

# THE CIRCULAR STAIRCASE

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### SYNOPSIS.

Miss Innes, spinster and guardian of Gertrude and Halsey, established summer headquarters at Sunnyside. Amidst numerous difficulties the servants deserted. As Miss Innes looked 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. The link cuff button mysteriously disappeared. Detective Jamieson and the coroner arrived. Gertrude revealed that she was engaged to Jack Bailey, with whom she had talked in the billiard room a few moments before the murder. Jamieson told Miss Innes that she was hiding evidence from him. He imprisoned an intruder in an empty room. The prisoner escaped down a laundry chute. It developed that the intruder was probably a woman. Gertrude was suspected, for the intruder left a print of a bare foot. Gertrude returned home with her right ankle sprained. A negro found the other half of what proved to be Jack Bailey's cuff button.

### CHAPTER VIII.—Continued.

"Undoubtedly. Why, what could it be but flight? Miss Innes, let me reconstruct that evening, as I see it. Bailey and Armstrong had quarreled at the club. I learned this to-day. Your nephew brought Bailey over. Prompted by jealous, insane fury, Armstrong followed, coming across by the path. He entered the billiard room wing—perhaps rapping, and being admitted by your nephew. Just inside he was shot, by some one on the circular staircase. The shot fired, your nephew and Bailey left the house at once, going toward the automobile house. They left by the lower road, which prevented them being heard, and when you and Miss Gertrude got downstairs everything was quiet."

"But—Gertrude's story," I stammered.

"Miss Gertrude only brought forward her explanation the following morning. I do not believe it, Miss Innes. It is the story of a loving and ingenious woman."

"And—this thing to-night?"

"May upset my whole view of the case. We must give the benefit of every doubt after all. We may, for instance, come back to the figure on the porch; if it was a woman you saw that night through the window, we might start with other premises. Or Mr. Innes' explanation may turn us in a new direction. It is possible that he shot Arnold Armstrong as a burglar and then fled, frightened at what he had done. In any case, however, I feel confident that the body was here when he left. Mr. Armstrong left the club ostensibly for a moonlight saunter, about half after eleven o'clock. It was three when the shot was fired."

I leaned back bewildered. It seemed to me that the evening had been full of significant happenings, had I only held the key. Had Gertrude been the fugitive in the clothes chute? Who was the man on the drive near the lodge, and whose gold-mounted dressing-bag had I seen in the lodge sitting room?

It was late when Mr. Jamieson finally got up to go. I went with him to the door, and together we stood looking out over the valley. Below lay the village of Casanova, with its Old World houses, its blossoming trees and its peace. Above on the hill across the valley were the lights of the Greenwood club. It was even possible to see the curving row of parallel lights that marked the carriage road. Rumors that I had heard about the club came back—of drinking, of high play, and once, a year ago, of a suicide under those very lights.

Mr. Jamieson left, taking a short cut to the village, and I still stood there. It must have been after 11, and the monotonous tick of the big clock on the stairs behind me was the only sound. Then I was conscious that some one was running up the drive. In a minute a woman darted into the area of light made by the open door, and caught me by the arm. It was Rosie—Rosie in a state of collapse from terror, and not the least important, clutching one of my Coalport plates and a silver spoon.

She stood staring into the darkness behind, still holding the plate. I got her into the house and secured the plate; then I stood and looked down at her where she crouched tremblingly against the doorway.

"Well," I asked, "didn't your young man enjoy his meal?"

She couldn't speak. She looked at the spoon she still held—I wasn't so anxious about it; thank Heaven, it wouldn't chip—and then she stared at me.

"I appreciate your desire to have everything nice for him," I went on, "but the next time, you might take the Limoges china. It's more easily duplicated and less expensive."

"I haven't a young man—not here." She had got her breath now, as I had guessed she would. "I—I have been chased by a thief, Miss Innes."

"Did he chase you out of the house and back again?" I asked.

"What in the world is the matter with you?" I snapped. "Has the day of good common sense gone by? Sit up and tell me the whole thing." Rosie sat up then, and sniffed.

"I was coming up the drive—" she began.

