr. Jamieson who broke up the tableau.

He stepped over to Alex and touched him on the arm.

"And now," he said quietly, "how long are you and I to play our little comedy, Mr. Bailey?"

CHAPTER XXXIV.

The Odds and Ends.

Of Dr. Walker's sensational escape that night to South America, of the recovery of over \$1,000,000 in cash and securities in the safe from the chimney room—the papers have kept the public well informed. Of my share in discovering the secret chamber they have been singularly silent. The inner history has never been told. Mr. Jamieson got all kinds of credit, and some of it he deserved, but if Jack Bailey, as Alex, had not traced Halsey and insisted on the disinterring of Paul Armstrong's casket, if he had not suspected the truth from the start, where would the detective have been?

When Halsey learned the truth, he insisted on going the next morning, weak as he was, to Louise, and by night she was at Sunnyside, under Gertrude's particular care, while her mother had gone to Barbara Fitzhugh's.

What Halsey said to Mrs. Armstrong I never knew, but that he was considerate and chivalrous I feel confident. It was Halsey's way always with women.



He Was Kissing Her.

He and Louise had no conversation together until that night. Gertrude and Alex—I mean Jack—had gone for a walk, although it was nine o'clock, and anybody but a pair of young geese would have known that dew was falling, and that it is next to impossible to get rid of a summer cold.

At half after nine, growing weary of my own company, I went downstairs to find the young people. At the door of the living room I paused. Gertrude and Jack had returned and were there, sitting together on a divan, with only one lamp lighted. They did not see or hear me, and I beat a hasty retreat to the library. But here again I was driven back. Louise was sitting in a deep chair, looking the happiest I had ever seen her, with Halsey on the arm of the chair, holding her close.

The next day, by degrees, I got the whole story. Paul Armstrong had a besetting evil—the love of money. Common enough, but he loved money, not for what it would buy, but for its own sake. An examination of the books showed no irregularities in the past year since John had been cashier, but before that, in the time of Anderson, the old cashier, who had died, much strange juggling had been done with the records. The railroad in New Mexico had apparently drained the banker's private fortune, and he determined to retrieve it by one stroke. This was nothing less than the looting of the bank's securities, turning them into money, and making his escape.

But the law has long arms. Paul Armstrong evidently studied the situation carefully. Just as the only good Indian is a dead Indian, so the only safe defaulter is a dead defaulter. He decided to die, to all appearances, and when the hue and cry subsided, he would be able to enjoy his money almost anywhere he wished.

The first necessity was an accomplice. The connivance of Dr. Walker was suggested by his love for Louise. The man was unscrupulous, and with the girl as a bait, Paul Armstrong soon had him fast. The plan was apparently the acme of simplicity: A small town in the west, an attack of heart disease, a body from a medical college dissecting room shipped in a trunk to Dr. Walker by a colleague in San Francisco, and palmed off for the supposed dead banker. What was simpler?

The woman, Nina Carrington, was the cog that slipped. What she only suspected, what she really knew, we never learned. She was a chambermaid in the hotel at C—, and it was evidently her intention to blackmail Dr. Walker. His position at that time was uncomfortable: To pay the woman to keep quiet would be confession. He denied the whole thing, and she went to Halsey.

It was that that had taken Halsey to the doctor the night he disappeared. He accused the doctor of the deception, and, crossing the lawn, had said something cruel to Louise. Then, furious at her apparent connivance, he had started for the station. Dr. Walker and Paul Armstrong—the latter still lame where I had shot him—hurried across to the embankment, certain only of one thing, Halsey must not tell the detective what he suspected until the money had been removed from the chimney room. They stepped into the road in front of the car to stop it, and fate played into their hands. The car struck the train, and they had only to dispose of the unconscious figure in the road. This they did as I have told. For three

days Halsey lay in the box car, tied hand and foot, suffering tortures of thirst, delirious at times, and discovered by a tramp at Johnsville only in time to save his life.

To go back to Paul Armstrong. At the last moment his plans had been frustrated. Sunnyside, with its hoard in the chimney room, had been rented without his knowledge! Attempts to dislodge me having failed, he was driven to breaking into his own house. The ladder in the chute, the burning of the stable and the entrance through the cardroom window—all were in the course of a desperate attempt to get into the chimney room.

Louise and her mother had, from the first, been the great stumbling-blocks. The plan had been to send Louise away until it was too late for her to interfere, but she came back to the hotel at C— just at the wrong time. There was a terrible scene. The girl was told that something of the kind was necessary; that the bank was about to close and her stepfather would either avoid arrest and disgrace in this way, or kill himself. Fanny Armstrong was a weakling, but Louise was more difficult to manage. She had no love for her stepfather, but her devotion to her mother was entire, self-sacrificing. Forced into acquiescence by her mother's appeals, overwhelmed by the situation, the girl consented and fled.

