

THE CIRCULAR STAIRCASE

By MARY ROBERTS RINEHART
ILLUSTRATIONS BY ROY WALTERS
COPYRIGHT 1928 BY DAVID W. REYNOLDS CO.
SYNOPSIS.

Miss Innes, spinster and guardian of Gertrude and Halsey, establishes 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.

CHAPTER V.—Continued.

"The quarrel, I believe," he persisted, "was about Mr. Armstrong's conduct to you, Miss Gertrude. He had been paying you unwelcome attentions."

And I had never seen the man! When she nodded a "yes" I saw the tremendous possibilities involved. If this detective could prove that Gertrude feared and disliked the murdered man, and that Mr. Armstrong had been annoying and possibly pursuing her with hateful attentions, all that, added to Gertrude's confession of her presence in the billiard room at the time of the crime, looked strange, to say the least. The prominence of the family assured a strenuous effort to find the murderer, and if we had nothing worse to look forward to, we were sure of a distasteful publicity.

Mr. Jamieson shut his note-book with a snap and thanked us.

"I have an idea," he said, apropos of nothing at all, "that at any rate the ghost is laid here. Whatever the rappings have been—and the colored man says they began when the family went west three months ago—they are likely to stop now."

Which shows how much he knew about it. The ghost was not laid; with the murder of Arnold Armstrong he, or it, only seemed to take on fresh vigor.

Mr. Jamieson left then, and when Gertrude had gone upstairs, as she did at once, I sat and thought over what I had just heard. Her engagement, once so engrossing a matter, paled now beside the significance of her story. If Halsey and Jack Bailey had left before the crime, how came Halsey's revolver in the tulip bed? What was the mysterious cause of their sudden flight? What had Gertrude left in the billiard room? What was the significance of the cuff-link and where was it?

CHAPTER VI.

In the East Corridor.

When the detective left he enjoined absolute secrecy on everybody in the household. The Greenwood club promised the same thing, and as there are no Sunday afternoon papers, the murder was not publicly known until Monday. The coroner himself notified the Armstrong family lawyer, and early in the afternoon he came out. I had not seen Mr. Jamieson since morning, but I knew he had been interrogating the servants. Gertrude was locked in her room with a headache, and I had luncheon alone.

Mr. Harton, the lawyer, was a little, thin man, and he looked as if he did not relish his business that day.

"This is very unfortunate, Miss Innes," he said, after we had shaken hands. "Most unfortunate—and mysterious. With the father and mother in the west, I find everything devolves on me; and, as you can understand, it is an unpleasant duty."

"No doubt," I said absently. "Mr. Harton, I am going to ask you some questions, and I hope you will answer them. I feel that I am entitled to some knowledge, because I and my family are just now in a most ambiguous position."

I don't know whether he understood me or not; he took off his glasses and wiped them.

"I shall be very happy," he said with old-fashioned courtesy.

"Thank you, Mr. Harton, did Mr. Arnold Armstrong know that Sunnyside had been rented?"

"I think—yes, he did. In fact, I myself told him about it."

"And he knew who the tenants were?"

"Yes."

"He had not been living with the family for some years, I believe?"



"The Quarrel, I Believe."

and I felt that this dried-up little man was the repository of much that he had not told me. I gave up trying to elicit any information from him, and we went together to view the body before it was taken to the city. It had been lifted on to the billiard-table and a sheet thrown over it; otherwise nothing had been touched. A soft hat lay beside it, and the collar of the dinner-coat was still turned up. The handsome, dissipated face of Arnold Armstrong, purged of its ugly lines, was now only pathetic. As we went in Mrs. Watson appeared at the card-room door.

"Come in, Mrs. Watson," the lawyer said. But she shook her head and withdrew; she was the only one in the house who seemed to regret the dead man, and even she seemed rather shocked than sorry.

Before Mr. Harton left, he told me something of the Armstrong family. Paul Armstrong, the father, had been married twice. Arnold was a son by the first marriage. The second Mrs. Armstrong had been a widow, with a child, a little girl. This child, now perhaps 20, was Louise Armstrong, having taken her stepfather's name, and was at present in California with the family.

