

THE CIRCULAR STAIRCASE

By MARY ROBERTS RINEHART
ILLUSTRATIONS BY ROY WALTERS
SYNOPSIS.

Miss Innes, spinster and guardian of Gertrude and Halsey, established 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. 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. Halsey suddenly reappeared. He said he and Bailey had left because they had received a telegram. Gertrude said that she had given Bailey an unloaded revolver, fearing to give him Halsey's loaded weapon.

CHAPTER IX.—Continued.

They stared at each other across the big library table, with young eyes all at once hard, suspicious. And then Gertrude held out both hands to him appealingly.

"We must not," she said brokenly. "Just now, with so much at stake, it is shameful. I know you are as ignorant as I am. Make me believe it, Halsey."

Halsey soothed her as best he could, and the breach seemed healed. But long after I went to bed she sat downstairs in the living room alone, and I knew he was going over the case as he had learned it. Some things were clear to him that were dark to me. He knew, and Gertrude, too, why Jack Bailey and he had gone away that night, as they did. He knew where they had been for the last 48 hours, and why Jack Bailey had not returned with him. It seemed to me that without fuller confidence from both the children—they are always children to me—I should never be able to learn anything.

As I was finally getting ready for bed, Halsey came upstairs and knocked at my door. When I had got into a negligee—I used to say wrapper before Gertrude came back from school—I let him in. He stood in the doorway a moment, and then he went into agonies of silent mirth. I sat down on the side of the bed and waited in severe silence for him to stop, but he only seemed to grow worse. When he had recovered he took me by the elbow and pulled me in front of the mirror.

"How to be beautiful," he quoted. "Advice to maids and matrons, by Beatrice Fairfax!" And then I saw myself. I had neglected to remove my wrinkle eradicators, and I presume my appearance was odd. I believe that it is a woman's duty to care for her looks, but it is much like telling a necessary falsehood—one must not be found out. By the time I got them off Halsey was serious again, and I listened to his story.

"Aunt Ray," he began, extinguishing his cigarette on the back of my ivory hair-brush, "I would give a lot to tell you the whole thing. But—I can't, for a day or so, anyhow. But one thing I might have told you a long time ago. If you had known it, you would not have suspected me for a moment of—of having anything to do with the attack on Arnold Armstrong. Goodness knows what I might do to a fellow like that, if there was enough provocation, and I had a gun in my hand—under ordinary circumstances. But—I care a great deal about Louise Armstrong, Aunt Ray. I hope to marry her some day. Is it likely I would kill her brother?"

"But the whole thing is absurd," I argued. "And besides, Gertrude's sworn statement that you left before Arnold Armstrong came would clear you at once."

Halsey got up and began to pace the room, and the air of cheerfulness dropped like a mask.

"She can't swear it," he said finally. "Gertrude's story was true as far as it went, but she didn't tell everything. Arnold Armstrong came here at 2:30—came into the billiard room and left in five minutes. He came to bring—something."

"Halsey," I cried, "you must tell me the whole truth. Every time I see a way for you to escape you block it yourself with this wall of mystery. What did he bring?"

"A telegram—for Bailey," he said. "It came by special messenger from town, and was—most important. Bailey had started for here, and the messenger had gone back to the city. The steward gave it to Arnold, who had been drinking all day and couldn't sleep, and was going for a stroll in the direction of Sunnyside."

"And he brought it?"

"Yes."

"I can tell you—as soon as certain things are made public. It is only a matter of days now," gloomily.

"And Gertrude's story of a telephone?"

"Poor Trude!" he half whispered.

"Poor loyal little girl! Aunt Ray,



They Stared at Each Other Across the Big Library Table.

there was no such message. No doubt, your detective already knows that and discredits all Gertrude told him."

"And when she went back, it was to get—the telegram?"

"Probably," Halsey said slowly.

"When you get to thinking about it, Aunt Ray, it looks bad for all three of us, doesn't it? And yet—I will take my oath none of us even inadvertently killed that poor devil."

I looked at the closed door into Gertrude's dressing room, and lowered my voice.

"The same horrible thought keeps recurring to me," I whispered. "Halsey, Gertrude probably had your revolver; she must have examined it, anyhow, that night. After you—and Jack had gone, what if—that ruffian came back, and she—and she—"

I couldn't finish. Halsey stood looking at me with shut lips.