From somewhere in Colorado she sent an anonymous telegram to Jack Bailey at the Traders' bank. Trapped as she was, she did not want to see an innocent man arrested. The telegram, received on Thursday, had sent the cashier to the bank that night in a frenzy.

Louise arrived at Sunnyside and found the house rented. Not knowing what to do, she sent for Arnold at the Greenwood club, and told him a little, not all. She told him that there was something wrong, and that the bank was about to close. That his father was responsible. Of the conspiracy she said nothing. To her surprise, Arnold already knew, through Bailey that night, that things were not right. Moreover, he suspected what Louise did not, that the money was hidden at Sunnyside. He had a scrap of paper that indicated a concealed room somewhere.

His inherited cupidity was aroused. Eager to get Halsey and Jack Bailey out of the house, he went up to the east entry, and in the billiard room gave the cashier what he had refused earlier in the evening—the address of Paul Armstrong in California and a telegram which had been forwarded to the club for Bailey, from Dr. Walker. It was in response to one Bailey had sent, and it said that Paul Armstrong was very ill.

Bailey was almost desperate. He decided to go west and find Paul Armstrong and to force him to disgorge. But the catastrophe at the bank occurred sooner than he had expected. On the moment of starting west, at Andrews station, where Mr. Jamieson had located the car, he read that the bank had closed, and, going back, surrendered himself.

John Bailey had known Paul Armstrong intimately. He did not believe that the money was gone; in fact, it was hardly possible in the interval since the securities had been taken. Where was it? And from some chance remark let fall some months earlier by Arnold Armstrong at a dinner, Bailey felt sure there was a hidden room at Sunnyside. He tried to see the architect of the building, but like the contractor, if he knew of the room, he refused any information. It



was Halsey's idea that John Bailey come to the house as a gardener, and pursue his investigations as he could. His smooth upper lip had been sufficient disguise, with his change of clothes, and a hair-cut by a country barber.

So it was Alex, Jack Bailey, who had been our ghost. Not only had he alarmed Louise—and himself, he admitted—on the circular staircase, but he had dug the hole in the trunkroom wall, and later sent Eliza into hysteria. The note Liddy had found in Gertrude's scrap-basket was from him, and it was he who had started me into unconscionable by the clothes chute, and, with Gertrude's help, had carried me to Louise's room. Gertrude, I learned, had watched all night beside me, in an extremity of anxiety about me.

That old Thomas had seen his master, and thought he had seen the Sunnyside ghost, there could be no doubt. Of that story of Thomas, about seeing Jack Bailey in the footpath between the club and Sunnyside, the night Liddy and I heard the noise on the circular staircase—that, too, was right. On the night before Arnold Armstrong was murdered, Jack Bailey had made an attempt to search for the secret room. He secured Arnold's keys from his room at the club and got into the house, armed with a golf-stick for sounding the walls. He ran against the hamper at the head of the stairs, caught his cuff-link in it, and dropped the golf-stick with a crash. He was glad enough to get away without an alarm being raised, and he took the "owl" train to town.

The oddest thing to me was that Mr. Jamieson had known for some time that Alex was Jack Bailey. But the face of the pseudo-gardener was very queer indeed when, that night, in the cardroom, the detective turned to him and said:

"How long are you and I going to play our little comedy, Mr. Bailey?"

Well, it is all over now. Paul Armstrong rests in Casanova churchyard, and this time there is no mistake. I went to the funeral, because I wanted to be sure he was really buried, and I looked at the step of the shaft where I had sat that night, and wondered if it was all real. Sunnyside is for sale—no, I shall not buy it. Little Lucien Armstrong is living with his step-grandmother, who is recovering gradually from troubles that had extended over the entire period of her second marriage. Anne Watson lies not far from the man she killed, and who as surely caused her death. Thomas, the fourth victim of the conspiracy, is buried on the hill. With Nina Carrington, five lives were sacrificed in the course of this grim conspiracy.

There will be two weddings before long, and Liddy has asked for my hellebore poplin to wear to the church. I knew she would. She has wanted it for three years, and she was quite ugly the time I spilled coffee on it. We are very quiet, just the two of us. Liddy still clings to her ghost theory, and points to my wet and muddy boots in the trunkroom as proof. I am gray, I admit, but I haven't felt as well in a dozen years. Sometimes, when I am bored, I ring for Liddy, and we talk things over. When Warner married Rosie, Liddy sniffed and said what I took for faithfulness in Rosie had been nothing but mawkishness. I have not yet outlived Liddy's contempt because I gave them silver knives and forks as a wedding gift.

