

THE BREAKING POINT

By Mary Roberts Rinehart

Author of "Dangerous Days," "K," "The Amazing Interlude," and many other striking and successful novels. Copyright, 1922, by George H. Doran Co.



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When does human nature crash under the strain of fear and tragedy? Must it pull down all loved ones in disaster?

THIS BEGINS THE STORY

Dr. David Livingston is the old family doctor of the quiet town of Haverly. Living with him and his sister Lucy is Dr. Dick Livingston, boyish in spirit of his thirty years, and a mystery which envelops him. He is deeply interested in Elizabeth Wheeler, lovely daughter of a substantial resident of the town. Wealthy Willie Sayre is in love with her, her sister Nina declares. AND HERE IT CONTINUES

DAVID did not sleep well that night. He had not had his golf after all, for the Homer baby had sent out its advance notice early in the afternoon, and had himself arrived on Sunday evening, at the hour when Minnie was winding her sock and preparing to retire early for the Monday washing, and the Sayre butler was announcing dinner. Dick had come in at 10 o'clock weary and triumphant to announce that Richard Livingston Homer, sex male, color white, weight nine pounds, had been safely delivered into this vale of tears.

David lay in the great walnut bed which had been his mother's, and read his prayer book by the light of his evening lamp. He read the Evening Prayer and the Litany, and then at last he resorted to the thirty-nine articles, which usually had a soporific effect on him. But it was no good.

At last he got his keys from his trousers' pocket and padded softly down the stairs and into his office, where he turned the shade and turned on the lights.

Through an open door was Dick's office, a neat place of shining linoleum and small glass stands, highly modern and businesslike. Beyond the office and opening from it was his laboratory, which had been the fruit closet once, and into which Dick on occasion resorted to fuss with slides and tubes and stains and a microscope.

David went to the bookcase and got down a large book, much worn, and carried it to his desk.

An hour or so later he heard footsteps in the hall and closed the book hastily. It was Lucy, a wadded dressing gown over her nightdress and a glass of hot milk in her hand.

"You drink this and come to bed, David," she said peremptorily. "I've been lying upstairs waiting for you to come up, and I need some sleep."

He had no sort of hope that she would not notice the book.

"I just got to thinking things over, Lucy," he explained, his tone apologetic. "There's no use pretending I'm not worried. I am."

"She was a wonder," he said. "I interviewed her once, and I was crazy about her. She had the stage set for me, all right. The papers had been full of the incident of Jud Clark and the night he lined up fifteen Johnnies in the lobby, each with a bouquet as big as a tub, all of them in top hats and Inverness coats, and standing in a row. So she played up the heavy domestic for me; knitting or sewing, I forget."

"Fell for her, did you?" "Did I? That was ten years ago, and I'm not sure I'm over it yet."

"Probably that's the reason," said the city editor, daily. "Go and see her, and get over it. Got her views on the flapper and bobbed hair, for next Sunday. Smith would be crazy about it."

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David sleeping, and Lucy on her knees. It found Elizabeth dreamlessly unconscious in her white bed, and Dick Livingston asleep, but in his clothing, and in a chair by the window. In the light from a street lamp his face showed lines of fatigue and nervous stress, lines only revealed when during sleep a man casts off the mask with which he protects his soul against even friendly eyes.

But midnight found others awake. It found Nina, for instance, in her draped French bed, consulting her jeweled watch and listening for Leslie's return from the country club. An angry and rather heart-sick Nina. And it found the night editor of one of the morning papers drinking a cup of coffee that a boy had brought in, and running through a mass of copy on his desk.

He picked up several sheets of paper, with a photograph clamped to them, and ran through them quickly. A man in a soft hat, sitting on the desk, watched him idly.

"Beverly Carlyle," commented the night editor. "Back with bells on!" He took up the photograph. "Doesn't look much older, does she? It's a queer world."

Louis Bassett, star reporter and feature writer of the Times-Republican, smiled reminiscently. "She was a wonder," he said. "I interviewed her once, and I was crazy about her. She had the stage set for me, all right. The papers had been full of the incident of Jud Clark and the night he lined up fifteen Johnnies in the lobby, each with a bouquet as big as a tub, all of them in top hats and Inverness coats, and standing in a row. So she played up the heavy domestic for me; knitting or sewing, I forget."

