

THE BREAKING POINT

By Mary Roberts Rinehart

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

WHO'S WHO IN THE STORY

DAVID LIVINGSTONE, chief physician in a small town, who is the hero of the story. He is a man of broad shoulders and a strong, steady gaze. He is a man of many parts, a man who has seen the world and who has learned the hard way that a man must be true to himself if he is to be true to others.

LUCY CROSBY, a young girl who is the love of David's life. She is a girl of many parts, a girl who has seen the world and who has learned the hard way that a girl must be true to herself if she is to be true to others.

ELIZABETH, David's wife. She is a woman of many parts, a woman who has seen the world and who has learned the hard way that a woman must be true to herself if she is to be true to others.

WILLIAM, David's son. He is a boy of many parts, a boy who has seen the world and who has learned the hard way that a boy must be true to himself if he is to be true to others.

MRS. BASKETT, David's neighbor. She is a woman of many parts, a woman who has seen the world and who has learned the hard way that a woman must be true to herself if she is to be true to others.

DR. REYNOLDS, David's neighbor. He is a man of many parts, a man who has seen the world and who has learned the hard way that a man must be true to himself if he is to be true to others.

MR. HARRISON, David's neighbor. He is a man of many parts, a man who has seen the world and who has learned the hard way that a man must be true to himself if he is to be true to others.



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case, for she felt calm and without any emotion whatever. And she finished her errand, so collected and poised that the two or three women who had come in to help stared after her as she departed.

"Do you suppose she's seen him?"

"She was in David's room. She must have."

Mindful of Mike, they withdrew into Lucy's sitting-room and closed the door, there to surmise and to wonder. Did he know she was engaged to Wallace Sayre? Would she break her engagement now or not? Did Dick for a moment think that he could do as he had done, go away and flirt a girl, and come back to be received as though nothing had happened? Because, if he did, it would not even be a fight. She was not angry or hurt. The barrier was more hopeless than that.

David, watching him, waited until Harrison had gone, and went directly to the subject.

"Have you ever stopped to think what these last months have meant to you?"

"I have," he said, "but I don't know what to expect anything else? When you think that, a few days ago, I was actually shaken at the thought of seeing another woman, you can hardly imagine what I'm going through now."

"That looks as though she cared!" he said. He had gone very white. After a time, as David sat silent and thoughtful, he said: "After all, what right had I to expect anything else? When you think that, a few days ago, I was actually shaken at the thought of seeing another woman, you can hardly imagine what I'm going through now."

"I know now—I think I know all along—the other thing was like that craving for liquor I told you about—I know now that she has always been the one woman. You'll understand that perhaps, but she wouldn't, I would say, on my knees to make her believe it, but it's too late. Everything's too late," he added.

Before the hour for the services he went in again and sat by Lucy's bed, but she who had given him wise counsel so many times before lay in her majestic peace, surrounded by flowers

the heavy scent of flowers greeted him. The hall was empty, and automatically he pushed open the door to David's office and went in. David was at the desk writing. David was alive. Thank God and thank God, David was alive.

"David!" he said brokenly. "Dear old David!"

And was suddenly shaken with dry, terrible sobbing.

"There was a great deal to do, and Dick was grateful for it. But first, like David, he went in and sat by Lucy's bed alone and talked to her. Not aloud, as David did, but still with that same quiet conviction that she heard. He told her he was free, and that she need not worry about David, that he was there now to look after her; and he asked her, if she could, to help him with Elizabeth. Then he kissed her and went out.

He met Elizabeth that day. She had come to the house, and after her custom now went un, unwarned, to David's room. She found David there and Harrison Miller, and—it was a moment before she realized it—Dick by the mantel. He was greatly changed. She saw that. But she had no feeling of pity, nor even of undue surprise. She felt nothing at all. It gave her a curious, almost hard little sense of triumph to see that he had gone pale. She marched up to him and held out her hand, mindful of the eyes on her.

"I'm so sorry, Dick," she said. "You have a sad home-coming."

Then she withdrew her hand, still calm, and turned to David.

"Mother sent over some things. I'll give them to Minnie," she said, her voice clear and steady. She went out, and they heard her descending the stairs.

She was puzzled to find out that her knees almost gave way on the stairs.

Lucy Crosby was dead. One moment she was of the quick, moving about the house, glancing at David, about Minnie in the kitchen pin and unpin her veil; and the next she was still and infinitely mysterious, on her white bed. She had fallen outside the door of David's room, and lay there, her arms still full of fresh bath towels, and a fixed and intense look in her eyes, as though, outside the door, she had come face to face with a messenger who bore surprising news. Dr. Reynolds, running up the stairs, found her there dead, and closed the door into David's room.

But David knew before they told him. He waited until they had placed her on her bed, had closed her eyes and drawn a white coverlet over her, and then he went in alone, and sat down beside her, and put a hand over her chilling one.

"If you are still here, Lucy," he said, "and have not yet gone on, I want you to carry this with you. We are all right here. Everybody is all right. You are not to worry."

After a time he went back to his room and got his prayer-book. He could hear Harrison Miller's voice soothing Minnie in the living room, and he could hear the sound of the door opening and closing, and the sound of the prayer-book being read aloud.

"Now is Christ risen from the dead, and become the first fruits of them that sleep."

