

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. The servants desert. Gertrude and Halsey arrive with Jack Bailey. The house was awakened by a revolver shot and Arnold Armstrong was found shot to death in the hall. Miss Innes found Halsey's revolver on the lawn. He and Jack Bailey had disappeared. Gertrude revealed that she was engaged to Jack Bailey, with whom she talked in the billiard room shortly before the murder. Detective Jamieson accused Miss Innes of holding back evidence. He imprisoned an intruder in an empty room. The prisoner escaped. Gertrude was suspected because of an injured foot. Halsey reappears and says he and Bailey were called away by a telegram. Cashier Bailey of Paul Armstrong's bank, defunct, was arrested for embezzlement. Paul Armstrong's death was announced. Halsey's fiancée, Louise Armstrong, told Halsey that while she still loved him, she was to marry another. It developed that Dr. Walker was the man. Louise was found at the bottom of the circular staircase. Recovering consciousness, she said something had brushed by her on the stairway and she faints. Bailey is suspected of Armstrong's murder. After "seeing a ghost," Thomas, the lodgekeeper, was found dead with a slip in his pocket bearing the name of "Lucien Wallace." Dr. Walker asked Miss Innes to vacate in favor of Mrs. Armstrong. She refused. A note from Bailey to Gertrude, arranged a meeting at night was found. A ladder out of place deepens the mystery. The stables were burned. During the excitement a man stole into the house. A search failed to reveal him. Miss Innes shot an intruder. A man limping was seen on the road. Halsey mysteriously disappeared. Louise scenting danger before his absence was noted.

CHAPTER XXV.—Continued.

"He's as dear to me as he is to you," she said sadly. "I tried to warn him."
"Nonsense!" I said as briskly as I could. "We are making a lot of trouble out of something perhaps very small. Halsey was probably late—he is always late. Any moment we may hear the car coming up the road."

But it did not come. After a half-hour of suspense, Louise went out quietly, and did not come back. I hardly knew she was gone until I heard the station hack moving off. At 11 o'clock the telephone rang. It was Mr. Jamieson.

"I have found the Dragon Fly, Miss Innes," he said. "It has collided with a freight car on the siding above the station. No, Mr. Innes was not there, but we shall probably find him. Send Warner for the car."

But they did not find him. At four o'clock the next morning we sat still waiting for news, while Alex watched the house and Sam the grounds. At daylight I dropped into exhausted sleep. Halsey had not come back, and there was no word from the detective.

CHAPTER XXVI.

Halsey's Disappearance.

Mr. Jamieson came back about eight o'clock the next morning; he was covered with mud, and his hat was gone. Altogether we were a sad-looking trio that gathered around a breakfast that no one could eat. Over a cup of black coffee the detective told us what he had learned of Halsey's movements the night before. Up to a certain point the car had made it easy enough to follow him. And I gathered that Mr. Burns, the other detective, had followed a similar car for miles at dawn, only to find it was a touring car on an endurance run.

"He left here about ten minutes after eight," Mr. Jamieson said. "He went alone; at 8:20 he stopped at Dr. Walker's. I went to the doctor's about midnight, but he had been called out on a case, and had not come back at four o'clock. From the doctor's it seems Mr. Innes walked across the lawn to the cottage Mrs. Armstrong and her daughter had taken. Mrs. Armstrong had retired, and he said perhaps a dozen words to Miss Louise. She will not say what they were, but the girl evidently suspects what has occurred. That is, she suspects foul play, but she doesn't know of what nature. Then, apparently, he started directly for the station. Along somewhere in the dark stretch between Carol street and the depot he evidently swerved suddenly—perhaps some one in the road—and went full into the side of a freight. We found it there last night."

"He might have been thrown under the train by the force of the shock," I said tremulously.
Gertrude shuddered.
"We examined every inch of track. There was no sign."
"But surely—he can't be—gone!" I cried. "Aren't there traces in the mud—anything?"

"There is no mud—only dust. There has been no rain. And the footpath there is of cinders. Miss Innes, I am inclined to think that he has met with bad treatment, in the light of what has gone before. I do not think he has been murdered." I shrank from the word. "Burns is back in the country on a crew we got from the night clerk at the drug store. There will be two more men here by noon, and the city office is on the lookout."