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"You might ask, too, what she thinks has become of Judson Clark," he added. "I have an idea she knows, if any one does."

Bassett stared at him. "You're joking, aren't you?" "Yes. But it would make a darned good story."

When he finished medical college Dick Livingston had found, like other men, that the two paths of ambition and duty were parallel and did not meet. Along one lay his desire to focus all his energy in one direction, to follow disease into the laboratory instead of the sick room, and there to fight its unsung battles. And win. He felt that he would win.

Along the other lay David. It was not until he had completed his course and had come home that he had realized that David was growing old. Even then he might have felt that, by the time David was compelled to relinquish his hold on his practice, he himself would be sufficiently established in his specialty to take over the support of the household.

For by that time Dick had made his decision. He could not abandon David. For him then and hereafter the routine of a general practice in a suburban town, the long hours, the varied responsibilities, the feeling he had sometimes that by doing many things passably he was doing none of them well.

But for compensation he had old David's content and greater leisure, and Lucy Crosby's gratitude and love.

Now and then he chafed a little when he read some article in a medical journal by one of his fellow enthusiasts, or when in France he saw men younger than himself obtaining an experience in their several specialties that would enable them to reach wide fields at home. But mostly he was content, or at least resigned. He was building up the Livingston practice, and his one anxiety was lest the time should come when more patients asked for Dr. Dick than for Dr. David. He did not want David hurt.

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Always he meant some time to go back to Norada and there to clear up certain things, but it was a long journey, and he had very little time. And, as the years went on, the past seemed unimportant compared with the present. He gave little thought to the future.

Then, suddenly, his entire attention became focused on the future. Just when he had fallen in love with Elizabeth Wheeler he did not know. He had gone away to the war, leaving her a little girl, apparently, and he had come back to find her a woman. He did not even know he was in love, at first. It was when, one day, he found himself driving home to the Wheeler house without occasion that he began to grow uneasy.

The future at once became extraordinarily important and so also, but somewhat less vitally, the past. Had he the right to marry, if he could make her care for him?

On the Monday night after he had asked Elizabeth to go to the theatre he went to David's office and closed the door. Lucy, alive to every movement in the old house, heard him go in, and, rocking in her chair overhead, her hands idle in her lap, waited in tense anxiety for the interview to end. She thought she knew what Dick would ask, and what David would answer. And, in a way, David would be right. Dick, fit to love, and fit to be loved, had a right to the things other men had, to love and a home of his own, to children, to his own full life.

But suppose Dick insisted on clearing everything up before he was to end? For to Lucy it was unthinkable that any girl in her senses would refuse him. Suppose he went back to Norada? He had not changed greatly in ten years. He had been well known there, a conspicuous figure.

Her mind began to turn on the possibility of keeping him away from Norada.

Some time later she heard the office door open and then close with Dick's characteristic slam.

On Wednesday he was in a state of alternating high spirits and periods of silence. Even Minnie noticed it.

"Mr. Dick's that queer I hardly know how to take him," she said to Lucy. "He came back and asked for noodle soup, and he put about all the hardware in the kitchen on him and said he was a knight in armor. And when I took the soup in he didn't eat it."

It was when he was ready to go out that Lucy's fears were realized. He came in, as always when anything unusual was afoot, to let her look him over. He knew that she waited for him, to give him a final pat, to inspect the laundering of his shirt bosom, to pick imaginary threads off his dinner coat.

"Well," he said, standing before her, "how's this? Act can do no more, Mrs. Crosby."

"I'll brush your back," she said, and brought the brush. He stooped to her, according to the little ceremony she had established, and she made little dabs at his speckless back. "There, that's better."

He straightened. "How do you think Uncle David is?" he asked, unexpectedly.

"Better than he has been in years. Why?"

"Because I'm thinking of taking a little trip. Only ten days," he added, seeing her face. "You could house-clean my office while I'm away. You know you've been wanting to. She dropped the brush and he stooped to pick it up. That gave her a moment.

"Where?" she managed. "To Dry River, by way of Norada."

"Why should you go back there?" she asked in a carefully suppressed voice. "Why don't you go East? You've wanted to go back to Johns Hopkins for months."

"On the other hand, why shouldn't I go back to Norada?" he asked with an affectionate lightness. "Then he put his hand on her shoulder. 'Why shouldn't I go back and clear things up in my own mind? Why shouldn't I find out, for instance, that I am a free man?'"