His voice tightened. He put his head down on the side of the bed.

He was very docile that day. He moved obediently from his room for the awful aftermath of a death, for the sweeping and dusting and clean reading, not even praying, a lonely yet indomitable old figure. When his friends came, elderly men who creaked in and tried to reduce their robust voices to a discreet whisper, he shook hands with them and made brief, courteous replies. Then he lapsed into silence. They felt shut off and uncomfortable, and creaked out again.

Only once did he seem shaken. That was when Elizabeth came swiftly in and put her arms around him as he sat. He held her close to him, saying nothing for a long time. Then he drew a deep breath.

"I was feeling mighty lonely, my dear," he said.

He was the better for her visit. He insisted on dressing that evening, and on being helped down the stairs. The town, which had seemed inimical for so long, appeared to him suddenly to be holding out friendly hands. More than friendly hands. Loving, tender hands offering service and affection and old-time friendship. It moved about sedately, in dark clothes, and came down the stairs red-eyed and using pocket-handkerchiefs, and it surrounded him with love and loving kindness.

When they had all gone Harrison Miller helped him up the stairs to where his tidy bed stood ready, and the nurse had placed his hot milk on a stand. But Harrison did not go at once.

"What about word to Dick, David?" he inquired awkwardly. "I've called up Baskett, but he's away. And I don't know that Dick ought to come back anyhow. If he comes, he'll be on the lookout now. They'll know he may try to come."

David looked away. Just how much he wanted Dick, to take him over these bad hours, only David knew. He could not have him. He stared at the glass of hot milk.

"I guess I can fight this out alone, Harrison," he said. "And Lucy will understand."

He did not sleep much that night. Once or twice he got up and tiptoed across the hall into Lucy's room, and looked at her. She was as white as her pillow, and quite serene. Her hands, always a little rough and twisted with service, were smooth and rested.

"You know why he can't come, Lucy," he said once. "It doesn't mean that he doesn't care. You have to remember that."

His sublime faith that she heard and understood, not the Lucy on the bed but the Lucy who had not yet gone on to the blessed company of heaven, carried him back to his bed, comforted and reassured.

He was up and about his room early. The odor of baking muffins and frying ham came up the stair-well, and the sound of Mike vigorously polishing the floor in the hall. Mixed with the odor of cooking and of floor wax was the scent of flowers from Lucy's room and Mrs. Sayre's machine stopped at the door while the chauffeur delivered a guest case of roses.

David went carefully down the stairs and into his office, and there, at his long deserted desk, commenced a letter to Dick.

He was sitting there when Dick came up the street.

The thought that he was going home had upheld Dick through the days that followed Baskett's departure for the West. He knew that it would be a fight, but not easily does a man step out of life and into it again, but after his days of inaction he stood ready to fight. For David, for Lucy, and, if it was not too late, for Elizabeth. When Baskett's news came from Norada, "All clear," he was out for Haverly, more nearly happy than for months. The very rhythm of the ballad sang: "Going home" going

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and infinitely removed. Yet she gave him something. Something of her own peace. Once more, as on the night she had stood at the kitchen door and watched him disappear in the darkness, there came the tug of the old familiar things, the house sense. Not only David now, but the house. The faded carpet on the stairs, the old self-rocker Lucy had loved, the creaking faucets in the bathroom. Mike and Minnie, the laboratory—united in their shabby strength, they were home to him. They had come back, never to be lost again. Home.

Then, little by little, they carried their claim further. They were not only home. They were the setting of a dream, long forgotten but now vivid in his mind, and a refuge from the dreary present. That dream had seen Elizabeth enshrined among the old familiar things; the old house was to be a sanctuary for her and for him. From it and from her in the dream he was to go out in the morning; to it and to her he was to come home at night, after he had done a man's work.

The dream faded. Before him rose her face of the morning, impassive and cold; her eyes, not hostile, but indifferent. She had taken herself out of his life, had turned her youth to youth, and forgotten him. He understood and

accepted it. He saw himself as he must have looked to her, old and worn, scoured from the last months, infinitely changed. And she was young. Heavens, how young she was!

Lucy was buried the next afternoon. It was raining, and the quiet procession followed Dick and the others who carried her light body under grotesquely bobbing umbrellas. Then he and David, and Minnie and Mike, went back to the house, quiet with that strange empti-

ness that follows a death, the unconscious listening for a voice that will not speak again, for a familiar foot-fall. David had not gone upstairs. He sat in Lucy's sitting room, in his old frock coat and black tie, with a knitted scarf across his knees.

His throat looked withered in his loose collar. And there for the first time they discussed the future.

To be continued tomorrow

CONTINUE TRANSFER FIGHT

Northwest Business Men Seek Further Trolley Privileges

The Northwest Business Men's Association last night discussed the changed transit conditions brought about by the new Frankford L. and the many reroutings made public by the P. H. T.

The association will continue its

fight for free transfer tickets at every intersection in the city and intend communicating with the Mayor, Council and other civic authorities in furtherance of that plan.

INDUSTRIOUS NEWS

It may be necessary to launch an anti-campaign to stop the "hook" men of America's active bands. In the United States, the business man is the most successful person in the world. He is the one who makes the money, and he is the one who is most respected. He is the one who is most successful. He is the one who is most successful.

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From Music Trade Review Feb. 11, 1922



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