"You must start with when you went down the drive, with my dishes and my silver," I interrupted, but, seeing more signs of hysteria, I gave in. "Very well. You were coming up the drive—"

"I had a basket of—of silver and dishes on my arm, and I was carrying the plate, because—because I was afraid I'd break it. Part-way up the road a man stepped out of the bushes, and held his arm like this, spread out, so I couldn't get past. He said—he said—Not so fast, young lady; I want you to let me see what's in that basket."

She got up in her excitement and took hold of my arm.

"It was like this, Miss Innes," she said, "and say you was the man. When he said that, I screamed and ducked under his arm like this. He caught at the basket and I dropped it. I ran as fast as I could, and he came after as far as the trees. Then he stopped. Oh, Miss Innes, that must have been the man that killed that Mr. Armstrong!"

"Don't be foolish," I said. "Whoever killed Mr. Armstrong would put as much space between himself and this house as he could. Go up to bed now; and mind, if I hear of this story being repeated to the other maids, I shall deduct from your wages for every broken dish I find in the drive."

I could fancy Liddy's face when she missed the extra pieces of china—she had opposed Rosie from the start. If Liddy once finds a prophecy fulfilled, especially an unpleasant one, she never allows me to forget it. It seemed to me that it was absurd to leave that china dotted along the road for her to spy the next morning; so with a sudden resolution, I opened the door again and stepped out into the darkness. As the door closed behind me I half regretted my impulse; then I shut my teeth and went on.

I have never been a nervous woman, as I said before. Moreover, a minute or two in the darkness enabled me to see things fairly well. Beulah gave me rather a start by rubbing unexpectedly against my feet; then we two, side by side, went down the drive.

There were no fragments of china, but where the grove began I picked up a silver spoon. So far Rosie's story was borne out; I began to wonder if it were not indiscreet, to say the least, this midnight prowling in a neighborhood with such a deservedly bad reputation. Then I saw something gleaming, which proved to be the handle of a cup, and a step or two farther on I found a V-shaped bit of plate. But the most surprising thing of all was to find the basket sitting comfortably beside the road, with the rest of the broken crockery piled neatly within, and a handful of small silver, spoons, forks and the like, on top! I could only stand and stare.

Then Rosie's story was true. But where had Rosie carried her basket? And why had the thief, if he were a thief, picked up the broken china out of the road and left it, with his booty?

It was with my nearest approach to

a nervous collapse that I heard the familiar throbbing of an automobile engine. As it came closer I recognized the outline of the Dragon Fly, and knew that Halsey had come back.

Strange enough it must have seemed to Halsey, too, to come across me in the middle of the night, with the skirt of my gray silk gown over my shoulders to keep off the dew, holding a red and green basket under one arm and a black cat under the other. What with relief and joy, I began to cry, right there, and very nearly wiped my eyes on Beulah in the excitement.

CHAPTER IX.

Just Like a Girl.

"Aunt Ray!" Halsey said from the gloom behind the lamps. "What in the world are you doing here?"

"Taking a walk," I said, trying to be composed. I don't think the answer struck either of us as being ridiculous at the time. "Oh, Halsey, where have you been?"

"Let me take you up to the house." He was in the road, and had Beulah and the basket out of my arms in a moment. I could see the car plainly now, and Warner was at the wheel—Warner in an ulster and a pair of slippers, over heaven knows what. Jack Bailey was not there. I got in, and we went slowly and painfully up to the house.

We did not talk. What we had to say was too important to commence there, and, besides, it took all kinds of coaxing from both men to get the Dragon Fly up the last grade. Only when we had closed the front door and stood facing each other in the hall did Halsey say anything. He slipped his strong young arm around my shoulders and turned me so I faced the light.

"Poor Aunt Ray!" he said gently. And I nearly wept again. "I—I must see Gertrude, too; we will have a three-cornered talk."

And then Gertrude herself came down the stairs. She had not been to bed evidently; she still wore the white negligee she had worn earlier in the evening, and she limped somewhat. During her slow progress down the stairs I had time to notice one thing: Mr. Jamieson had said the woman who escaped from the cellar had worn no shoe on her right foot. Gertrude's right ankle was the one she had sprained!

The meeting between brother and sister was tense, but without tears. Halsey kissed her tenderly, and I noticed evidences of strain and anxiety in both young faces.

