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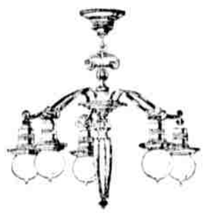

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THE BREAKING POINT

By Mary Roberts Rinehart

Author of "Dangerous Days," "K," "The Amazing Interlude," and many other striking and successful novels.
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WHO'S WHO IN THE STORY

DR. DAVID LIVINGSTONE, chief physician in Waverly, a small town, genial but blue. He shares a secret concerning identity of their beloved neighbor with
LUCY, his sister, beloved by everybody in town.
DR. DICK LIVINGSTONE, in whose mem-ory there is a gap, and who's determined one day to go back to Nevada, his childhood home, in order to hedge the gap. He's full of vitality and is bouncing back and trying in spite of his injury wounds and professional care. He is in love with
ELIZABETH WHEELER, a wholesome girl, who loves him very sincerely.
BEVERLY CARLYSLE, actress, who, for reasons before, was mixed up in a curious story. Her husband, Lucas, had been shot to death, as was generally believed, by a certain Jud Clark, a rich young man about town. Clark had disappeared immediately and it was believed he perished in a blizzard.
FRED GREGORY, Beverly's brother and manager, whose researches bring him up with
LOUIS BASSETT, a newspaperman, who suspects that Dick Livingstone is Jud Clark. His desire is to clear things up.
NINA, Elizabeth's sister, an extravagant young wife.
JOHN WARD, Elizabeth's brother-in-law.
MRS. ANNE MYS WHEELER, typical American mother.
WALTER SAYRE, a rich youth whose social ambitions make him desire to marry Elizabeth, with whom he is smitten.

I don't think she shot Lucas. But I don't think she has ever told all she knows

BASSETT was watching him intently.

"Has it all come back?" he inquired.

"Practically all. Not much between the thing that happened at the ranch and David Livingstone's picking me up at the cabin."

"Did it ever occur to you to wonder just how I got in on your secret?"

"I suppose you read Maggie Donaldson's confession."

"I came to see you before that came out."

"Then I don't know. I'm afraid."

"I suppose you would stake your life on the fact that Beverly Carlysle knows nothing of what happened that night at the ranch?"

Dick's face twinkled, but he returned Bassett's gaze steadily.

"She has no criminal knowledge, if that is what you mean."

"I'm not so sure of it."

"I think you'd better explain that."

At the cold anger in Dick's voice Bassett stared at him. So that was how the wind lay. Poor devil! And out of the smug complacence of his bachelor peace Bassett thanked his stars for no women in his life.

"I'm afraid you misunderstand me, Livingstone," he said easily. "I don't think that she shot Lucas. But I don't think she has ever told all she knows. I've got the coroner's inquest here, and we'll go over it later. I'll tell how I got onto your trail. Do you remember taking Elizabeth Wheeler to see 'The Valley?'"

"I had forgotten it. I remember now."

"Well, Gregory, the brother, saw you and recognized you. He tried to deny you later, but I was on. Of course he told her, and I think she sent him to warn David Livingstone. They knew I was on the trail of a bad story. Then I think Gregory stayed here to watch me when the company made its next point. He knew I'd started, for he sent David Livingstone the letter you got. By the way, that letter nearly got me jailed in Nevada."

"I'm not hiding behind her skirts," Dick said shortly. "And there's nothing incriminating in what you say. She saw me as a fugitive, and sent me a warning. That's all."

"Easy, easy, old man. I'm not pinning anything on her. But I want, if you don't mind, to carry this through. I have every reason to believe that some time before you got to Nevada, the Thorwald woman was on my trail. I know that I was followed to the cabin the night I stayed there, and that she got a saddle horse from her son that night, her son by Thorwald, either for herself or some one else."

"All right. I accept that tentatively."

"That means that she knew that I was coming to Nevada. Think a minute. I kept my movement quiet, but Beverly Carlysle knew, and her brother. When they warned David they warned her."

"I don't believe it."