"They will probably return at once," he concluded, "and part of my errand here to-day is to see if you will relinquish your lease here in their favor."

"We would better wait and see if they wish to come," I said. "It seems unlikely, and my town house is being remodeled." At that he let the matter drop, but it came up unpleasantly enough, later.

At six o'clock the body was taken away, and at seven-thirty, after an early dinner, Mr. Harton went. Gertrude had not come down, and there was no news of Halsey. Mr. Jamieson had taken a lodging in the village, and I had not seen him since mid-afternoon. It was about nine o'clock, I think, when the bell rang and he was ushered into the living room.

"Sit down," I said grimly. "Have you found a clew that will incriminate me, Mr. Jamieson?"

He had the grace to look uncomfortable. "No," he said. "If you had killed Mr. Armstrong, you would have left no clews. You would have had too much intelligence."

After that we got along better. He was fishing in his pocket, and after a minute he brought out two scraps of paper. "I have been to the club-house," he said, "and among Mr. Armstrong's effects, I found these. One is curious; the other is puzzling."

The first was a sheet of club note-paper on which was written, over and over, the name "Halsey B. Innes." It was Halsey's flowing signature to a dot, but it lacked Halsey's ease. The ones toward the bottom of the sheet were much better than the top ones. Mr. Jamieson smiled at my face.

"His old tricks," he said. "That one is merely curious; this one, as I said before, is puzzling."

The second scrap, folded and re-folded into a compass so tiny that the writing had been partly obliterated, was part of a letter—the lower half of a sheet, not typed, but written in a cramped hand.

—by altering the plans for rooms, may be possible. The best way, in my opinion would be to—The plan for—In one of the—rooms—cham—

That was all.

"Well!" I said, looking up. "There is nothing in that, is there? A man

ought to be able to change the plan of his house without becoming an object of suspicion."

"There is little in the paper itself," he admitted; "but why should Arnold Armstrong carry that around, unless it meant something? He never built a house, you may be sure of that. If it is this house, it may mean anything from a secret room—"

"To an extra bathroom," I said scornfully. "Haven't you a thumb-print, too?"

"I have," he said with a smile, "and the print of a foot in a tulip bed, and a number of other things. The oddest part is, Miss Innes, that the thumb-mark is probably yours and the footprint certainly."

His audacity was the only thing that saved me; his amused smile put me on my mettle, and I ripped out a perfectly good scallop before I answered.



Trembling as I was, I was determined to see that door opened. I hardly knew what I feared, but so many terrible and inexplicable things had happened that suspense was worse than certainty.

"I am perfectly cool," I said, "and I am going to remain here."

The lights flashed up along that end of the corridor, throwing the doors into relief. At the intersection of the small hallway with the larger, the circular staircase wound its way up, as if it had been an afterthought of the architect. And just around the corner, in the small corridor, was the door Mr. Jamieson had indicated. I was still unfamiliar with the house, and I did not remember the door. My heart was thumping wildly in my ears, but I nodded to him to go ahead. I was perhaps eight or ten feet away—and then he threw the bolt back.

"Come out," he said quietly. There was no response. "Come out," he repeated. Then—I think he had a revolver, but I am not sure—he stepped aside and threw the door open.

From where I stood I could not see beyond the door, but I saw Mr. Jamieson's face change and heard him mutter something, then he bolted down the stairs, three at a time. When my knees had stopped shaking, I moved forward, slowly, nervously, until I had a partial view of what was beyond the door. It seemed at first to be a closet, empty. Then I went close and examined it, to stop with a shudder.

Where the floor should have been was black void and darkness, from which came the indescribable damp smell of the cellars.

Mr. Jamieson had locked somebody in the clothes chute. As I leaned over I fancied I heard a groan—or was it the wind?

CHAPTER VII.

A Sprained Ankle.

I was panic-stricken. As I ran along the corridor I was confident that the mysterious intruder and probable murderer had been found, and that he lay dead or dying at the foot of the chute. I got down the staircase somehow, and through the kitchen to the basement stairs. Mr. Jamieson had been before me, and the door stood open. Liddy was standing in the middle of the kitchen holding a frying pan by the handle as a weapon.