"Is everything—right?" she asked. "Right as can be," with forced cheerfulness.

I lighted the living room and we went in there. Only a half-hour before I had sat with Mr. Jamieson in that very room, listening while he overtly accused both Gertrude and Halsey of at least a knowledge of the death of Arnold Armstrong. Now Halsey was here to speak for himself: I should learn everything that had puzzled me.

"I saw it in the paper to-night for the first time," he was saying. "It knocked me dumb. When I think of this household of women, and a thing like that occurring!"

Gertrude's face was still set and white. "That isn't all, Halsey," she

said. "You and—Jack left almost at the time it happened. The detective here thinks that you—that we—know something about it."

"The devil he does!" Halsey's eyes were fairly starting from his head. "I beg your pardon, Aunt Ray, but—the fellow's a lunatic."

"Tell me everything, won't you, Halsey?" I begged. "Tell me where you went that night, or rather morning, and why you went as you did. This has been a terrible 48 hours for all of us."

He stood staring at me, and I could see the horror of the situation dawning in his face.

"I can't tell you where I went, Aunt Ray," he said after a moment. "As to why, you will learn that soon enough. But Gertrude knows that Jack and I left the house before this thing—this horrible murder—occurred."

"Mr. Jamieson does not believe," Gertrude said drearily. "Halsey, if the worst comes, if they should arrest you, you must—tell."

"I shall tell nothing," he said with a new sternness in his voice. "Aunt Ray, it was necessary for Jack and me to leave that night. I cannot tell you why—just yet. As to where we went, if I have to depend on that as an alibi, I shall not tell. The whole thing is an absurdity, a trumped-up charge that cannot possibly be serious."

"Has Mr. Bailey gone back to the city," I demanded, "or to the club?"

"Neither," he said; "at the present moment I do not know where he is."

"Halsey," I asked gravely, leaning forward, "have you the slightest suspicion who killed Arnold Armstrong? The police think he was admitted from within, and that he was shot down from above, by some one on the circular staircase."

"I know nothing of it," he maintained; but I fancied I caught a sudden glance at Gertrude, a flash of something that died as it came.

As quietly, as calmly as I could, I went over the whole story, from the night Liddy and I had been alone up to the strange experience of Rosie and her pursuer. The basket still stood on the table, a mute witness to this last mysterious occurrence.

"There is something else," I said hesitatingly, at the last. "Halsey, I have never told this even to Gertrude, but the morning after the crime I found, in a tulip bed, a revolver. It—it was yours, Halsey."

For an appreciable moment Halsey stared at me. Then he turned to Gertrude.

"My revolver, Trude!" he exclaimed. "Why, Jack took my revolver with him, didn't he?"

"Oh, for heaven's sake don't say that," I implored. "The detective thinks possibly Jack Bailey came back, and—the thing happened then."

"He didn't come back," Halsey said sternly. "Gertrude, when you brought down a revolver that night for Jack to take with him, what one did you bring? Mine?"

Gertrude was defiant now.

"No. Yours was loaded, and I was afraid of what Jack—might do. I gave him one I have had for a year or two. It was empty."

Halsey threw up both hands despairingly.

"If that isn't like a girl!" he said. "Why didn't you do what I asked you to, Gertrude? You sent Bailey off with an empty gun, and throw mine in a tulip bed, of all places on earth! Mine was a 38 caliber. The inquest will show, of course, that the bullet that killed Armstrong was a 38. Then where shall I be?"

"You forget," I broke in, "that I have the revolver, and that no one knows about it."

But Gertrude had risen angrily. "I cannot stand it; it is always with me," she cried. "Halsey, I did not throw your revolver into the tulip bed. I—think—you—did—yourself!"

(TO BE CONTINUED.)

A Burglar's Text Book.

The police of New York found upon a burglar, arrested by them, a treatise on safe-cracking that is said to be the most remarkable document that has ever fallen into their hands. The contents are so well compiled that the police unhesitatingly declare the author a past grand master in his profession, and, according to Popular Mechanics, are somewhat anxious to find out just how many copies are in circulation throughout the country.

