

THE CIRCULAR STAIRCASE

By MARY ROBERTS RINEHART
ILLUSTRATIONS BY ROY WALTERS
COPYRIGHT 1910 BY DOBBS-MERRILL CO.

CHAPTER I.

I Take a Country House.
This is the story of how a middle-aged spinster lost her mind, deserted her domestic gods in the city, took a furnished house for the summer out of town, and found herself involved in one of those mysterious crimes that keep our newspapers and detective agencies happy and prosperous. For 20 years I had been perfectly comfortable; for 20 years I had had the window-boxes filled in the spring, the carpets lifted, the awnings put up and the furniture covered with brown linen; for as many summers I had said good-by to my friends, and, after watching their perspiring helms, had settled down to a delicious quiet in town, where the mail comes three times a day, and the water supply does not depend on a tank on the roof.

And then—the madness seized me. When I look back over the months I spent in Sunnyside, I wonder that I survived at all. As it is, I show the wear and tear of my harrowing experiences. I have turned very gray—Liddy reminded me of it only yesterday by saying that a little bluing in the rinse water would make my hair silvery instead of a yellow white. I hate to be reminded of unpleasant things and I snapped her off.

"No," I said sharply, "I'm not going to use bluing at my time of life, or starch, either."

Liddy's nerves are gone, she says, since that awful summer, but she has enough left, goodness knows! And when she begins to go around with a lump in her throat, all I have to do is to threaten to return to Sunnyside, and she is frightened into a semblance of cheerfulness—from which you may judge that the summer there was anything but a success.

The newspaper accounts have been so garbled and incomplete—one of them mentioned me but once, and then only as the tenant at the time the thing happened—that I feel it my due to tell what I know. Mr. Jamieson, the detective, said himself he could never have done without me, although he gave me little enough credit, in print.

I shall have to go back several years—13, to be exact—to start my story. At that time my brother died, leaving me his two children. Halsey was 11 then and Gertrude was seven. When Halsey had finished his electrical course and Gertrude her boarding school both came home to stay. The winter Gertrude came out was nothing but a succession of sitting up late at night to bring her home from things, taking her to the dressmakers between naps the next day, and discouraging ineligible youths with either more money than brains or more brains than money. By spring I was quite tractable. So when Halsey suggested camping in the Adirondacks and Gertrude wanted Bar Harbor, we compromised on a good country house with links near, within motor distance of town and telephone distance of the doctor. That was how we went to Sunnyside.

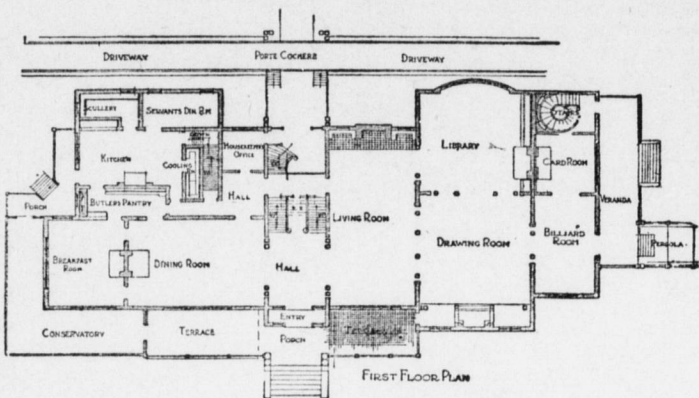
We went out to inspect the property, and it seemed to deserve its name. Its cheerful appearance gave no indication whatever of anything out of the ordinary. Only one thing seemed unusual to me: The housekeeper, who had been left in charge, had moved from the house to the gardener's lodge a few days before. As the lodge was far enough away from the house, it seemed to me that either fire or thieves could complete their work of destruction undisturbed. The property was an extensive one; the house on the top of a hill, which sloped away in great stretches of green lawn and clipped hedges, to the road, and across the valley, perhaps a couple of miles away, was the Greenwood Club house. Gertrude and Halsey were infatuated.

