

THE BREAKING POINT

By Mary Roberts Rinehart

Author of "Dangerous Days," "K," "The Amazing Interlude," and many other striking and successful novels. Copyright, 1921, by George H. Doran Co.

WHO'S WHO IN THE STORY

DR. DAVID LIVINGSTONE, chief of the hospital, a small town, and his wife, who shares a secret concerning identity of the man who pulled himself out of the mud. He is believed by everybody in town to be a doctor.

DR. LIVINGSTONE, in whose memory there is a street in the town, is a man of vitality and is looking for a wife. He is in love with a woman who is believed to be a doctor.

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When a man pulled himself out of the mud as you have it's not my business to pull him down

I came out here pretty well convinced I'd found the solution to an old mystery, and for that matter I think I have. But there's a twist in it that isn't clear and until it is clear I'm not going to saddle you with an identity that may not belong to you. You are one of two men. One of them is Judson Clark, and I'll be honest with you; I'm pretty sure you're Clark. The other I don't know, but I have reason to believe that he spent part of his time with Henry Livingstone at Dry River.

"I went to the Livingstone ranch yesterday. I remember my early home, that wasn't it. Which one of these two men will be arrested if he is recognized?"

"For what?"

"I'm coming to that. I suppose you'll have to know. Another drink? No? All right. About ten years ago, or a little less, a young chap called Judson Clark got into trouble here, and headed into the mountains in a blizzard. He was supposed to have frozen to death. But recently a woman named Donaldson made a confession on her deathbed. She said she had helped to nurse Clark in a mountain cabin, and that with the aid of some one unnamed he had not died."

"Then I'm Clark. I remember her and the cabin."

"There was a short silence following that admission. To Dick, it was filled with thought of Elizabeth, and her relation to what he was about to hear. Again he braced himself for what was coming."

"I'm not sure," he said. "It sounds familiar, and then it doesn't. It doesn't mean anything to me, if you get that. If it's a key, it doesn't unlock. That's all. Am I Judson Clark?"

Shortly after that Dick said he would go to his room. He was still pale, but his eyes looked bright and feverish, and Bassett went with him, uneasily conscious that something was not quite right. Dick spoke only once on the way.

"My head aches like the mischief," he said, and his voice was dull and lifeless.

He did not want Bassett to go with him, but Bassett went, nevertheless. Dick's statement that he meant to surrender himself had filled him with uneasiness. He determined, following him along the hall, to keep a close guard on him for the next few hours, but beyond that, just then, he did not try to go.

If it were humanly possible he meant to smuggle him out of the town and take him East. But he had an uneasy conviction that Dick was going to be ill. The mind did strange things with the body.

Dick sat down on the edge of the bed. "My head aches like the mischief," he repeated. "Look in that grip and find me some tablets, will you? I'm dizzy."

He made an effort and stretched out on the bed. "Good Lord," he muttered. "I haven't had such a headache since—"

His voice trailed off. Bassett, bending over the army kit bag in the corner, straightened up to look around. Dick was suddenly asleep and breathing heavily.

For a long time the reporter sat by the side of the bed, watching him and trying to plan a course of action. He was overcome with his own responsibility and by the prospect of tragedy that threatened. That Livingstone was Clark, and that he would insist on surrendering himself when he awakened, he could no longer doubt. His mind wandered back to that day when he had visited the old house as a patient, and from that long strange road they had both come since then.

He repeated, "Look in that grip and find me some tablets, will you? I'm dizzy."

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