

# THE CIRCULAR STAIRCASE

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SYNOPSIS.

Miss Innes, spinster and guardian of Gertrude and Halsey, establishes summer headquarters at Sunnyside. Amidst numerous difficulties the servants deserted. As Miss Innes locked up for the night, she was startled by a dark figure on the veranda. She passed a terrible night, which was filled with unseemly noises. In the morning Miss Innes found a strange link cuff button in a clothes hamper. Gertrude and Halsey arrived with Jack Bailey. The house was awakened by a revolver shot. A strange man was found shot to death in the hall. It proved to be the body of Arnold Armstrong, whose banker father owned the country house. Miss Innes found Halsey's revolver on the lawn. He and Jack Bailey had disappeared.

## CHAPTER IV.—Continued.

"Especially what?"  
"Especially since Jack Bailey and Arnold Armstrong were notoriously bad friends. It was Bailey who got Arnold into trouble last spring—something about the bank. And then, too—"

"Go on," I said. "If there is anything more, I ought to know."  
"There's nothing more," he said evasively. "There's just one thing we may bank on, Miss Innes. Any court in the country will acquit a man who kills an intruder in his house at night. If Halsey—"

"Why, you don't think Halsey did it!" I exclaimed. There was a queer feeling of physical nausea coming over me.

"No, no, not at all," he said with forced cheerfulness. "Come, Miss Innes, you're a ghost of yourself, and I am going to help you upstairs and call your maid. This has been too much for you."

About six o'clock Gertrude came in. She was fully dressed, and I sat up nervously.

"Poor Aunt!" she said. "What a shocking night you have had!" She came over and sat down on the bed, and I saw she looked very tired and worn.

"Is there anything new?" I asked anxiously.

"Nothing. The car is gone, but Warner—he is the chauffeur—Warner is at the lodge and knows nothing about it."

"Well," I said, "if I ever get my hands on Halsey Innes I shall not let go until I have told him a few things. When we get this cleared up, I am going back to the city to be quiet. One more night like the last two will end me. The peace of the country—fiddlesticks!"

Whereupon I told Gertrude of the noises the night before, and the figure on the veranda in the east wing. As an afterthought I brought out the pearl cuff-link.

"I have no doubt now," I said, "that it was Arnold Armstrong the night before last, too. He had a key, no doubt, but why he should steal into his father's house I cannot imagine. He could have come with my permission easily enough. Anyhow, whoever it was that night left this little souvenir."

Gertrude took one look at the cuff-link and went as white as the pearls in it; she clutched at the foot of the bed and stood staring. As for me, I was quite as astonished as she was.

"Where did you find it?" she asked finally, with a desperate effort at calm. And while I told her she stood looking out of the window with a look I could not fathom on her face. It was a relief when Mrs. Watson tapped at the door and brought me some tea and toast. The cook was in bed, completely demoralized, she reported, and Liddy, brave with the daylight, was looking for footprints around the house. Mrs. Watson herself was a wreck; she was blue-white around the lips, and she had one hand tied up. She said she had fallen downstairs in her excitement. It was natural, of course, that the thing would shock her, having been the Armstrongs' housekeeper for several years and knowing Mr. Arnold well.

Gertrude had slipped out during my talk with Mrs. Watson, and I dressed and went downstairs. The billiard and card rooms were locked until the coroner and the detectives got there, and the men from the club had gone back for more conventional clothing.

I could hear Thomas in the pantry alternately wailing for Mr. Arnold, as he called him, and citing the tokens that had precluded the murder. The house seemed to choke me, and, slipping a shawl around me, I went out on the drive. At the corner by the east wing I met Liddy. Her skirts were dragged with dew to her knees and her hair was still in curls.

"Go right in and change your clothes," I said sharply. "You're a sight, and at your age!"

She had a self-stick in her hand, and she said she had found it on the lawn. There was nothing unusual about it, but it occurred to me that a self-stick with a metal end might have been the object that had scratched the stairs near the cardroom. I took it from her, and sent her up for dry garments. Her daylight courage and self-importance, and her shuddering delight in the mystery, irritated me beyond words. After I left her I made a circuit of the building. Nothing seemed to be disturbed; the house looked so calm and peaceful in the morning sun, as it had the day I had been ordered into taking it there

was nothing to show that inside had been mystery and violence and sudden death.