The property was owned by Paul Armstrong, the president of the Traders' bank, who at the time we took the house was in the west with his wife and daughter, and a Dr. Walker, the Armstrong family physician. Halsey knew Louise Armstrong—had been rather attentive to her the winter before, but as Halsey was always attentive to somebody, I had not thought of it seriously, although she was a charming girl. I knew of Mr. Armstrong only through his connection with the bank, where the children's money was largely invested, and through an ugly story about the son, Arnold Armstrong, who was reported to have forged his father's name for a considerable amount to some bank paper. However, the story had had no interest for me.

I cleared Halsey and Gertrude away to a house party, and moved out to Sunnyside the first of May.

The first night passed quietly enough. I have always been grateful for that one night's peace; it shows what the country might be under favorable circumstances. Never after that night did I put my head on my pillow with any assurance how long it would be there; or on my shoulders, for that matter.

On the following morning Liddy and Mrs. Rabston, my own housekeeper, had a difference of opinion, and Mrs. Rabston left on the 11 train. Just after luncheon, Burke, the butler, was taken



FIRST FLOOR PLAN

unexpectedly with a pain in his right side, much worse when I was within hearing distance, and by afternoon he was started cityward. That night the cook's sister had a baby—the cook, seeing indecision in my face, made it twins on second thought—and, to be short, by noon the next day the household staff was down to Liddy and myself. And this in a house with 22 rooms and five baths!

Liddy wanted to go back to the city at once, but the milkboy said that Thomas Johnson, the Armstrongs' colored butler, was working as a waiter at the Greenwood club and might come back. I have the usual scruples about coercing people's servants away, but few of us have any conscience regarding institutions or corporations—witness the way we beat railroads and street car companies when we can—so I called up the club, and about eight o'clock Thomas Johnson came to see me. Poor Thomas!

Well, it ended by my engaging Thomas on the spot, at outrageous wages, and with permission to sleep in the gardener's lodge, empty since the house was rented. The old man—he was white-haired and a little stooped, but with an immense idea of his personal dignity—gave me his reasons hesitatingly.

"I ain't sayin' nothin', Mis' Innes," he said, his hand on the door-knob, "but there's been goin'-on here this las' few months as ain't natchal. 'Tain't nothin' an' 'tain't nothin'—it's jest a door squealin' here, an' a winder

up, Miss Rachel!" she quavered. "Why, there's a dozen French windows in the drawing room and the billiard room wing, and every one opens on a porch. And Mary Anne said that last night there was a man standing by the stable when she locked the kitchen door."

"Mary Anne was a fool," I said sternly. "If there had been a man there she would have had him in the kitchen and been feeding him what was left from dinner, inside of an hour, from force of habit. Now don't be ridiculous. Lock up the house and go to bed. I am going to read."

But Liddy set her lips tight and stood still.

"I'm not going to bed," she said. "I am going to pack up, and to-morrow I am going to leave."

"You'll do nothing of the sort," I snapped. Liddy and I often desire to part company, but never at the same time. "If you are afraid, I will go with you, but for goodness' sake don't try to hide behind me."

The house was a typical summer residence on an extensive scale. Wherever possible, on the first floor, the architect had done away with partitions, using arches and columns instead. The effect was cool and spacious, but scarcely cozy. As Liddy and I went from one window to another, our voices echoed back at us uncomfortably. There was plenty of light—the electric plant down in the village supplied us—but there were long vistas of polished floor, and mirrors which reflected us from unexpected



That Completed Our Demoralization.

closing there, but when doors and winders gets to cuttin' up capers and there's nobody nigh 'em, it's time Thomas Johnson sleeps somewhat's else."

Liddy, who seemed to be never more than ten feet away from me that night, and was afraid of her shadow in that great barn of a place, screamed a little, and turned a yellow-green. But I am not easily alarmed.