"She might have heard him fumbling at the door—he had no key, the police say—and thinking it was you, or Jack, she admitted him. When she saw her mistake she ran up the stairs, a step or two, and turning, like an animal at bay, she fired."

Halsey had his hand over my lips before I finished, and in that position we stared each at the other, our stricken glances crossing.

"The revolver—my revolver—thrown into the tulip bed!" he muttered to himself. "Thrown perhaps from an upper window; you say it was buried deep. Her prostration ever since, her—Aunt Ray, you don't think it was Gertrude who fell down the clothes chute?"

I could only nod my head in a hopeless affirmative.

CHAPTER X.

The Traders' Bank.

The morning after Halsey's return was Tuesday. Arnold Armstrong had been found dead at the foot of the circular staircase at three o'clock on Sunday morning. The funeral services were to be held on Tuesday, and the interment of the body was to be deferred until the Armstrongs arrived from California. No one, I think, was very sorry that Arnold Armstrong was dead, but the manner of his death aroused some sympathy and an enormous amount of curiosity. Mrs. Ogden Fitzhugh, a cousin, took charge of the arrangements, and everything, I believe, was as quiet as possible. I gave Thomas Johnson and Mrs. Watson permission to go into town to pay their last respects to the dead man, but for some reason they did not care to go.

Halsey spent part of the day with Mr. Jamieson, but he said nothing of what happened. He looked grave and anxious, and he had a long conversation with Gertrude late in the afternoon.

Tuesday evening found us quiet, with the quiet that precedes an explosion. Gertrude and Halsey were both gloomy and distraught, and as Liddy had already discovered that some of the china was broken—it is impossible to have any secrets from an old servant—I was not in a pleasant humor myself. Warner brought up the afternoon mail and the evening papers at seven—I was curious to know what the papers said of the murder. We had turned away at least a dozen reporters. But I read over the headline that ran half-way across the top of the Gazette twice before I comprehended it. Halsey had opened the Chronicle and was staring at it fixedly.

"The Traders' bank closes its doors!" was what I read, and then I put down the paper and looked across the table.

"Did you know of this?" I asked Halsey.

"I—expected it. But not so soon," he replied.

"And you?" to Gertrude.

"Jack—told us—something," Gertrude said faintly. "Oh, Halsey, what can he do now?"

"Jack!" I said scornfully. "Your Jack's flight is easy enough to explain now. And you helped him, both of you, to get away! You get that from your mother; it isn't an Innes trait. Do you know that every dollar you have, both of you, is in that bank?"

Gertrude tried to speak, but Halsey stopped her.

"That isn't all, Gertrude," he said quietly; "Jack is—under arrest."

"Under arrest!" Gertrude screamed, and tore the paper out of his hand. She glanced at the heading, then she crumpled the newspaper into a ball and flung it to the floor. While Halsey, looking stricken and white, was trying to smooth it out and read it, Gertrude had dropped her head on the table and was sobbing stormily.

I have the clipping somewhere, but just now I can remember only the essentials.

On the afternoon before, Monday, while the Traders' bank was in the rush of closing hour, between two and three, Mr. Jacob Trautman, president



Sent Two Telegrams.

of the Pearl Brewing Company, came into the bank to lift a loan. As security for the loan he had deposited some 300 International Steamship Company 5's, in total value \$300,000. Mr. Trautman went to the loan clerk, and after certain formalities had been gone through, the loan clerk went to the vault. Mr. Trautman, who was a large and genial German, waited for a time, whistling under his breath. The loan clerk did not come back. After an interval, Mr. Trautman saw the loan clerk emerge from the vault and go to the assistant cashier; the two went hurriedly to the vault. A lapse of another ten minutes, and the assistant cashier came out and approached Mr. Trautman. He was noticeably white and trembling. Mr. Trautman was told that through an oversight the bonds had been misplaced, and was asked to return the following morning, when everything would be made all right.

Mr. Trautman, however, was a shrewd business man, and he did not like the appearance of things. He left the bank apparently satisfied, and within 30 minutes he had called up three different members of the Traders' board of directors. At 3:30 there was a hastily convened board meeting, with some stormy scenes, and late in the afternoon a national bank exam-



iner was in possession of the books. The bank had not opened for business Tuesday.