"If you had killed Lucas," Bassett asserted positively, "the Thorwald woman would have let the sheriff get you, and be damned to you. She had no reason to love you. You kept her son out of what she felt was his birthright."

He got up and opened a table drawer.

"I've got a copy of the coroner's inquest here. It will bear going over. And it may help you to remember, too. We couldn't read it all. There's a lot that isn't pertinent."

He got out a long envelope, and took from it a number of typed pages, backed with a base of heavy paper.

"Inquest in the Coroner's office on the body of Howard Lucas," he read. "October 10th, 1911." That was the second day after. "Examination of witnesses by Coroner Samuel J. Barnhart. Mrs. Lucas was called and sworn." He glanced at Dick and hesitated. "I don't know about this tonight, Livingstone. You look pretty well shot to pieces."

"I didn't sleep last night. I'm all right. Go on."

During the reading that followed he sat back in his deep chair, his eyes closed. Except that once or twice he clenched his hands he made no movement whatever.

Q. "What is your name?"

A. "Anne Elizabeth Lucas. My stage name is Beverly Carlysle."

Q. "Where do you live, Mrs. Lucas?"

A. "At 26 East 56th street, New York City."

Q. "I shall have to ask you some questions that are extremely painful at this time. I shall try to be brief as possible. Perhaps it will be easier for you to tell us much if you know of what happened the night before last at the Clark ranch."

A. "I cannot tell very much. I am confused, too. I was given a sleeping powder last night. I can only say that I heard a shot, and thought at first it was fired from outside. I ran down the stairs, and back to the billiard room. As I entered the room Mr. Donaldson came in through a window. My husband was lying on the floor. That is all."

Q. "Where was Judson Clark?"

A. "He was leaning on the roulette table, staring at the—at my husband."

Q. "Did you see him leave the room?"

A. "No. I was on my knees beside Mr. Lucas. I think when I got up he was gone. I didn't notice."

Q. "Did you see a revolver?"

A. "No. I didn't look for one."

Q. "Now I shall ask you one more question, and that is all. Had there been any quarrel between Mr. Lucas and Mr. Clark that evening in your presence?"

A. "No. But I had quarreled with them both. They were drinking too much. I had gone to my room to pack and go home. I was packing when I heard the shot."

Witness excused and Mr. John Donaldson called.

Q. "What is your name?"

A. "John Donaldson."

Q. "Where do you live?"

A. "At the Clark ranch."

Q. "What is your business?"

A. "You know all about me. I'm foreman of the ranch."

Q. "I want you to tell what you know, Jack, about last night. Begin with where you were when you heard the shot."

A. "I was on the side porch. The billiard room opens on to it. I'd been told by the corral boss earlier in the evening that he'd seen a man skulking around the house. There'd been a report like that once or twice before, and I set a watch. I put Ben Haggerty at the kitchen wing with a gun, and I took up a stand on the porch. Before I did that I told Judson, but I don't think he took it in. He'd been lit up like a house afire all evening. I asked him for his gun, but he said he didn't know where it was, and I went back to the house and got my own. Along about 8 o'clock I thought I saw some one in the shrubbery, and I went out as quietly as I could. But it was a woman, Hattie Thorwald, who was working at the ranch.

"When I left the men were playing roulette. I looked in as I went back, and Judson had a gun in his hand. He said, 'I found it, Jack.' I saw he was very drunk, and I told him to put it up. I'd got mine. It had occurred to me that I had better warn Haggerty to be careful, and I started along the veranda to tell him not to shoot except to scare. I had only gone a few steps when I heard a shot, and ran back. Mr. Lucas was on the floor dead, and Judson was as the lady said. He must have gone out while I was bending over the body."

Q. "Did you see the revolver in his hand?"

A. "No."

Q. "How long between your warning Mr. Clark and the shot?"

A. "I suppose I'd gone a dozen yards."

Q. "Were you present when the revolver was found?"

A. "No, sir."

Q. "Did you see Judson Clark again?"

A. "No, sir. From what I gather he went straight to the corral and got his horse."

Q. "You entered the room as Mrs. Lucas came in the door?"

A. "Well, she's wrong about that. She was there a little ahead of me. She'd reached the body before I got in. She was stooping over it."