It was entirely in vain I represented to Thomas that we were alone, and that he would have to stay in the house that night. He was politely firm, but he would come over early the next morning, and if I gave him a key, he would come in time to get some sort of breakfast. I stood on the huge veranda and watched him shuffle along down the shadowy drive with mingled feelings—irritation at his cowardice and thankfulness at getting him at all. I am not ashamed to say that I double-locked the hall door when I went in.

"You can lock up the rest of the house and go to bed, Liddy," I said severely. "You give me the creeps standing there. A woman of your age ought to have better sense." It usually braces Liddy to mention her age; she owns to 49—which is absurd. Her mother cooked for my grandfather, and Liddy must be at least as old as I. But that night she refused to brace.

"You're not going to ask me to lock

corners, until I felt some of Liddy's foolishness communicate itself to me.

The house was very long, a rectangle in general form, with the main entrance in the center of the long side. The brick-paved entry opened into a short hall, to the right of which, separated only by a row of pillars, was a huge living room. Beyond that was the drawing room, and in the end the billiard room. Off the billiard room, in the extreme right wing, was a den, or cardroom, with a small hall opening on the east veranda, and from there went up a narrow circular staircase.

Liddy and I got as far as the cardroom and turned on all the lights. I tried the small entry door there, which opened on the veranda, and examined the windows. Everything was secure, and Liddy, a little less nervous now, had just pointed out to me the disgraceful dusty condition of the hard-wood floor, when suddenly the lights went out. We waited a moment; I think Liddy was stunned with fright or she would have screamed. And then I clutched her by the arm and pointed to one of the windows opening on the porch. The sudden change threw the window into relief, an oblong of grayish light, and showed us a figure standing close, peering in. As I looked it darted across the veranda and out of sight in the darkness.



CHAPTER II.

A Link Cuff-Button.

Liddy's knees seemed to give away under her. Without a sound she sank down, leaving me staring at the window in petrified amazement. Liddy began to moan under her breath, and in my excitement I reached down and shook her.

"Stop it," I whispered. "It's only a woman—maybe a maid of the Armstrongs. Get up and help me find the door." She groaned again. "Very well," I said, "then I'll have to leave you here. I'm going."

She moved at that, and, holding to my sleeve, we felt our way, with numerous collisions, to the billiard-room, and from there to the drawing-room. The lights came on then, and, with the long French windows unshuttered, I had a creepy feeling that each one sheltered a peering face. In fact, in the light of what happened afterward, I am pretty certain we were under surveillance during the entire ghostly evening. We hurried over the rest of the locking-up and got upstairs as quickly as we could. I left the lights all on, and our footsteps echoed cavernously. Liddy had a stiff neck the next morning, from looking back over her shoulder, and she refused to go to bed.

"Let me stay in your dressing room, Miss Rachel," she begged. "If you don't I'll sit in the hall outside the door. I'm not going to be murdered with my eyes shut."

It was 11 o'clock when I finally prepared for bed. In spite of my assumption of indifference, I locked the door into the hall, and finding the transom did not catch, I put a chair cautiously before the door—it was not necessary to rouse Liddy—and climbing up put on the ledge of the transom a small dressing-mirror, so that any movement of the frame would send it crashing down. Then, secure in my precautions I went to bed.

I did not go to sleep at once. Liddy disturbed me just as I was growing drowsy, by coming in and peering under the bed. She was afraid to speak, however, because of her previous snubbing, and went back, stopping in the doorway to sigh dismally.

Somewhere down-stairs a clock with a chime sang away the hours—eleven-thirty, forty-five, twelve. And then the lights went out to stay. The Casanova Electric Company shuts up shop and goes home to bed at midnight: when one has a party, I believe it is customary to fee the company, which will drink hot coffee and keep awake a couple of hours longer. But the lights were gone for good that night. Liddy had gone to sleep, as I knew she would. She was a very unreliable person: always awake and ready to talk when she wasn't wanted and dozing off to sleep when she was called her once or twice, the only result being an explosive snore that threatened her very windpipe—then I got up and lighted a bedroom candle.