For the most part the manuscript is in the yegg code, a lingo freely used by thieves the country over. It describes the two kinds of safes recognized by the profession, namely, the fireproof and the burglar-proof, asserting, however, that there is no genuine burglar-proof safe, and that kind that are drill-proof are only called so by courtesy. Minute directions for cracking a safe are given, together with diagrams to illustrate the treatise.



Guilt Revealed.

"Johnny, do you smoke cigarettes?" "I do do a little, sir," stammered Johnny, pulling beneath the tap of the baseball field.

The boss fixed him with his eagle eye.

"Then gimme me one," he said. "I left mine on the bureau."

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### Seeking Comfort.

"I've got a long way to go and I'm not used to travel," said the applicant at the railway ticket office. "I want to be just as comfortable as I can, regardless of expense."

"Parlor car?"

"No. I don't care for parlor fixings."

"Sleeper?"

"No. I want to stay awake and watch the scenery."

"Then what do you want?"

"Well, if it wouldn't be too much trouble, I wish you'd put me up in one of these refrigerator cars I've read so much about."

### Casey at the Bat.

This famous poem is contained in the Coca-Cola Baseball Record Book for 1910, together with records, schedules for both leagues and other valuable baseball information compiled by authorities. This interesting book sent by the Coca-Cola Co., of Atlanta, Ga., on receipt of 2c stamp for postage. Also copy of their booklet "The Truth About Coca-Cola" which tells all about this delicious beverage and why it is so pure, wholesome and refreshing. Are you ever hot—tired—thirsty? Drink Coca-Cola—it is cooling, relieves fatigue and quenches the thirst. At soda fountains and car bonated in bottles—5c everywhere.

### Only One Cobb.

The morning after Judge Andrew Cobb, a one-time justice of the supreme court of Georgia, tendered his resignation, an Atlanta lawyer and a shoe drummer sat in the same seat in an outgoing train.

The lawyer bought a newspaper and looked over the headlines. Then he turned to the drummer and said:

"Well, I see Cobb has resigned."

"Gee!" said the drummer. "What will Detroit do now?"—Philadelphia Saturday Evening Post.

### His Soft Answer.

And this is the sort of excuse you put up for coming home two hours late for dinner and in such a condition—that you and that disreputable Augustus Jones were out hunting mushrooms, you wretch? And where, pray, are the mushrooms?"

"Eere zay are, m' dear, in m' ves' pocket; and w'ile zay ain' so many of 'em, m' dear, we had lots of fun—Gus an' I—huntin' 'em."

### Reformation.

"You say you are a reformer?"

"Yep," replied the local boss; "of the deepest dye."

"But you were not always so."

"No. The reformers reformed our town last year and I want to reform it back again."

Life is two-thirds bluff, law is three-fourths tyranny, pity is nine-tenths pretense. Be genuine and poor if you would die respected.

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### History Cleared Up.

The third grade was "having history." Forty youngsters were making guesses about the life and character of the Father of His Country, when the teacher propounded a question that stumped them all.

"Why did Washington cross the Delaware?"

"Why, indeed? Not a child could think of anything but the answer to the famous chicken problem: "To get on the other side," and, of course, that wouldn't do. Then little Annie's hand shot into the air. Little Annie crosses the Delaware every summer herself, hence the bright idea.

"Well, Annie?"

"Because he wanted to get to Atlantic City."—Philadelphia Times.

### She Burned the House.

A woman in Montana sat down the other day and thought about house cleaning—about the carpets and rugs to clean, the woodwork to wash, the bedding to wash, the curtains to wash, the portieres to wash, the stairways and the railings and the floors and the steps and the windows and everything else to be washed and cleaned—and she got so worried over the prospect that she set fire to the house. Do you blame her? If she had only known as you do that Easy Task soap will do half the work of washing and cleaning, she would have felt more cheerful. It's a nickel a cake and one woman said she would pay a dollar a cake for it if she could get it no other way.

### Fine School.

"Your daughter should attend my school of education."

"She shan't! She's attended one, and she's positively—"

"Ah, but I teach a new system. When my pupils are asked to recite they are trained to refuse."

### Cleaned Out.

"I can't pay this taxicab bill."

"Then I'll take you to a police station."

"I'll pay it. But take me to the poorhouse and leave me there."—Louisville Courier-Journal.

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I Was Conscious That Some One Was Running Up the Drive.