

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 do as she wishes. Miss Innes locks up for the night. As Miss Innes locks up for the night, she is startled by a dark figure on the veranda. She passes a terrible night, which was filled with uneasy notes. In the morning Miss Innes found a strange link cut button in a clothes hamper. Gertrude and Halsey escaped with Jack Bailey. The house was swarmed 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 and Jack Bailey had disappeared. The link cut button mysteriously disappeared. Detective Jamieson and the servants 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 intruder escaped down a ladder 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 link cut button. Halsey suddenly reappeared. He said he and Bailey had left because they had received a telegram. Gertrude said that she had even called an unlicensed lawyer, fearing to give Jim Halsey's loaded weapon. Cashier Bailey of Paul Armstrong's bank, defunct, was arrested, charged with embezzlement. Halsey said Armstrong had wrecked his own bank and was able to clear Bailey. A telegram contained news that Paul Armstrong was dead. Halsey trapped Mrs. Watson, the housekeeper, while she was stealing from the house. At the lodge Miss Innes and Halsey found Halsey's fiancée, Louise Armstrong, sister of the dead man. She was believed to be in California. The lodge keeper told Miss Innes that Louise and Arnold had had a long talk the night of the murder. Louise was prostrated.



"I Am Very Sorry You Have Made This Decision," He Said.

CHAPTER XIII.—Continued.

The gardener mentioned by Halsey came out about two o'clock in the afternoon, and walked up from the station. I was favorably impressed by him. His references were good—he had been employed by the Brays until they went to Europe, and he looked young and vigorous. He asked for one assistant, and I was glad enough to get off so easily. He was a pleasant-faced young fellow, with black hair and blue eyes, and his name was Alexander Graham. I have been particular about Alex, because, as I said before, he played an important part later.

That afternoon I had a new insight into the character of the dead banker. I had my first conversation with Louise. She sent for me, and against my better judgment I went.

She held out her hand and I took it between both of mine.

"What can I say to you, Miss Innes?" she said slowly. "To have come like this—"

I thought she was going to break down, but she did not.

"You are not to think of anything but of getting well," I said, patting her hand. "When you are better, I am going to scold you for not coming here at once. This is your home, my dear, and of all people in the world, Halsey's old aunt ought to make you welcome."

She smiled a little, sadly, I thought.

"I ought not to see Halsey," she said. "Miss Innes, there are a great many things you will never understand, I am afraid. I am an imposter on your sympathy, because I— I stay here and let you lavish care on me, and all the time I know you are going to despise me."

"Nonsense!" I said briskly. "Why, what would Halsey do to me if I even ventured such a thing? He is so big and masterful that if I dared to be anything but rapturous over you, he would throw me out of a window. Indeed, he would be quite capable of it."

She seemed scarcely to hear my facetious tone. She had eloquent brown eyes—the Inneses are fair, and prone to a grayish-green optic that is better for use than appearance—and they seemed now to be clouded with trouble.

"Poor Halsey!" she said softly. "Miss Innes, I cannot marry him, and I am afraid to tell him. I am a coward—a coward!"

I sat beside the bed and stared at her. She was too ill to argue with, and, besides, sick people take queer fancies.

"We will talk about that when you are stronger," I said gently.

"But there are some things I must tell you," she insisted. "You must wonder how I came here, and why I stayed hidden at the lodge. Dear old

Thomas has been almost crazy. Miss Innes, I did not know that Sunnyside was rented. I knew my mother wished to rent it, without telling my—stepfather, but the news must have reached her after I left. When I started east, I had only one idea—to be alone with my thoughts for a time, to bury myself here. Then, I—must have taken a cold on the train."

"You came east in clothing suitable for California," I said, "and like all young girls nowadays, I don't suppose you wear flannels." But she was not listening.

"Miss Innes," she said, "has my stepbrother Arnold gone away?"

"What do you mean?" I asked, startled. But Louise was literal.

"He didn't come back that night," she said, "and it was so important that I should see him."

"I believe he has gone away," I replied uncertainly. "Isn't it something that we could attend to instead?"