My bedroom and dressing room were above the big living room on the first floor. On the second floor a long corridor ran the length of the house, with rooms opening from both sides. In the wings were small corridors crossing the main one—the plan was simplicity itself. And just as I got back into bed, I heard a sound from the east wing, apparently, that made me stop, frozen, with one bedroom slipper half off, and listen. It was a rattling metallic sound, and it reverberated along the empty halls like the crash of doom. It was for all the world as if something heavy, perhaps a piece of steel, had rolled clattering and jangling down the hard-wood stairs leading to the card-room.

In the silence that followed Liddy stirred and snored again. I was exasperated; first she kept me awake by silly alarms, then when she was needed she slept like Joe Jefferson, or Rip—they are always the same to me. I went in and aroused her, and I give her credit for being wide awake the minute I spoke.

"Get up," I said, "if you don't want to be murdered in your bed."

"Where? How?" she yelled vociferously, and jumped up.

"There's somebody in the house," I said. "Get up. We'll have to go to the telephone."

"Not out in the hall!" she gasped; "Oh, Miss Rachel, not out in the hall!" trying to hold me back. But I am a large woman and Liddy is small. We got to the door, somehow, and Liddy held a brass andiron, which it was all she could do to lift, let alone brain anybody with. I listened, and hearing nothing, opened the door a little and peered into the hall. It was a black void, full of terrible suggestion, and my candle only emphasized the gloom. Liddy squealed and drew me back again, and as the door slammed, the mirror I had put on the transom came down and hit her on the head. That completed our demoralization. It was some time before I could persuade her she had not been attacked from behind by a burglar, and when she found the mirror smashed on the floor she wasn't much better.

(TO BE CONTINUED.)

INCOMPETENT.



Mrs. Hare—Old Snail got his boy a position last week and he only held it one day.

Mr. Hare—What was it?

Mrs. Hare—A messenger boy.

A Hibernian Verdict.

A New Yorker is the happy employer of an aged Irishman, who grows eloquent over the woes of the Emerald Isle. Said the boss: "Pat, the king of England is dead."

The old man was silent for a moment. Then he took off his hat.

"Well," he said slowly, "as a man he was a fine bit of a boy. As Englishmen go, he was as good as yez can make them. As a king, there was nobody on earth as could beat him. But still, I'll keep me eye on George."

Your Wife's Picture.

A man ought to be ashamed to live so that his wife is compelled to look as she does at housecleaning time. He'll allow her to buy cheap old yellow soap right along and take twice as long for her housework and washing, when Easy Task soap will save time, health and money for her. A man wouldn't tolerate old-fashioned methods in his place of business for a minute. If your wife would use Easy Task soap all the time there wouldn't be a tenth of the dirt to get rid of at housecleaning time.

For the Dog's Sake.

"Where are you going for your summer vacation this year?" asked Mrs. Gotrox.

"O, dear, I've not made up my mind yet," sighed Mrs. Rich wearily. "I want to find some quiet, restful spot, where my dear little French poodle can get plenty of fresh air."

Decidedly So.

Hewitt—Are you sweet on that girl?
Jewett—Sweet on her? The sugar trust isn't in it.

A rich man's children seem to think it is up to them to make a noise in the world.

Ennui is the price we pay for knowledge.

Mrs. Winslow's Soothing Syrup.
For children teething, softens the gums, reduces inflammation, allays pain, cures wind colic. See bottles.

It is a wise worm that turns no oftener than he has to.