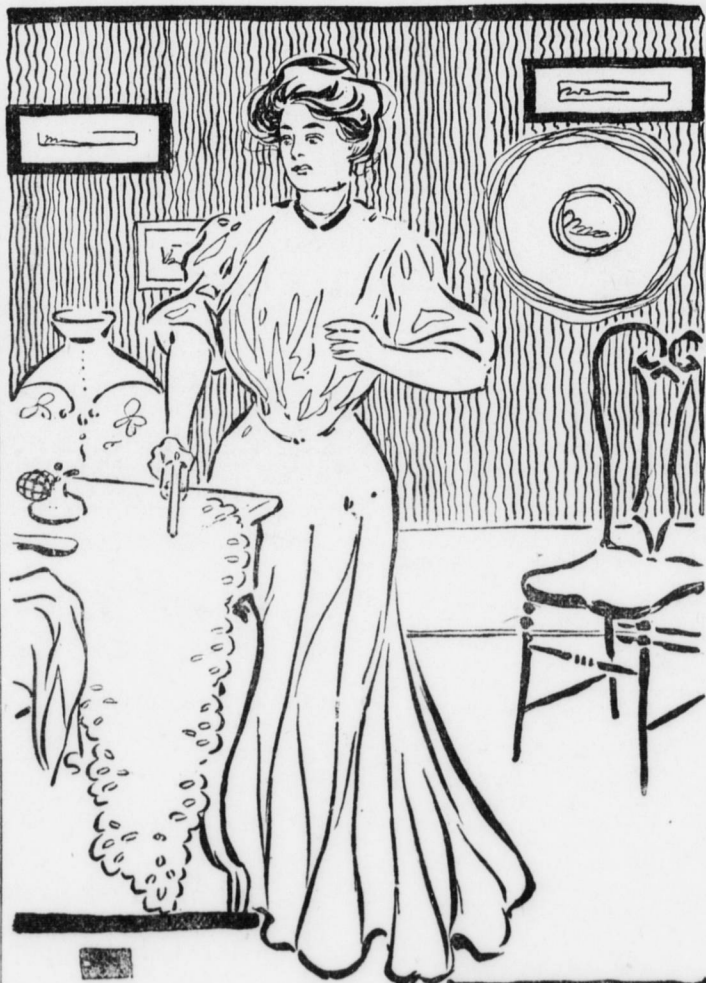
In one of the tulip beds back of the house an early blackbird was pecking viciously at something that glittered in the light. I picked my way gingerly over through the dew and stooped down; almost buried in the soft ground was a revolver! I scraped the earth off it with the tip of my shoe, and, picking it up, slipped it into my pocket. Not until I had got into my bedroom and double-locked the door did I venture to take it out and examine it. One look was all I needed. It was Halsey's revolver. I had unpacked it the day before and put it on his shaving stand, and there could be no mistake. His name was on a small silver plate on the handle.

I seemed to see a network closing around my boy, innocent as I knew he was. The revolver—I am afraid of them, but anxiety gave me courage to look through the barrel—the revolver had still two bullets in it. I could only breathe a prayer of thankfulness that I had found the revolver before any sharp-eyed detective had come around. I decided to keep what clues I had, the cuff-link, the golf stick and the revolver, in a secure place until I could see some reason for displaying them. The cuff-link had been dropped into a little filigree box on my toilet table. I opened the box and felt around for it. The box was empty—the cuff-link had disappeared!

## CHAPTER V.

### Gertrude's Engagement.

At ten o'clock the Casanova hack brought up three men. They introduced themselves as the coroner of the county and two detectives from



"One Look Was All I Needed."

the city. The coroner led the way at once to the locked wing, and with the aid of one of the detectives examined the rooms and the body. The other detective, after a short scrutiny of the dead man, busied himself with the outside of the house. It was only after they had got a fair idea of things as they were that they sent for me.

I received them in the living room, and I had made up my mind exactly what to tell. I had taken the house for the summer, I said, while the Armstrongs were in California. In spite of a rumor among the servants about strange noises—I cited Thomas—nothing had occurred the first two nights. On the third night I believed that some one had been in the house; I had heard a crashing sound, but being alone with one maid had not investigated. The house had been locked in the morning and apparently undisturbed.

Then, as clearly as I could, I related how, the night before, a shot had roused us; that my niece and I had investigated and found a body; that I did not know who the murdered man was until Mr. Jarvis from the club informed me, and that I knew of no reason why Mr. Arnold Armstrong should steal into his father's house at night. I should have been glad to allow him entrance there at any time.

"Have you reason to believe, Miss Innes," the coroner asked, "that any member of your household, imagining Mr. Armstrong was a burglar, shot him in self-defense?"

"I have no reason for thinking so," I said quietly.

"Your theory is that Mr. Armstrong was followed here by some enemy and shot as he entered the house?"