But she shook her head. "I must do it myself," she said dully.

Halsey came to the door at that moment and I could hear him coaxing Liddy for admission to the sick room.

"Shall I bring him in?" I asked Louise, uncertain what to do. The girl seemed to shrink back among her pillows at the sound of his voice. I was vaguely irritated with her; there are few young fellows like Halsey—straightforward, honest, and willing to sacrifice everything for the one woman. I knew one once, more than 30 years ago, who was like that; he died a long time ago. And sometimes I take out his picture, with its cane and its queer silk hat, and look at it. But of late years it has grown too painful; he is always a boy—and I am an old woman. I would not bring him back if I could.

Perhaps it was some such memory that made me call out sharply.

"Come in, Halsey." And then I took my sewing and went into the boudoir beyond, to play propriety. I did not try to hear what they said, but every word came through the open door with curious distinctness. Halsey had evidently gone over to the bed and I suppose he kissed her. There was silence for a moment, as if words were superfluous things.

"I have been almost wild, sweet heart,"—Halsey's voice. "Why didn't you trust me, and send for me before?"

"It was because I couldn't trust myself," she said in a low tone. "I am too weak to struggle to-day; oh, Halsey, how I have wanted to see you!"

There was something I did not hear, then Halsey again.

"We could go away," he was saying. "What does it matter about any one in the world but just the two of us? To be always together, like this, hand in hand; Louise—don't tell me it isn't going to be. I won't believe you."

"You don't know; you don't know," Louise repeated dully. "Halsey, I care—you know that—but not enough to marry you."

"That is not true, Louise," he said sternly. "You cannot look at me with your honest eyes and say that."

"I cannot marry you," she repeated miserably. "It's bad enough, isn't it? Don't make it worse. Some day, before long, you will be glad."

"Then it is because you have never loved me." There were depths of hurt pride in his voice. "You saw how much I loved you, and you let me think you cared—for a while. No—that isn't like you, Louise. There is something you haven't told me. Is it—because there is some one else?"

"Yes," almost inaudibly.

"Louise! Oh, I don't believe it."

"It is true," she said sadly. "Halsey, you must not try to see me again. As soon as I can, I am going away from here—where you are all so much kinder than I deserve. And whatever you hear about me, try to think as well of me as you can. I am going to marry—another man. How you must hate me—hate me!"

"I could hear Halsey cross the room to the window. Then, after a pause, he went back to her again. I could hardly sit still; I wanted to go in and give her good shaking."

"Then it's all over," he was saying with a long breath. "The plans we made together, the hopes, the—all of it—over! Well, I'll not be a baby, and I'll give you up the minute you say 'I don't love you and I do love—some one else!'"

"I can not say that," she breathed, "but, very soon, I shall marry—the other man."

I could hear Halsey's low triumphant laugh.

"I defy him," he said. "Sweetheart, as long as you care for me, I am not afraid."

The wind slammed the door between the two rooms just then, and I could hear nothing more, although I moved my chair quite close. After a discreet interval, I went into the other room and found Louise alone. She was staring with sad eyes at the cherub painted on the ceiling over the bed, and because she looked tired I did not disturb her.

CHAPTER XIV.

An Egg-Nog and a Telegram.

We had discovered Louise at the lodge Tuesday night. It was Wednesday I had my interview with her. Thursday and Friday were uneventful, save as they marked improvement in our patient. Gertrude spent almost all the time with her, and the two had grown to be great friends. But certain things hung over me constantly; the coroner's inquest on the death of Arnold Armstrong, to be held Saturday, and the arrival of Mrs. Armstrong and young Dr. Walker, bringing the body of the dead president of the Traders' bank. We had not told Louise of either death.

Then, too, I was anxious about the children. With their mother's inheritance swept away in the wreck of the bank, and with their love affairs in a disastrous condition, things could scarcely be worse. Added to that, the cook and Liddy had a flare up over the proper way to make beef-tea for Louise, and, of course, the cook left.