WESTERN CANADA

What Prof. Shaw, the Well-Known Agriculturist, Says About It: "In Western Canada there is the corn belt of the United States. Feed is cheaper and climate better for the purpose. Your market will improve faster than your farmers will produce the surplus. Wheat can be grown up to the 60th parallel and miles north of the international boundary. Your vacant land will be taken at a rate beyond present conception. As a bonus enough people in the United States alone who want homes to take up this land." Nearly

70,000 Americans will enter and make their homes in Western Canada this year. Here produced another large crop of wheat, oats and barley. In addition to which the cattle exports was an immense item. Cattle raising, dairying, mixed farming and grain growing in the provinces of Manitoba, Saskatchewan and Alberta. Free homestead and pre-emption areas, as well as lands held by railway and land companies, will provide homes for millions. Adaptable soil, beautiful climate, splendid schools and churches, and good railroads. For settlers' lists, descriptive literature "Look West" how to reach the country and other particulars, write to Dept. of Immigration, Ottawa, Canada, or to the Canadian Government Agent.

H. M. WILLIAMS
Law Building Toledo, Ohio
(If no address nearest you, write to me)

PROOF in the Morning!

We tell you about how good you'll feel after taking a CASCARET—that millions of people—buy, use and recommend them—But that's talk—you buy a box now—take as directed to-night and get the proof in the morning—After you know CASCARETS you'll never be without them.

CASCARETS are a box for a week's treatment, all ailments, biggest relief in the world. Millions bow to a month.

PATENTS

The Place to Buy Cheap
—IS AT—
J. F. PARSONS'



CURES
RHEUMATISM
LUMBAGO, SCIATICA
NEURALGIA and
KIDNEY TROUBLE

"DROPS" taken internally, rids the blood of the poisonous matter and acids which are the direct causes of these diseases. Applied externally it affords almost instant relief from pain, while a permanent cure is being effected by purifying the blood, dissolving the poisonous substance and removing it from the system.

DR. S. D. BLAND

Of Brewster, Ga., writes:
"I had been a sufferer for a number of years with Lumbago and Rheumatism in my arms and legs, and tried all the remedies that I could gather from medical works, and also consulted with a number of the best physicians, but found nothing that gave the relief obtained from 'DROPS.' I then procured it in my private case for rheumatism and kindred diseases."

FREE

If you are suffering with Rheumatism, Neuralgia, Kidney Trouble or any kindred disease, write to us for a trial bottle of "DROPS," and test it yourself.

"DROPS" can be used any length of time without acquiring a "drug habit," as it is entirely free of opium, cocaine, alcohol, laudanum, and other similar ingredients.

Large Size Bottle, "DROPS" (500 Doses) \$1.00. For Sale by Druggists.
SWARSON RHEUMATISM CURE COMPANY,
Dept. 80, 160 Lake Street, Chicago.

How's Business?

THIS ad. is directed at the man who has all the business in his line in this community.

Mr. Merchant—you say you've got it all. You're selling them all they'll buy, anyhow. But at the same time you would like more business.

Make this community buy more.

Advertise strongly, consistently, judiciously.

Suppose you can buy a lot of washtubs cheap; advertise a big washtub sale in this paper. Put in an inviting picture of a washtub where people can see it the minute they look at your ad. Talk strong on washtubs. And you'll find every woman in this vicinity who has been getting along with a rickety washtub for years and years will buy a new one from you. That's creative business power.

OUR AD. RATES ARE RIGHT

—CALL ON US

(Copyright, 1910, by W. N. C.)

Word-of-Mouth Advertising

Passing encomiums, only over your store counter, about the quality of what you've got to sell, results in about as much satisfaction as your wife would get if you gave her a box of cigars for Christmas.

Advertising in This Paper talks to everybody at once and makes them talk back with money.

(Copyright, 1910, by W. N. C.)

\$ Aim the \$ Ad. Gun TRUE

If it's hot weather, advertise cool things, Mr. Merchant. When it's cold, heat warmth. You know what people want when they want 'em. Profit thereby. Send your copy today for your ad. in this paper.

(Copyright, 1910, by W. N. C.)