So we sit and talk, and sometimes Liddy threatens to leave, and often I discharge her, but we stay together somehow. I am talking of renting a house next year, and Liddy says to be sure there is no ghost. To be perfectly frank, I never really lived until that summer. Time has passed since I began this story. My neighbors are packing up for another summer. Liddy is having the awnings put up, and the window-boxes filled. Liddy or no Liddy, I shall advertise to-morrow for a house in the country, and I don't care if it has a Circular Staircase.

THE END.

Hunters Kill Big Grizzly.

The monster grizzly bear that for years has been making many sleepless nights for the farmers, miners and residents of the northwestern Trinity region has at last been slain.

This monarch of the forest and slayer of small domestic animals was killed by Thomas McDonald, a wealthy mining man who has been camping along the Salmon range in Trinity.

Single-handed McDonald, who is a mountaineer of marked ability, killed the bear after a lively tussle. The bear weighed 1,000 pounds, and is the finest and biggest specimen ever seen in the Trinity mountain regions. The animal had for years defied all efforts to capture or kill him.

Maryville Correspondence San Francisco Call.

Safe Offer.

Jones—Why on earth do you offer such a large reward for the return of that horrid, yapping, snapping cur?
Brown—To please my wife.
Jones—But such a large reward will be sure to bring him back.
Brown—O, no, it won't. He's dead. I drowned him myself.—Stray Stories

NEBRASKA IN BRIEF.

News Notes of Interest From Various Sections.

Blue Hill is soon to have a lighting plant.

A series of religious meetings are being held in Blue Hill.

The Nebraska bakers will have their meeting next year at Fremont.

A fire at Graf, in Johnson county, destroyed two stores with the goods therein.

Thieves entered the pasture of B. K. Penner, living just over the Gage county line in Jefferson county, and stole three head of horses.

Peter Penner of Beatrice celebrated his eighty-seventh birthday at his home in the north part of the city, where he located forty years ago.

Mrs. Alice Jordan Paul, wife of Major Herbert J. Paul of the Second regiment, Nebraska National Guard, died at her home in St. Paul after a short illness.

Peterson Brothers of Cuming county sold fourteen head of six months' old pigs at public sale, the price realized being more than an average of \$22 per head.

Mr. and Mrs. H. L. Gardner, who recently sold the Cortland Sun to J. R. Ellis of Beatrice, will return to Omaha where they resided before locating at Cortland.

The band at Cook has invested in \$800 worth of new silver-plated instruments. The instructor is Professor Joseph Chairini, bandmaster of the Tecumseh Military band.

The tenth annual sunset social for all persons over the age of seventy years was held in York, at which ninety-nine were present, the oldest being Mrs. Mary Wildman, who was ninety-two years old.

The Congregational brotherhood of Fremont will stand sponsor for the production of the oratorio, "Queen Esther," in Fremont after the holidays and will proceed to organize a chorus of 200 local voices.

In Jack Barrett, who is serving a sentence of twenty-five days in the county jail on the charge of vagrancy, the Fremont police believe they have Oscar Bridges, wanted in Washington state for a holdup job.

Recently the Nebraska City Vinegar works received forty cars of apples, which will be converted into cider and vinegar. Most of the apples came from southeastern Nebraska and a few cars from Missouri.

Two of York's citizens were honored recently. W. R. Furman, councilman of the Third ward, was elected vice president of the Nebraska State Bakers' association, and Dale McDonald is one of four from this state invited by the United States government to accept six months' study at Fort Crook.

Fred Fiene, of Antelope county, was before County Judge Wilson on two complaints, the first one charging him with maliciously cutting down trees; second and third counts were cutting down fence posts. He was fined \$25 and costs on the first, and on the second and third, was held to the next term of the district court.

Jefferson Welcher, a hotel owner of Dunbar, was arrested for assaulting a Dunbar young man. His fine was assessed at \$50 and costs and he was placed under bonds to keep the peace. He paid his fine. Later a complaint was filed charging him with an attempted assault upon a 12-year-old girl of that town. He pleaded not guilty and the court continued the case.

The most encouraging of reports come from Johnson county cornfields. The yield is going to be more than an average, notwithstanding the many predictions made in July and August that there would be no crop at all. This season, the first in years, there will be an abundant crop on the bottom lands, the Nehama river and Badger creek not having left their banks during the year. The grain is of excellent quality.