"The creek?" Gertrude asked.
"The creek is shallow now. If it were swollen with rain it would be different. There is hardly any water in it. Now, Miss Innes," he said, "turning to me, I must ask you some questions. Had Mr. Halsey any possible reason for going away like this, without warning?"

"None whatever."
"He went away once before," he



"Miss Armstrong is Very Ill and Unable to See Any One."

persisted. "And you were as sure then."

"He did not leave the Dragon Fly jammed into the side of a freight car before."

"No, but he left it for repairs in a blacksmith shop, a long distance from here. Do you know if he had any enemies? Any one who might wish him out of the way?"

"Not that I know of, unless—no, I cannot think of any."

"Was he in the habit of carrying money?"

"He never carried it far. No, he never had more than enough for current expenses."

Mr. Jamieson got up then and began to pace the room. It was an unwonted concession to the occasion.
"Then I think we get at it by elimination. The chances are against flight. If he was hurt, we find no trace of him. It looks almost like an abduction. This young Dr. Walker—have you any idea why Mr. Innes should have gone there last night?"

"I cannot understand it," Gertrude said thoughtfully. "I don't think he knew Dr. Walker at all, and—their relations could hardly have been cordial, under the circumstances."

Jamieson pricked up his ears, and little by little he drew from us the unfortunate story of Halsey's love affair, and the fact that Louise was going to marry Dr. Walker.

Mr. Jamieson listened attentively.

"There are some interesting developments here," he said thoughtfully. "The woman who claims to be the mother of Lucien Wallace has not come back. Your nephew has apparently been spirited away. There is an organized attempt being made to enter this house; in fact, it has been entered. Witness the incident with the cook yesterday. And I have a new piece of information." He looked carefully away from Gertrude. "Mr. John Bailey is not at his Knickerbocker apartments, and I don't know where he is. It's a hash, that's what it is. It's a Chinese puzzle. They won't fit together, unless—unless Mr. Bailey and your nephew have again—"

And once again Gertrude surprised me. "They are not together," she said hotly. "I know where Mr. Bailey is, and my brother is not with him."

"Miss Gertrude," he said, "if you and Miss Louise would only tell me everything you know and surmise about this business, I should be able to do a great many things. I believe I could find your brother, and I might be able to—well, to do some other things." But Gertrude's glance did not falter.

"Nothing that I know could help you to find Halsey," she said stubbornly. "I know absolutely as little of his disappearance as you do, and I can only say this: I do not trust Dr. Walker. I think he hated Halsey, and he would get rid of him if he could."

"Perhaps you are right. In fact, I had some such theory myself. But Dr. Walker went out late last night to a serious case in Summitville, and is still there. Burns traced him there. We have made guarded inquiry at the Greenwood club and through the village. There is absolutely nothing to go on but this: On the embankment above the railroad, at the point where we found the machine, is a small house. An old woman and a daughter, who is very lame, live there. They say that they distinctly heard the shock when the Dragon Fly hit the car, and they went to the bottom of their garden and looked over. The automobile was there; they could see the lights, and they thought some one had been injured. It was very dark,