"I don't think I have a theory," I said. "The thing that has puzzled me is why Mr. Armstrong should enter

his father's house two nights in succession, stealing in like a thief, when he needed only to ask entrance to be admitted."

The coroner was a very silent man; he took some notes after this, but he seemed anxious to make the next train back to town. He set the inquest for the following Saturday, gave Mr. Jamieson, the younger of the two detectives, and the more intelligent looking, a few instructions, and, after gravely shaking hands with me and regretting the unfortunate affair, took his departure, accompanied by the other detective.

I was just beginning to breathe freely when Mr. Jamieson, who had been standing by the window, came over to me.

"The family consists of yourself alone, Miss Innes?"

"My niece is here," I said.

"There is no one but yourself and your niece?"

"My nephew." I had to moisten my lips.

"Oh, a nephew. I should like to see him, if he is here."

"He is not here just now," I said as quietly as I could. "I expect him—at any time."

"He was here yesterday evening, I believe?"

"No—yes."

"Didn't he have a guest with him? Another man?"

"He brought a friend with him to stay over Sunday, a Mr. Bailey."

"Mr. John Bailey, the cashier of the Traders' bank, I believe. And I knew that some one at the Greenwood club had told. 'When did they leave?'"

"Very early—I don't know at just what time."

Mr. Jamieson turned suddenly and looked at me.



her stop suddenly, as if she had been struck.

"He does not," she said in a tone that was not her own. "Mr. Bailey and my brother know nothing of this. The murder was committed at three. They left the house at a quarter before three."

"How do you know that?" Mr. Jamieson asked oddly. "Do you know at what time they left?"

"I do," Gertrude answered firmly. "At a quarter before three my brother and Mr. Bailey left the house, by the main entrance. I—was—there."

"Gertrude," I said excitedly, "you are dreaming! Why, at a quarter to three—"

"Listen," she said. "At half-past two the downstairs telephone rang. I had not gone to sleep, and I heard it. Then I heard Halsey answer it, and in a few minutes he came upstairs and knocked at my door. We—talked for a minute, then I put on my dressing gown and slippers, and went downstairs with him. Mr. Bailey was in the billiard room. We—we all talked together for perhaps ten minutes. Then it was decided—that they should both go away—"

"Can't you be more explicit?" Mr. Jamieson asked. "Why did they go away?"

"I am only telling you what happened, not why it happened," she said evenly. "Halsey went for the car, and instead of bringing it to the house and rousing people, he went by the lower road from the stable. Mr. Bailey was to meet him at the foot of the lawn. Mr. Bailey left—"

"Which way?" Mr. Jamieson asked sharply.

"By the main entrance. He left—it was a quarter to three. I know exactly."

"The clock in the hall is stopped, Miss Innes," said Jamieson. Nothing seemed to escape him.

"He looked at his watch," she replied, and I could see Mr. Jamieson's eyes snap, as if he had made a discovery. As for myself, during the whole recital I had been plunged into the deepest amazement.

"Will you pardon me for a personal question?" The detective was a youngish man, and I thought he was somewhat embarrassed. "What are your—your relations with Mr. Bailey?"

Gertrude hesitated. Then she came over and put her hand lovingly in mine.

"I am engaged to marry him," she said simply.

I had grown so accustomed to surprises that I could only gasp again, and as for Gertrude, the hand that lay in mine was burning with fever.

"And—after that," Mr. Jamieson went on, "you went directly to bed?"

Gertrude hesitated.

"No," she said finally. "I—I am not nervous, and after I had extinguished the light, I remembered something I had left in the billiard room, and I felt my way back there through the darkness."

"Will you tell me what it was you had forgotten?"

"I cannot tell you," she said slowly. "I—I did not leave the billiard room at once—"

"Why?" The detective's tone was imperative. "This is very important, Miss Innes."

"I was crying," Gertrude said in a low tone. "When the French clock in the drawing room struck three I got up and then—I heard a step on the east porch, just outside the cardroom. Some one with a key was working with the latch, and I thought, of course, of Halsey. When we took the house he called that his entrance, and he had carried a key for it ever since. The door opened and I was about to ask what he had forgotten, when there was a flash and a report. Some heavy body dropped, and half crazed with terror and shock, I ran through the drawing room and got upstairs—I scarcely remember how."

She dropped into a chair, and I thought Mr. Jamieson must have finished. But he was not through.

"You certainly clear your brother and Mr. Bailey admirably," he said. "The testimony is invaluable, especially in view of the fact that your brother and Mr. Armstrong had, I believe, quarreled rather seriously some time ago."

"Nonsense," I broke in. "Things are bad enough, Mr. Jamieson, without inventing bad feeling where it doesn't exist. Gertrude, I don't think Halsey knew the—murdered man, did he?"