At 12:30 o'clock the Saturday before, as soon as the business of the day was closed, Mr. John Bailey, the cashier of the defunct bank, had taken his hat and departed. During the afternoon he had called up Mr. Aronson, a member of the board, and said he was ill, and might not be at the bank for a day or two. As Bailey was highly thought of, Mr. Aronson merely expressed a regret. From that time until Monday night, when Mr. Bailey had surrendered to the police, little was known of his movements. Some time after one on Saturday he had entered the Western Union office at Cherry and White streets and had sent two telegrams. He was at the Greenwood Country club on Saturday night, and appeared unlike himself. It was reported that he would be released under enormous bond some time that day, Tuesday.

The article closed by saying that while the officers of the bank refused to talk until the examiner had finished his work, it was known that securities aggregating a million and a quarter were missing. Then there was a diatribe on the possibility of such an occurrence; on the folly of a one-man bank, and of a board of directors that met only to lunch together and to listen to a brief report from the cashier, and on the poor policy of a government that arranges a three or four day examination twice a year. The mystery, it insinuated, had not been cleared by the arrest of the cashier. Before now minor officials had been used to cloak the misdeeds of men higher up. Inseparable as the words "speculation" and "peculation" have grown to be, John Bailey was not known to be in the stock market. His only words, after his surrender, had been: "Send for Mr. Armstrong at once." The telegraph message which had finally reached the president of the Traders' bank, in an interior town in California, had been responded to by a telegram from Dr. Walker, the young physician who was traveling with the Armstrong family, saying that Paul Armstrong was very ill and unable to travel.

That was how things stood that Tuesday evening. The Traders' bank had suspended payment, and John Bailey was under arrest, charged with wrecking it; Paul Armstrong lay very ill in California, and his only son had been murdered two days before. I sat dazed and bewildered. The children's money was gone; that was bad enough, though I had plenty, if they would let me share. But Gertrude's grief was beyond any power of mine to comfort; the man she had chosen stood accused of a colossal embezzlement—and even worse. For in the instant that I sat there I seemed to see the coils closing around John Bailey as the murderer of Arnold Armstrong.

Gertrude lifted her head at last and stared across the table at Halsey.

"Why did he do it?" she wailed.

"Couldn't you stop him, Halsey? It was suicidal to go back!"

Halsey was looking steadily through the windows of the breakfast room, but it was evident he saw nothing.

"It was the only thing to do, Trude," he said at last. "Aunt Ray, when I found Jack at the Greenwood club last Saturday night, he was frantic. I cannot talk until Jack tells me I may, but—he is absolutely innocent of all this, believe me. I thought, Trude and I thought, we were helping him, but it was the wrong way. He came back. Isn't that the act of an innocent man?"

"Then why did he leave at all?" I asked, unconvinced. "What innocent man would run away from here at three o'clock in the morning? Doesn't it look rather as though he thought it impossible to escape?"

Gertrude rose angrily. "You are not even just!" she flamed. "You don't know anything about it, and you condemn him!"

"I know that we have all lost a great deal of money," I said. "I shall believe Mr. Bailey innocent the moment he is shown to be. You profess to know the truth, but you cannot tell me! What am I to think?"

Halsey leaned over and patted my hand.

"You must take us on faith," he said. "Jack Bailey hasn't a penny that doesn't belong to him; the guilty man will be known in a day or so."

"I shall believe that when it is proved," I said grimly. "In the meantime, I take no one on faith. The Inneses never do."

Gertrude, who had been standing aloof at a window, turned suddenly. "But when the bonds are offered for sale, Halsey, won't the thief be detected at once?"

Halsey turned with a superior smile.

"It wouldn't be done that way," he said. "They would be taken out of the vault by some one who had access to it, and used as collateral for a loan in another bank. It would be possible to realize 80 per cent. of their face value."

(TO BE CONTINUED.)

Origin of "John Bull."

The name "John Bull," as applied to the English nation, was first made use of in a poem dated 1712.

TUBERCULOSIS IN THE PRISON

Per Cent. of Suffering is Enormous and There Seems but One Remedy.

From several investigations that have been made by the National Association for the Study and Prevention of Tuberculosis it is estimated that on an average about 15 per cent. of the prison population of the country is afflicted with tuberculosis. On this basis, out of the 80,000 prisoners housed in the penal institutions of the United States at any given time, no less than 12,000 are infected with the disease. If the Philippine islands and other insular possessions were taken into consideration the number would be much larger. Some of the prisons of Pennsylvania, Kansas and Ohio show such shocking conditions with reference to tuberculosis that many wardens admit that these places of detention are death traps. Similar conditions could be found in almost every state, and in the majority of cases the only sure remedy is the destruction of the old buildings and the erection of new ones.