"You are free."

"I've got to know," he said, almost doggedly. "I can't take a chance. I believe I am. I believe David, of course. But, anyhow, I'd like to see the ranch. I want to see Maggie Donaldson."

"She's not at the ranch. Her husband died, you know."

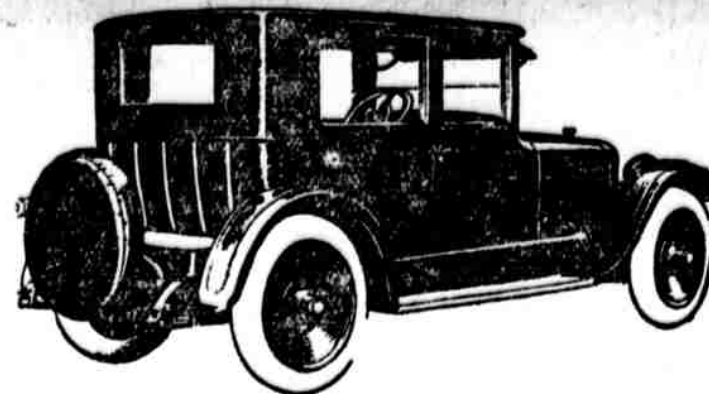
"I have an idea I can find her," he said. "I'll make a good try, anyhow."

When he had gone she got her salts bottle and lay down on her bed. Her heart was hammering wildly.

Elizabeth was waiting for him in the living room in the midst of her family. She looked absurdly young and very pretty, and he had a momentary misgiving that he was old to her and that heaven save the mark—that she looked up to him. He considered the blue dress the height of fashion and the mold of form, and having taken off his overcoat in the hall, tried to put on Mr. Wheeler's instead of very dignified. Also, becoming very dignified after the overcoat incident, and making an exit which should conceal his wild excitement and show only polite pleasure, he stumbled over Mickey, so that they finally departed to a series of staccato yelps.

He felt very hot and slightly ridiculous as he tucked Elizabeth into the little car, being very careful about her feet and starting with extreme care so as not to jar her. He had the feeling of being entrusted temporarily with something infinitely precious and very, very dear. Something that must never suffer or be hurt.

To be continued tomorrow



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Will the Injunction Break the Strike?

A conservative New York daily observes that if the Daugherty injunction against strike propaganda were literally enforced, every striker would be "doomed to a life of silent meditation and prayer." Since the popular reaction to the injunction obtained against striking railway men is likely to determine whether future officials will have recourse to it, it is of immense importance to show just where the press stand on it.

The leading article in THE LITERARY DIGEST this week (September 16) presents all shades of public opinion. Labor leaders feel that the injunction "denies them free speech and peaceful assembly," and puts the Government in the role of a strikebreaker, while railway executives feel that the Government has "gummed the works" just as they had the strike beaten.

The St. Louis Star and the Scranton Times agree that this injunction is a strike-breaking weapon, pure and simple, and the Indianapolis Union calls it "a highly dangerous precedent" which "can but in the end lead to deep resentment in the hearts of millions and to eventual Bolshevism, that is, hatred for the class favoring the injunction."

While many editors decry the injunction there are scores of others who feel that Attorney-General Daugherty was compelled to take just the action he did take.

The places of striking shopmen can be filled, but we read in the Chicago Daily News, "burned bridges, wrecked trains, locomotives subjected to sabotage, peaceful workers beaten or killed—these prove the existence of active and widespread criminality." This leading feature article in the "Digest" is illustrated by appropriate pictures.

Other news-articles that will surely interest you are:

"Wets" and "Drys" Speak Out in Meeting

Interesting Sidelights in the Way of Letters Reveal Strikingly the Human Interest in the Prohibition Poll

- How the Boll Weevil Destroys
- The Child Labor Amendment
- The Price of Coal
- Meaning of the Supreme Court Shift
- The Greek Catastrophe in Asia Minor
- Untouched Wealth of Brazil
- Why Germany Should Join the League
- British Amaze at Our New Tariff
- Why We Laugh

- Ships Swallowed Up in the Ice
- Air Tank Explosions
- Radio in China
- Typewriting by Wireless
- The Kaiser as a New Kind of Historian
- Mysteries in the Theatre
- Why Boys Go to College
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