But Mr. Jamieson was sure of his ground.

(TO BE CONTINUED.)

### A New Sun-Defying Cloth.

A new cloth is being made in Calcutta, India, which is manufactured on scientific principles to conform to nature's plan of warding off the sun's rays, as exemplified in the color of the skin and the pigments under the skin. It is the belief of physicians that one of the chief reasons for the many deaths recorded in hot weather is that of improper clothing. The designers of what we must wear to be of the elect may ordain a color or texture thoroughly unsuited to the prevailing climatic conditions, and safety and comfort are often jeopardized in consequence.—Van Norden Magazine.

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### TOUGH LUCK.



"Why, what's the matter, my lad?"

"Boo hoo! Ma sez I got to president when I grows up, an' I'd set my heart on bein' a prize fighter. Boo hoo!"

### WEAK KIDNEYS WEAKEN THE WHOLE BODY.

No chain is stronger than its weakest link. No man is stronger than his kidneys. Overwork, colds, strains, etc., weaken the kidneys and the whole body suffers. Don't neglect the slightest kidney ailment. Begin using Doan's Kidney Pills at once. They are especially for sick kidneys.



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Remember the name—Doan's. For sale by all dealers. 50 cents a box. Foster-Milburn Co., Buffalo, N. Y.

Didn't Care for Expenses. They were seated at the breakfast table.

"John, dear," said the young wife, "this is my birthday."

"I'm glad you mentioned it, darling," rejoined her husband. "I'll buy you a present the first thing when I get downtown."

"Well," she said, "I hope you won't get any cheap 98-cent affair."

"Of course I won't," he replied.

"Why, I would be ashamed to present you with anything that cost less than a dollar."

Simple Truth. You can only do clean washing with clean soap. You know that cocoanut oil, borax and naphtha are natural cleansers and sterilizers and that they can't harm fabrics. Easy Task soap is the only one that combines these scientifically, and for that reason it cuts washday work in two and does the work better than it ever has been done. Ten cents to test it; money back quickly if it isn't what is claimed for it.

Confused Impressions. "Of course, you know the story of William Tell," said the serious citizen.

"To tell you the truth," replied Mr. Cumrox, "I'm not clear about him. I can't exactly remember whether he was a great marksman or a famous opera singer."

Women in Love. "Women in love are generally troublesome and persecuting." Such is the reported opinion of M. Emile Fauguet. And if a French critic does not understand the subject, of whom shall we seek understanding?

His Big Bill. Guest—How long is this lease of your hotel to run?

Hotel Clerk—What lease?

Guest—The one I just gave you the money for.

It Would Depend. "Would you marry a man who wore side whiskers?"

"I might if I thought it would be worth while to reform him."

A Mean Man. "Is your wife going to Europe this summer?"

"No. I've bribed a fortune teller to warn her to watch for a slim blonde woman who is coming into my life."

We live truly in proportion as we go out of ourselves and enter into the fulness of the experience of those whom we serve, and by whom in turn we are served.—Westcott.

## Poor Digestion?

This is one of the first signs of stomach weakness. Distress after eating, sour eructations, sick headache, bilious conditions are all indicative that it is the stomach that needs assistance. Help it to regain health and strength by taking

## BEECHAM'S PILLS

for they are a stomach remedy that never disappoints. They act quickly and gently upon the digestive organs, sweeten the contents of the stomach, carry off the disturbing elements, and establish healthy conditions of the liver and bile.

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Awfully Busy. Jim—A stitch in time saves nine. Tom—Who said that?

Jim—Gee! Ain't you read your Bible?

Tom—Nope; I ain't even had time to read the sporting page this morning yet.—Cleveland Leader.

How She Conciliated Them. Filmer—How did it happen that these five men who were so angry with the woman in the nickelodeon for not taking off her hat became so friendly with her afterward?

Screeners—It was raining like fury when the show was over and she invited them to take shelter with her under her hat.

Autoing and Optics. "Is not auto driving terribly hard on the eyes?" we asked.

"Well, I guess not," replied the chauffeur, winking us with scorn.

"Why, before I got to runnin' a car I was thinkin' o' gettin' specks, my eyesight was that poor I couldn't see the contribution box in church until it was so near past me it was too late to dig for any money. But I hadn't been runnin' that wagon two days till I could see a policeman's little finger stickin' out from behind a tree four miles away. I could even see which way a copper's eyeballs were turned if he was standin' in the shade three miles off. Hard on the eyes! Well, not much! It's the best medicine for weak eyes that was ever invented, don't you forget it."

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