"Don't go down there," she yelled, when she saw me moving toward the basement stairs. "Don't you do it, Miss Rachel. That Jamieson's down there now. There's only trouble comes of hunting ghosts; they lead you into bottomless pits and things like that. Oh, Miss Rachel, don't—"

She was interrupted by Mr. Jamieson's reappearance. He ran up the stairs two at a time, and his face was flushed and furious.

"The whole place is locked," he said angrily. "Where's the laundry key kept?"

"It's kept in the door," Liddy snapped. "That whole end of the cellar is kept locked, so nobody can get at the clothes, and then the key's left in the door, so that unless a thief

I laid down my knitting then and looked at him.

"And Halsey?" I managed to say.

"We are going to exchange information," he said. "I am going to tell you that, when you tell me what you picked up in the tulip bed."

We looked steadily at each other; it was not an unfriendly stare; we were only measuring weapons. Then he smiled a little and got up.

"With your permission," he said, "I am going to examine the card room and the staircase again. You might think over my offer in the meantime."

He went on through the drawing room, and I listened to his footsteps growing gradually fainter. I dropped my pretence at knitting and, leaning back, I thought over the last 48 hours. Here was I, Rachel Innes, spinster, a granddaughter of old John Innes of revolutionary days, a D. A. R., a Colonial Dame, mixed up with a vulgar and revolting crime, and even attempting to hoodwink the law! Certainly I had left the straight and narrow way.

I was roused by hearing Mr. Jamieson coming rapidly back through the drawing room. He stopped at the door.

"Miss Innes," he said quickly, "will you come with me and light the east corridor? I have fastened somebody in the small room at the head of the card room stairs."

I jumped up at once.

"You mean—the murderer?" I gasped.

"Possibly," he said quietly, as we hurried together up the stairs. "Some one was lurking on the staircase when I went back. I spoke; instead of an answer, whoever it was turned and ran up. I followed—it was dark—but as I turned the corner at the top a figure darted through this door and closed it. The bolt was on my side, and I pushed it forward. It is a closet, I think. We were in the upper hall now. If you will show me the electric switch, Miss Innes, you would better wait in your own room."

Where it Goes.

"That man made an immense fortune out of a simple little invention."

"Indeed! What did he invent?"

IN THE LIMELIGHT

TO HEAD MONEY HEPTARCHY



J. Pierpont Morgan, Jr., whom Thomas Ryan says is to head an American financial heptarchy, recently has been visiting some of the vast property interests to which he is to fall heir. Young Morgan marveled at the huge steel plants in Pittsburg, a part of the United States Steel corporation—the trust—which is controlled by his father. He also visited the mills at Gary, Ind., which are growing so rapidly, and found much to ponder over there.

Although the impression is far from general, young Morgan is in many ways much like his father. He may not have the latter's organizing genius; that remains to be seen.

But he has the dominating personality and aptitude for business that made the elder Morgan even a decade ago and before he crowned his organization exploits with the formation of all industrial combinations—the United States Steel corporation—such a towering figure in the financial world. And for years the younger man has taken an active part in the affairs of both the London and New York houses of J. P. Morgan & Co. But it was not until a year ago that J. P. Morgan, Jr., entered the domain of corporate finance and management.

His election to the directorate and finance committee of the United States Steel corporation and his entrance to the National City bank board of directors indicated unmistakably the purpose of the father to familiarize the son with more important views than devolved upon him in the ordinary routine of even so great a banking concern as that of J. P. Morgan & Co. Young Morgan is much like his father, physically, as well as mentally. He is tall, robust and fine looking. The temperaments of the two men, however, have little in common. Morgan, Sr., is brusque and saturnine. Morgan, Jr., is genial. What is called personal magnetism is one of the assets that have made him extremely popular in both business and society.

He is also an athlete and outdoor man, this heir to \$300,000,000 and the most lucrative banking business in the world, and an ardent sportsman. Seldom does he miss the New York Yacht club's races on Long Island sound, where even in the worst of weather and in his oilskins, looking like the hardest of Gloucester fishermen, he handles his smart 30-footer Ibis in mastery fashion.