but they could make out two figures, standing together. The women were curious, and, leaving the fence, they went back and by a roundabout path down to the road. When they got there the car was still standing, the headlight broken and the bonnet crushed, but there was no one to be seen."
The detective went away immediately, and to Gertrude and me was left the woman's part, to watch and wait. By luncheon nothing had been found, and I was frantic. I went upstairs to Halsey's room finally, from sheer inability to sit across from Gertrude any longer and meet her terrified eyes.
Liddy was in my dressing room, suspiciously red-eyed and trying to put a right sleeve in a left arm-hole of a new waist for me. I was too much shaken to scold.
"What name did that woman in the kitchen give?" she demanded, viciously ripping out the offending sleeve.
"Bliss. Mattie Bliss," I replied.
"Bliss. M. B. Well, that's not what she has on her suitcase. It is marked N. F. C."
The new cook and her initials troubled me not all. I put on my bonnet and sent for what the Casanova liverman called a "stylish turnout." Having once made up my mind to a course of action, I am not one to turn back. Warner drove me; he was plainly disgusted, and he steered the livery horse as he would the Dragon Fly, feeling uneasily with his left foot for the clutch, and working his right elbow at an imaginary horn every time a dog got in the way.
Warner had something on his mind, and after we had turned into the road he voiced it.
"Miss Innes," he said. "I overheard a part of a conversation yesterday that I didn't understand. It wasn't my business to understand it, for that matter. But I've been thinking all day that I'd better tell you. Yesterday afternoon, while you and Miss Gertrude were out driving, I had got the car in some sort of shape again after the fire, and I went to the library to call Mr. Innes to see it. I went into the living room, where Miss Liddy said he was, and half-way across the library I heard him talking to some one. He seemed to be walking up and down, and he was in a rage, I can tell you."
"What did he say?"
"The first thing I heard was—excuse me, Miss Innes, but it's what he said, 'The damned rascal,' he said, 'I'll see him in—well, in hell was what he said, 'in hell first.' Then somebody else spoke up; it was a woman. She said: 'I warned them, but they thought I would be afraid.'"
"A woman! Did you wait to see who it was?"
"I wasn't spying, Miss Innes," Warner said with dignity. "But the next thing caught my attention. She said: 'I knew there was something wrong from the start. A man isn't well one day, and dead the next, without some reason.' I thought she was speaking of Thomas."
"And you don't know who it was?" I exclaimed. "Warner, you had the key to this whole occurrence in your hands and did not see it!"
However, there was nothing to be done. I resolved to make inquiry when I got home, and in the meantime, my present errand absorbed me. This was nothing less than to see Louise Armstrong, and to attempt to drag from her what she knew, or suspected of Halsey's disappearance. But here, as in every direction I turned, I was baffled.
A neat maid answered the bell, but



she stood squarely in the doorway, and it was impossible to preserve one's dignity and pass her.

"Miss Armstrong is very ill and unable to see any one," she said. I did not believe her.

"And Mrs. Armstrong—is she also ill?"

"She is with Miss Louise and cannot be disturbed."

"Tell her it is Miss Innes, and that it is a matter of the greatest importance."

"It would be of no use, Miss Innes, my orders are positive."

At that moment a heavy step sounded on the stairs. Past the maid's white-strapped shoulder I could see a familiar thatch of gray hair, and in a moment I was face to face with Dr. Stewart. He was very grave, and his customary geniality was tinged with restraint.

"You are the very woman I want to see," he said promptly. "Send away your trap, and let me drive you home. What is this about your nephew?"

"He has disappeared, doctor. Not only that, but there is every evidence that he has been either abducted or—I could not finish. The doctor helped me into his capacious buggy in silence. Until we had got a little distance he did not speak; then he turned and looked at me.

"Now tell me all about it," he said. He heard me through without speaking.

"And you think Louise knows something?" he said when I had finished. "I don't—in fact, I am sure of it. The best evidence of it is this: She asked me if he had been heard from, or if anything had been learned. She won't allow Walker in the room, and she made me promise to see you and tell you this: don't give up the search for him. Find him, and find him soon. He is living."

"Well," I said, "if she knows that, she knows more. She is a very cruel and ungrateful girl."

"She is a very sick girl," he said gravely. "Neither you nor I can judge her until we know everything. Both she and her mother are ghosts of their former selves. Under all this, these two sudden deaths, this bank robbery, the invasions at Sunnyside and Halsey's disappearance, there is some mystery that, mark my words, will come out some day. And when it does, we shall find Louise Armstrong a victim."

Then we drove slowly home. I had the doctor put me down at the gate, and I walked to the house—past the lodge where we had found Louise, and, later, poor Thomas; on the drive where I had seen a man watching the lodge and where, later, Rosie had been frightened; past the east entrance, where so short a time before the most obstinate effort had been made to enter the house, and where, that night two weeks ago, Liddy and I had seen the strange woman. Not far from the west wing lay the blackened ruins of the stables. I felt like a ruin myself as I paused on the broad veranda before I entered the house.