Rev. Jordan of South Omaha takes the ground that it is the duty of preachers to take interest in politics. The marriage of Miss Eva Smith, daughter of Brigadier General Frederick A. Smith, U. S. A., commanding the department of the Missouri, to Capt. A. Larue Christie of the Eighth infantry, stationed at Presidio, Cal., was solemnized at Omaha. The wedding, a brilliant affair, was followed by a reception at which General and Mrs. Smith and Mr. and Mrs. C. A. Christie of Jersey City, parents of the bridegroom, were in the receiving line.

Secretary Marshall of the state board of horticulture has returned from a visit to the southeastern part of Nebraska. "I visited the apple farm of Henry C. Smith, thirteen miles east of Falls City. Mr. Smith has sixty-five acres of orchard and will this year raise 22,000 bushels of apples. He sold his Jonathans, which are an early apple, for \$4 a barrel and he has shipped and stored most of his crop in cold storage houses at St. Paul, Minneapolis, Council Bluffs, Indianapolis, Ind., and Kansas City.

Announcement has been received in Holdrege of the first sectional meeting of the frontier teachers' association which will be held at Arton, Saturday, November 5. Preparations are being made by the organization to make it one of the banner events of the year.

A brakeman by the name of Edward Napier was killed in the Lexington yards by a freight local of the Union Pacific. The train was switching and his foot got caught in a frog. The train ran over a part of his head and also crushed his leg and mangled his body.

And Endless Job.
"I'll bet I could keep a fairy god-mother busy."
"As to how?"
"I'd have her look after my touring car."

A good honest remedy for Rheumatism, Neuralgia and Sore Throat is Hamlin's Wizard Oil. Nothing will so quickly drive out all pain and inflammation.

Some folks never feel saintly until they have a chance to syndicate their sorrows.

Mrs. Winstow's Soothing Syrup. For children teething, softens the gums, reduces inflammation, allays pain, cures wind colic, etc. In a bottle.

Revenge is better than a greedy kind of gratitude.

BETTER HEALTH WILL RESULT

To the thousands of persons who suffer from ailments of the Stomach, Liver, Kidneys or Bowels, and who therefore, feel half-sick all the time, we want to urge an immediate trial of Hostetter's Stomach Bitters. We know from past experience that it will be of great benefit to you and bring about an improvement in your health. It is for Indigestion, Dyspepsia, Constipation and Malarial Fever. Try it today.

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SWELLING THE HOTEL BILL

Hotel Keeper's Method of Taxing Traveler Had at Least the Method of Novelty.

One of the things which help swell the traveler's expenses, both in this country and abroad, is the "extra." It may or may not be charged in the bill, but it is sure to be paid for. Probably even the most generous traveler, however, will have some sympathy for the gentleman in the following story who was made to pay liberally for a certain annoying privilege.

During his stay at the hotel the weather had been very hot.

"Charles," said the landlord to the clerk who was making out the bill to be presented to the departing guest, "have you noticed that the gentleman in number seven has consulted the thermometer on the piazza at least ten times every morning during his stay here?"

Charles replied that he had.

"Well," said the landlord, "charge him the price of one dinner a day for the use of the thermometer."—Youth's Companion.

Laying the Foundation.
"Why are you always so careful to ask advice about what you are going to do?"
"So that if things go wrong I can say 'I told you so.'"

"Off Day" of Favorite.
Chapley—How did she happen to refuse you; I thought you were her favorite?
Washley—Well, the favorite didn't win, that's all.

The more the tongue flows the less the head knows.

THE FIRST TASTE
Learned to Drink Coffee When a Baby.

If parents realized the fact that coffee contains a drug—caffeine—which is especially harmful to children, they would doubtless hesitate before giving the babies coffee to drink.

"When I was a child in my mother's arms and first began to nibble things at the table, mother used to give me sips of coffee. As my parents used coffee exclusively at meals I never knew there was anything to drink but coffee and water.

"And so I contracted the coffee habit early. I remember when quite young the continual use of coffee so affected my parents that they tried roasting wheat and barley, then ground it in the coffee-mill, as a substitute for coffee.

"But it did not taste right and they went back to coffee again. That was long before Postum was ever heard of. I continued to use coffee until I was 27, and when I got into office work, I began to have nervous spells. Especially after breakfast I was so nervous I could scarcely attend to my correspondence.

"At night, after having coffee for supper, I could hardly sleep, and on rising in the morning would feel weak and nervous.

"A friend persuaded me to try Postum. My wife and I did not like it at first, but later when boiled good and strong it was fine. Now we would not give up Postum for the best coffee ever tasted.

"I can now get good sleep, am free from nervousness and headaches. I recommend Postum to all coffee drinkers."

Read "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.