GORST EGYPT'S REAL RULER



The famous speech which Col. Theodore Roosevelt made in London, following the one which he made in Egypt, has attracted attention to that country, and to Sir Eldon Gorst, British agent and consul general in Egypt, who was the real ruler in that part of John Bull's domain.

Sir Eldon Gorst succeeded Lord Cromer in Egypt a little more than three years ago, but previously he had had much experience in that country. He first went to Cairo in 1886 as an attaché and has been promoted gradually to his present position. The criticism against him is that he is too conciliatory; that he has not been sufficiently firm in dealing with the Nationalist press which even goes so far as to advocate assassination of the British government representatives. He is a native of New Zealand and is forty-nine years of age. Recently Sir Edward Grey, foreign secretary in the British cabinet, eulogized Gorst and his administration of Egyptian affairs, but in spite of this Gorst is to be replaced by Sir Arthur Hardinge, cousin of the newly-appointed viceroy of India. There is an effort to make it appear that the Roosevelt speech had nothing to do with Gorst's removal, but the people generally accept the idea that the government is taking the ex-president's advice and will rule in Egypt with a curb bit in the future.

Egypt owes her present prosperity to the security which comes with the "foreign joke," but there exists a Nationalist party, the ambition of which is independence. Mr. Roosevelt, in addressing these Nationalists, bluntly told them they were not fit for self-government and would not be for several generations.

In England, Mr. Roosevelt followed this up by telling the British their duty was plain. In effect he said that if Great Britain had no right in Egypt it should get out. If it had a right there, then it should rule with a firm hand and establish and maintain order at all costs.

OLD GUERRILLA CHIEF OUT



Col. John S. Mosby, the famous Confederate guerrilla of Civil war days has lost his position as a special attorney in the department of justice, after eight years there.

In the absence of Attorney General Wickersham no explanation was made at the department. Old age, that nightmare of superannuated government employees, it is understood, was the main reason for the dismissal.

Col. Mosby is about seventy-three years of age. To his old friends he appears active and energetic. He has been blind in one eye since he was a young man, and lately has been getting deaf.

The colonel's history as a fighting man, his achievements with a small band of guerrillas during the great war between the states, has given him a place in history that has marked him for distinction for many years. He was appointed a special attorney of the department early in the first part of the Roosevelt administration, and was assigned to break up the cattlemen's operations against government lands in the middle west. His fearlessness in this work, in spite of numerous threats, won him the approbation of President Roosevelt. The colonel was one of the investigators of the case which recently led to the sensational charges made by Senator Gore, and his dismissal so soon afterward is regarded as significant.

Colonel Mosby became a Republican some time after the Civil war, believing that to be the best method for securing concessions to the south. He was a special favorite of General Grant, who kept him in the best federal positions to be had and consulted him often as to important government matters.

RAIL CHIEF HAS A SCHOOL



H. E. Byram, vice-president of the Burlington system, has been teaching school in St. Louis. Naturally it is a railroad school and notable from the fact that the occasion was the first upon which the man who recently shouldered the responsibilities of operation of the Burlington System had been in St. Louis.

From the time Mr. Byram left the Chicago headquarters he became a peripatetic pedagogue—a traveling teacher as it were—for he is going all over the Burlington System, meeting members of the operating and traffic staff at division and district headquarters and holding little educational meetings.

He had a school composed of local celebrities in St. Louis. One was W. A. Taloe, assistant general passenger agent, who is studying the question of how to make easy, comfortable and safe riding for passengers. Then there was William Gray, general freight agent of the Missouri district lines. He has up for solution the question of the rapid, correct and safe transportation of freight at compensatory rates.

Tom Knight is making a deep study of how to be a division superintendent and Theodore Roehm is just finishing an elaborate course on production in the ranks of the general passenger department.

J. G. Delaplaine has made large advances in the art of "guiding stars" the victims of "wanderlust" if they are headed west of Chicago and St. Louis. His last examination papers showed a remarkably high average.