Two private detectives had arrived in my absence, and it was a relief to turn over to them the responsibility

soldiery. I am chief magistrate and commander-in-chief as well as king, just as my father was before me. I settle all disputes, civil, ecclesiastical and moral! I may tell you that as 'heir apparent' I ran the regency in my late father's absence, and so served a useful apprenticeship to the business I am now succeeding to. I think I've got the hang of the islands, so to speak, and I don't anticipate any trouble when I come into my kingdom. The principles of government have been simplified since my great-grandfather reigned as first king of the Cocos Keeling group.

"We are strictly a moral community. No drunkenness is allowed, and beyond the little whisky that is doled out from the palace, no intoxicating liquors are obtainable on the islands. There was a time, not so long ago, when the natives manufactured their own fire water. They brewed a concoction from coconuts, which they called 'palm toddy.' They got drunk on it—nastily drunk—and the result was a law prohibiting every possible variety of palm toddy. Today, so far as I know, there isn't a drop of that toddy obtainable on the islands."

His Majesty went on to describe the principal city of the island group and its domestic life. New Selma is its name, and its population is barely 70—all, with two or three exceptions, Malays, of whom Ilin, the Queen Mother, is one. New Selma boasts a modern school in which Arabic and a little English are taught, and the young idea is trained in the tenets of Mohametanism, which is the religion of all proper Malaysians. All marrying and giving in marriage has to be done through the New Selma registry office—after his Majesty has approved of the union. To understand the divorce laws of the kingdom it is perhaps necessary to be a New Selman; they are a little complicated. Like his father before him, the new king was sent to Scotland (the home of his ancestors) to be educated.

It will be only in accordance with the fitness of things if King Sidney marries in the islands, as his forbears did. His grandfather married the beautiful Sinia Dupong, a Malay of royal Sulu blood, whilst the late king espoused Ilin, "the dusky queen."

Early Roller Rink.
London.—This city seems to have possessed a roller skating rink over three-quarters of a century ago, for in 1821 mention can be found of the invention of a skate "for rendering the movement independent of frost," which was being "practically exhibited at the old tennis court in Windmill street."

His Little Joke.
"I'm sorry, old man," said the doctor when his patient came out of the chloroform, "but we had to remove your leg to save your life."

"Will I get better?" asked the man feebly.

"Yes, you're all right now. You ought to live 70 years more."

"Ah," sighed the victim, "that's a long while to live with one foot in the grave."

(TO BE CONTINUED.)

Gertrude.

of the house and grounds. Mr. Jamieson, they said, had arranged for more to assist in the search for the missing man, and at that time the country was being secured in all directions.
The household staff was again depleted that afternoon. Liddy was waiting to tell me that the new cook had gone, bag and baggage, without waiting to be paid. No one had admitted the visitor whom Warner had heard in the library, unless, possibly, the missing cook. Again I was working in a circle.

KING OF THE COCOS

Bachelor of 30 Inherits Throne and Vast Estate.

Is Absolute Monarch Over Malays Inhabiting the Cocos Keeling Group of Islands—Capital Has Population of 700.

London.—His Majesty, Sidney I, the new King of the Cocos Keeling islands, is in London engaged over the administration of the affairs of the late king, his father, whose estate has just been proved at the value of over \$1,000,000, exclusive of his properties in the islands.

The new king received a representative of the London Leader in the ante-room of a city office in Whittington avenue, and consented to be interviewed with a readiness that is remarkable, to say the least of it, on the part of a reigning monarch.

King Sidney is a tall, spare young man of about 30, as brown as a beechnut, with high cheek bones, close-cropped black hair, a carefully trained mustache, and a soft, caressing voice. He was completely disguised in well-fitting clothes of gray and patent leather boots. An enormous emerald glowed upon the little finger of his left hand—a jewel such as none but a king dare wear, and from his watch chain dangled a medal of gold, struck in commemoration of the discovery of the Cocos Keeling islands in the early days of the seventeenth century.

"Pray be seated," said his Majesty, producing an aromatic cigarette. "The court I receive here is quite unofficial, I assure you. At the royal palace of New Selma it might be different." He waved his hand airily. "I am plain Mr. Sidney Clunies Ross here; and when I get to Cocos I shall have quite enough of kingship to last me a lifetime. It's true that when I am at home I shall be a king with more power than most monarchs, with a royal palace that cost a fortune to build, with my own laws to administer in my own way, and no ministry to worry me.

