

# POOR DOCUMENT M C 2 0 3 5

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## The Breaking Point

By Mary Roberts Rinehart

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(Continued From Yesterday)

"Will you have some coffee? I can get a class from the bathroom. It takes a week to get a waiter here."

"Thanks. Yes."

The feeling of uneasiness grew in the reporter's mind. It increased still further when they sat opposite each other, the small table with its Bible on the lower shelf between them, while he made a pretence at breakfasting.

"First of all," Dick said, at last, "I was not sure I had found the right man. You are the only Bassett in the place, however, and you're registered from my town. So I took a chance. I suppose that headache was not genuine."

Bassett hesitated.

"No," he said at last.

"What you really wanted to do was to see me, then?"

"In a way, yes."

"I'll ask you one more question. It may clear the air. Does this mean anything to you? I'll tell you now that it doesn't, to me."

From his pocketbook he took the note addressed to David, and passed it over the table. Bassett looked at him quickly and took it.

"Before you read it, I'll explain something. It was not sent to me. It was sent to my—Doctor David Livingstone. It happened to fall into my hands. I've come a long way to find out what it means."

He paused, and looked the reporter straight in the eyes. "I'm laying my cards on the table, Bassett. This 'G' whoever he is, is clearly warning me, and I want to know what he is warning me about."

Bassett read the note carefully, and looked up.

"I suppose you know who 'G' is?"

"I do not. Do you?"

"I'll give you another name, and maybe you'll get it. A name that I think will mean something to you, Beverly Carlyle."

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"unpleasant" startled Bassett by its very inadequacy. He knew now that David had built up for him an identity that probably did not exist, but he wanted Bassett to know that there could never be any doubt of David's high purpose and his essential fitness.

"Whatever I was before," he finished simply, "and I'll get that from you now, if I am any sort of a man at all it is his work."

He stood up and braced himself. It had been clear to Bassett for ten minutes that Dick was talking against time, against the period of revelation. He would have it, but he was mentally bracing himself against it.

"I think he said, 'I'll have that this way now.'"

Bassett poured him a small drink, and took a turn about the room while he drank it. He was perplexed and apprehensive. Strange as the story was, he was convinced that he had heard the truth. He had, now and then, run across men who came back after a brief disappearance, with a cock and bull story of forgetting who they were, and because nearly always these men vanished at the peak of some crisis they had always been open to suspicion. Perhaps, poor devil, they had been telling the truth after all. So he closed like a grave over the unbearable!

His own part in the threatening catastrophe began to obsess him. Without the warning from Gregory there would have been no return to Nova Scotia. He had all been dead and buried, until he himself had revived it. And a girl, too! The girl in the blue dress at the theatre, of course. Dick put down the glass.

"I'm ready, if you are."

"Does the name of Clark recall anything to you?"

"Nothing."

"Judson Clark? Jud Clark?"

Dick passed his hand over his forehead, wearily.

"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. It's a key, it doesn't unlock. That's all. Am I Judson Clark?"

Oddly enough, Bassett found himself now seeking for hope of escape in the very situation that had previously irritated him, in the story he had heard almost violently.

"Look here, I may have made a mistake. 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, but 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 want 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?"

"Clark."

"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 death-bed. She said that she had helped to nurse Clark in a mountain cabin, and that with the aid of some one unnamed he had got away."

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

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

"I suppose," he said at last, "that if I ran away I was in pretty serious trouble. What was it?"

"We've got no absolute proof that you are Clark, remember. You don't know, and Maggie Donaldson was considered not quite sane before she died. I've told you, there's a chance you are the other man."

"All right. What had Clark done, then?"

"He had shot a man."

(To be continued.)

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(To be continued.)

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