Mrs. Watson had been glad enough, I think, to turn Louise over to our care, and Thomas went upstairs night and morning to greet his young mistress from the doorway. Poor Thomas! He had the faculty—found still in some old negroes, who cling to the traditions of slavery days—of making his employer's interest his. It was always "we" with Thomas. I miss him sorely; pipe-smoking, obsequious, not over reliable, kindly old man!

On Thursday Mr. Harton, the Armstrongs' legal adviser, called up from town. He had been advised, he said, that Mrs. Armstrong was coming east with her husband's body and would arrive Monday. He came with some hesitation, at last, to the fact that he had been further instructed to ask me to relinquish my lease on Sunnyside, as it was Mrs. Armstrong's desire to come directly there.

I was aghast.

"Here!" I said. "Surely you are mistaken, Mr. Harton. I should think, after what happened here only a few days ago, she would never wish to come back."

"Nevertheless," he replied, "she is most anxious to come. This is what she says: 'Use every possible means to have Sunnyside vacated. Must go there at once.'"

"Mr. Harton," I said testily, "I am not going to do anything of the kind.

I and mine have suffered enough at the hands of this family. I rented the house at an exorbitant figure and I have moved out here for the summer. My city home is dismantled and in the hands of decorators. I have been here one week, during which I have had not a single night of uninterrupted sleep, and I intend to stay until I have recuperated. Moreover, if Mr. Armstrong died insolvent, as I believe was the case, his widow ought to be glad to be rid of so expensive a piece of property."

The lawyer cleared his throat.

"I am very sorry you have made this decision," he said. "Miss Innes, Mrs. Fitzhugh tells me Louise Armstrong is with you."

"She is."

"Has she been informed of this—double bereavement?"

"Not yet," I said. "She has been very ill; perhaps to-night she can be told."

"It is very sad; very sad," he said. "I have a telegram for her, Miss Innes. Shall I send it out?"

"Better open it and read it to me," I suggested. "If it is important, that will save time."

There was a pause while Mr. Harton opened the telegram. Then he read it slowly, judicially.

"Watch for Nina Carrington. Home Monday. Signed—F. L. W."

"Hum!" I said. "Watch for Nina Carrington. Home Monday. Very well, Mr. Harton, I will tell her, but she is not in condition to watch for any one."

"Well, Miss Innes, if you decide to—er—relinquish the lease, let me know," the lawyer said.

"I shall not relinquish it," I replied, and I imagined his irritation from the way he hung up the receiver.

I wrote the telegram down word for word, afraid to trust my memory, and decided to ask Dr. Stewart how soon Louise might be told the truth. The closing of the Traders' bank I considered unnecessary for her to know, but the death of her stepfather and stepbrother must be broken to her soon, or she might hear it in some unexpected and shocking manner.

Dr. Stewart came about four o'clock, bringing his leather satchel into the house with a great deal of care, and opening it at the foot of the stairs to show me a dozen big yellow eggs nesting among the bottles.

"Real eggs," he said proudly. "None of your anemic store eggs, but the real thing—some of them still warm. Peel them! Egg-nog for Miss Louise!"

He was beaming with satisfaction, and before he left, he insisted on going back to the pantry and making an egg-nog with his own hands. Somehow, all the time he was doing it, I had a vision of Dr. Willoughby, my nerve specialist in the city, trying to make an egg-nog. I wondered if he ever prescribed anything so plebeian—and so delicious. And while Dr. Stewart whisked the eggs he talked.

"I said to Mrs. Stewart," he confided, a little red in the face from the exertion, "after I went home the other day, that you would think me an old gossip, for saying what I did about Walker and Miss Louise."

"Nothing of the sort," I protested.

"The fact is," he went on, evidently justifying himself, "I got that piece of information just as we get a lot of things, through the kitchen end of the house. Young Walker's chauffeur—Walker's more fashionable than I am, and he goes around the country in a Stanhope car—well, his chauffeur comes to see our servant girl, and he told her the whole thing. I thought it was probable, because Walker spent a lot of time up here last summer, when the family was here, and besides, Riggs, that Walker's man, had a very pat little story about the doctor's building a house on this property, just at the foot of the hill. The sugar, please."