"In my kingdom," continued his Majesty, "there are neither police nor



A Native's Mansion.

He was a Boston Boy.
"Your little boy must be very intelligent," said a visitor to a Boston school teacher whose five-year-old son was forming Greek words with building blocks.
"Intelligent!" exclaimed the proud parent. "He is phenomenally gifted. As an example of his early erudition, what do you suppose were the first words he ever spoke?"
"Papa" and "mamma!"
"Stuff and nonsense!" ejaculated the father, in a tone of disgust. "Why, the day he was 12 months old he suddenly laid down his algebra and said to me: 'Father, the longer I live the more indubitable proofs I perceive that there is in Boston as much culture to the square inch as there ever was in the ambient area of ancient Athens!'"

An Awful Moment.
The company always included many delightful women, and I remember the consternation caused among them one day by Burnham, the scout. He explained that he attributed his success as a scout to the acuteness of his sense of smell; it was like a bloodhound's.
"There's no one here today," he affirmed, "who at any time anywhere in the future I could not recognize in the dark. Yes, I could tell you, and you, and you," nodding at an alluring group in modish apparel, "by the way you smell."

For an awful moment the conversation flagged.—McClure's.

STOPPED SHORT
Taking Tonics, and Built Up on Right Food.

The mistake is frequently made of trying to build up a worn-out nervous system on so-called tonics—drugs.

New material from which to rebuild wasted nerve cells is what should be supplied, and this can be obtained only from proper food.

"Two years ago I found myself on the verge of a complete nervous collapse, due to overwork and study, and to illness in the family," writes a Wisconsin young mother.
"My friends became alarmed because I grew pale and thin and could not sleep nights. I took various tonics prescribed by physicians, but their effects wore off shortly after I stopped taking them. My food did not seem to nourish me and I gained no flesh nor blood.

"Reading of Grape-Nuts, I determined to stop the tonics and see what a change of diet would do. I ate Grape-Nuts four times a day, with cream and drank milk also, went to bed early after eating a dish of Grape-Nuts.

"In about two weeks I was sleeping soundly. In a short time gained 29 pounds in weight and felt like a different woman. My little daughter whom I was obliged to keep out of school last spring on account of chronic catarrh has changed from a thin, pale, nervous child to a rosy, healthy girl and has gone back to school this fall.

"Grape-Nuts and fresh air were the only agents used to accomplish the happy result."

Read "The Road to Wellville," in 30c. "There's a Reason."

Ever read the above letter? A new case appears from that time. They are genuine, true, and full of human interest.

SAVED FROM AN OPERATION

By Lydia E. Pinkham's Vegetable Compound



De Forest, Wis.—"After an operation four years ago I had pains downward in both sides, backache, and a weakness. The doctor wanted me to have another operation. I took Lydia E. Pinkham's Vegetable Compound and I am entirely cured of my troubles."—Mrs. AUGUSTE VESPERMANN, De Forest, Wisconsin.

Another Operation Avoided.
New Orleans, La.—"For years I suffered from severe female troubles. Finally I was confined to my bed and the doctor said an operation was necessary. I gave Lydia E. Pinkham's Vegetable Compound a trial first, and was saved from an operation."—Mrs. LILY PEYROUX, 1111 Kerlerec St., New Orleans, La.

Thirty years of unparalleled success confirms the power of Lydia E. Pinkham's Vegetable Compound to cure female diseases. The great volume of unsolicited testimony constantly pouring in proves conclusively that Lydia E. Pinkham's Vegetable Compound is a remarkable remedy for those distressing feminine ills from which so many women suffer.

If you want special advice about your case write to Mrs. Pinkham, at Lynn, Mass. Her advice is free, and always helpful.

DR. J. D. KELLOGG'S ASTHMA

Remedy for the prompt relief of Asthma and Hay Fever. Ask your druggist for it. Write for FREE SAMPLE. NORTHROP & LYMAN CO. LTD., BUFFALO, N.Y.

It is affected with more eyes, use it Thompson's Eye Water

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