LEG A MASS OF HUMOR

"About seven years ago a small abrasion appeared on my right leg just above my ankle. It irritated me so that I began to scratch it, and it began to spread until my leg from my ankle to the knee was one solid scale like a scab. The irritation was always worse at night and would not allow me to sleep, or my wife either, and it was completely undermining our health. I lost fifty pounds in weight and was almost out of my mind with pain and chagrin as no matter where the irritation came, at work, on the street or in the presence of company, I would have to scratch it until I had the blood running down into my shoe. I simply cannot describe my suffering during those seven years. The pain, mortification, loss of sleep, both to myself and wife is simply indescribable on paper and one has to experience it to know what it is.

"I tried all kinds of doctors and remedies but I might as well have thrown my money down a sewer. They would dry up for a little while and fill me with hope only to break out again just as bad if not worse. I had given up hope of ever being cured when I was induced by my wife to give the Cuticura Remedies a trial. After taking the Cuticura Remedies for a little while I began to see a change, and after taking a dozen bottles of Cuticura Resolvent in conjunction with the Cuticura Soap and Cuticura Ointment, the trouble had entirely disappeared and my leg was as fine as the day I was born. Now after a lapse of six months with no signs of a recurrence I feel perfectly safe in extending to you my heartfelt thanks for the good the Cuticura Remedies have done for me. I shall always recommend them to my friends. W. H. White, 312 E. Cabot St., Philadelphia, Pa., Feb. and Apr. 13, 1909."

THE DOCTOR'S IDEA.



Invalid—Doctor, I must positively insist upon knowing the worst.

Dr. Wise—Well, I guess my bill will be about \$55.

In the Desert.

Here is a glimpse of the horrors of a western desert taken from the Goldfield (Nev.) News: "Another desert victim is reported, and Archie Campbell, manager of the Last Chance mining property, near Death valley, came to Goldfield yesterday to endeavor to establish the identity of the unfortunate.

"Mr. Campbell encountered the unknown man on the desert in a frightful condition. He was in the last stages of desert exhaustion, devoid of clothing, sunburned, blistered and crazed, with his tongue swollen enormously, a pitiable object, and unable to speak.

"He was tenderly conveyed to camp but kind aid came too late, for an hour after he had absorbed the first cup of water he expired."

And They Wondered!

Judge Nicholas Longworth, who used to sit on Ohio's supreme bench, looked unnaturally grave, and a neighbor, in recognition of his facial depression, named a pet owl "Judge Longworth." It was the very next day that an excited maid broke up his wife's garden party. "Oh, madam," said she. "Madam! Judge Longworth has laid an egg."

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Quaint Table Manners.

Jerome S. McWade, the Duluth millionaire, talked at a dinner about the delights of a backwoods vacation.

"I go to a quaint backwoods village every summer," he said, "and numberless are the quaint people I meet there.

"Old Boucher, for instance, the janitor of the village church, is most amusing with his quaint ways. I had old Boucher to lunch one day, and the cold lobster was served with a mayonnaise sauce. When my servant offered this sauce to Boucher, the old man stuck his knife in it, took up a little on the blade, tasted it, then shook his head and said:

"Don't choose none."

Another Tradition Exploded.

Two Englishmen were resting at the "Red Horse Inn" at Stratford-on-Avon. One of them discovered a print picturing a low tumbling building underneath which was printed: "The House in Which Shakespeare Was Born."

Turning to his friend in mild surprise he pointed to the print. His friend exhibited equal surprise, and called a waiter, who assured them of the accuracy of the inscription.

"Pon my word," said the observing Englishman, shaking his head dubiously, "I thought he was born in a manger!"—Success Magazine.

A Fitting Design.

"I want an estimate on 10,000 letter heads," said the professional-looking man with the silk hat.

"Any special design?" asked the engraver.

"Yes, sir," replied the caller. "In the upper left-hand corner I want a catchy cut of Patrick Henry making his memorable speech, and in distinct letters, under the cut, his soul-inspiring words, 'Give me liberty or give me death.' You see," he added, handing a card to the engraver, "I'm a divorce lawyer, and want something fitting."—Lippincott's.

The Summer Girl.

"How'd you like to be engaged to a millionaire?"

"I was engaged to one all last summer, and he seldom spent a dime. I want to be engaged to a young man who is down here for two weeks with about \$300 in his roll."

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