The egg-nog was finished. Drop by drop the liquor had cooked the egg, and now, with a final whisk, a last toss in the shaker, it was ready, a symphony in gold and white. The doctor sniffed it.

"Real eggs, real milk, and a touch of real Kentucky whisky," he said.

He insisted on carrying it up himself, but at the foot of the stairs he paused.

"Riggs said the plans were drawn for the house," he said, harking back to the old subject. "Drawn by Huston in town. So I naturally believed him."

When the doctor came down, I was ready with a question.

"Doctor," I asked, "is there any one in the neighborhood named Carrington? Nina Carrington?"

"Carrington?" He wrinkled his forehead. "Carrington? No, I don't remember any such family. There used to be Covingtons down the creek."

"The name was Carrington," I said and the subject lapsed.

(TO BE CONTINUED.)

Woman a Rural Mail Carrier.

Mrs. Carrie Doherty King, of Crystal Springs, Miss., is the only woman mail carrier in her state. She delivers mail on a rural route, making a circuit of about 25 miles a day. In her girlhood she won many trophies for her horsemanship, an accomplishment that is now of great service to her.

How a Chronic Invalid Regained Perfect Health.

Mrs. Ray Trusner, 30 West Third St., New Albany, Ind., says: "Kidney disease had rendered me a chronic invalid. I lay in bed unable to move hand or foot. My right limb was swollen to twice normal size. I looked the picture of death and my case puzzled the doctors. The kidney secretions were highly colored and scalded terribly. Marked improvement followed the use of Doan's Kidney Pills. In six weeks I was a well woman. My friends and relatives marvel at my recovery." Remember the name—Doan's.

For sale by all dealers. 50 cents a box. Foster-Milburn Co., Buffalo, N. Y.

How a Doctor Cured Scalp Disease.

"When I was ten or twelve years old I had a scalp disease, something like scald head, though it wasn't that. I suffered for several months, and most of my hair came out. Finally they had a doctor to see me and he recommended the Cuticura Remedies. They cured me in a few weeks. I have used the Cuticura Remedies, also, for a breaking out on my hands and was benefited a great deal. I haven't had any more trouble with the scalp disease. Miss Jessie F. Buchanan, R. F. D. 3, Hamilton, Ga., Jan. 7, 1909."

Kept with Barnum's Circus.

P. T. Barnum, the famous circus man, once wrote: "I have had the Cuticura Remedies among the contents of my medicine chest with my shows for the last three seasons, and I can cheerfully certify that they were very effective in every case which called for their use."

When the Fish Exploded.

Somebody discovered that fish are fond of gasoline, and this led to the idea of soaking worms in gasoline in order to make them more alluring when used for bait.

Mark the result.

Two of those gasoline-tempted fish exploded in the frying pan, and broke the kitchen window, and blew the cook's face full of mashed potato, and hurled the teakettle into the flour barrel, and painted the kitchen ceiling with stewed tomatoes.

Call it a lying world and let it go at that.

How It Was Named.

Nottingham lace was so called because it originally was made by the semi-savage people who lived in the caves in the district now known as Nottingham, in England. By keeping the work between them and the dark mouth of the cave the women could work the pattern easily. Nottingham, or any other lace, even the finest and filmiest, can be washed safely and quickly with Easy Task soap, which is a natural, scientific cleanser and leaves the lace in the best condition. Easy Task costs but five cents a cake at your grocer's.

Something Dreadful.

Wee Anita was listening to a story of the Johnstown flood.

"What made it?" she asked.

"Oh, the dam broke," replied grandma.

The next morning she ran into her brother's room and, climbing up on the bed, inquired anxiously: "Buvver, wasn't it just drefful 'bout that swear breaking and killing all dose people?"