Bassett looked up from his reading.

"I want you to get this, Livingstone," he said. "How did she reach the billiard room? Where was it in the house?"

"Off the end of the living-room."

"A large living-room?"

"Forty or forty-five feet, about."

"Will you draw it for me, roughly?"

He passed over a pad and pencil, and Dick made a hasty outline. Bassett worked with growing satisfaction.

"Here's the point," he said, when Dick had finished. "She was there before Donaldson, or at the same time." As Dick made an impatient movement, "But he had only a dozen yards to go. She was in her room, upstairs. To get down in that time she had to leave her room, descend a stair case, cross a hall and run the length of the living-room, forty-five feet. If the case had ever gone to trial she'd have had to do some explaining."

"She or Donaldson," Dick said obstinately.

Bassett read on:

Jean Melis called and sworn.

Q. "Your name?"

A. "Jean Melis."

Q. "Have you an American residence, Mr. Melis?"

A. "Only where I am employed. I am now living at the Clark ranch."

Q. "What is your business?"

A. "I am Mr. Clark's valet."

Q. "It was you who found Mr. Clark's revolver?"

A. "Yes."

Q. "Tell about how and where you found it."

A. "I made a search early in the evening. I will not hide from you that I meant to confiscate it if I discovered it. A man who is drunk is not a fit person for lethal weapons. I did not find it. I slept that night, when the house had gone to rest, and found it beneath the garden seat, by the fireplace. I had not thought that the Sheriff had placed it there outside the window."

"Got that, too," Bassett said, putting down the paper. "The Englishman was fond of you, and he was doing his blundering best. But the Sheriff expected you back and had had the place watched, so they caught him. But that's not the point. A billiard room is a hard place to hide things in. I take it yours was like the average."

Dick nodded.

"All right. This poor boob of a valet made a search and didn't find it. Later he found it. Why did he search? Wasn't it the likely thing that you'd carried it away with you? Do you suppose for a moment that with Donaldson and the woman in the room you hid it there, and then went back and stood behind the roulette table, leaning on it with both hands, and staring? Not at all. Listen to this:

Q. "You recognize this revolver as the one you found?"

A. "Yes."

Q. "You are familiar with it?"

A. "Yes. It is Mr. Clark's."

Q. "You made the second search because you had not examined the woodbox earlier?"

A. "No. I had examined the woodbox. I had a theory that——"

Q. "The jury cannot listen to any theories. This is an inquiry into facts."

"I'm going to find Melis," the reporter said thoughtfully, as he folded up the papers. "The fact is, I mailed an advertisement to the New York papers today. I want to get that theory of his. It's the servants in the house who know what is going on. I've got an idea that he'd stumbled onto something. He'd searched for the revolver, and it wasn't there. He went back and it was. All that conflicting evidence, and against it, what? That you'd run away!"

But he saw that Dick was very tired, and even a little indifferent. He would be glad to know that his hands were clean, but against the intimation that Beverly Carlysle had known more than she had disclosed he presented a dogged front of opposition. After a time Bassett put the papers away and essayed more general conversation, and there he found himself met half way and more. He began to get Dick as a man, for the first time, and as a strong man. He watched his quiet, lined face, and surmised behind it depths of tenderness and gentleness. No wonder the little Wheeler girl had worshiped him.

To be continued tomorrow

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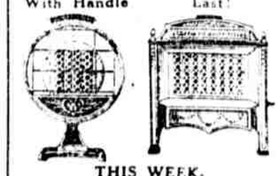

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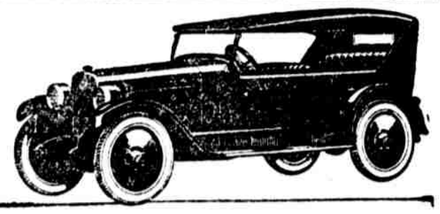

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