There is more Catarrh in this section of the country than at other diseases put together, and until the last few years was supposed to be incurable. For a great many years doctors pronounced it a local disease and prescribed local remedies, and by constantly failing to cure with local treatment, pronounced it incurable. Science has proven Catarrh to be a constitutional disease, and therefore requires constitutional treatment. Hall's Catarrh Cure, manufactured by F. J. Cheney & Co., Toledo, Ohio, is the only Constitutional cure on the market. It is taken internally in doses from 10 drops to a teaspoonful. It acts directly on the blood and mucous surfaces of the system. They offer one hundred dollars for any case it fails to cure. Send for circulars and testimonials.

Address: F. J. CHENEY & CO., Toledo, Ohio. Sold by Druggists, Inc. Take Hall's Catarrh Cure for constipation.

Last Here.

The Minister—In the next world, Tommy, the last shall be first.

Tommy—Say, won't I shine when the minister comes to supper at our house up there!—Puck.

If You Are a Trifle Sensitive.

About the size of your shoes, many people wear smaller shoes by using Allen's Foot-Powder, the Antiseptic Powder to shake into the shoes. It cures Itch, Swollen, Aching Feet and gives rest and comfort. Just the thing for breaking in new shoes. Sold everywhere. The sample sent FREE. Address, Allen's, One Cent, Le Roy, N. Y.

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AWFUL.



Stranger—I suppose you people in this town think you have the grandest climate in the country?

Man With a Cold—No; but we claim the greatest variety.

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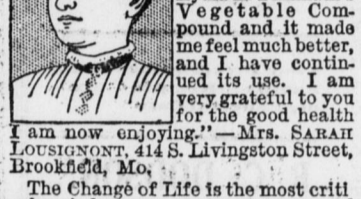
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WOMEN OF MIDDLE AGE

Need Lydia E. Pinkham's Vegetable Compound

Brookfield, Mo.—"Two years ago I was unable to do any kind of work and only weighed 118 pounds. My trouble dates back to the time that women may expect nature to bring on them the Change of Life. I got a bottle of Lydia E. Pinkham's Vegetable Compound and it made me feel much better, and I have continued its use. I am very grateful to you for the good health I am now enjoying."—Mrs. SARAH LOUISGONT, 414 S. Livingston Street, Brookfield, Mo.



The Change of Life is the most critical period of a woman's existence, and neglect of health at this time invites disease and pain.

Women everywhere should remember that there is no other remedy known to medicine that will so successfully carry women through this trying period as Lydia E. Pinkham's Vegetable Compound, made from native roots and herbs.

For 80 years it has been curing women from the worst forms of female ills—Inflammation, ulceration, displacements, fibroid tumors, irregularities, periodic pains, backache, and nervous prostration.

If you would like special advice about your case write a confidential letter to Mrs. Pinkham, at Lynn, Mass. Her advice is free, and always helpful.

WHERE HE SAVED MONEY.



"You say it costs less to run this automobile than that trotting horse you owned?"

"Yes; I used to bet on the trotting horse."

A Liking for "Hamlet."

"Do you like Hamlet?" asked the hostess of her unlettered, if gushing, guest.

"Indeed I do," was the reply. "I am excessively fond of it, but I always prefer a savory to a sweet one."

There was a momentary confusion, and then the hostess realized that the admiration of the guest was of a culinary, not literary, character.

"I gave her ham with an omelette for breakfast next morning," said the hostess, when telling the story.—Scraps.

Even the Children.

Ex-Governor Pennypacker, condemning in his witty way the American divorce evil, told, at a Philadelphia luncheon, an appropriate story.

"Even our children," he said, "are becoming infected. A Kensington school teacher, examining a little girl in grammar, said:

"What is the future of 'love'?"

"A divorce," the child answered promptly."

This Is a Good Breakfast!

Instead of preparing a hot meal, have some fruit;

Post Toasties

with cream;

A soft boiled egg;
Slice of crisp toast;
A cup of Postum.

Such a breakfast is pretty sure to win you.

"The Memory Lingers"

Postum Cereal Co., Ltd.
Battle Creek, Mich.



He Looked Young and Vigorous.

anything but rapturous over you, he would throw me out of a window. Indeed, he would be quite capable of it."

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