

# The Breaking Point

By Mary Roberts Rinehart

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(Continued from yesterday)

"All right. I accept that, tentative. That means that she knew I was going to Nevada. Think a minute, I kept my movements quiet, but Beverly Carlyle knew and her brother, when they warned David they warned me."

"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 son to love you. You'd kept her out of what she felt was his birthright."

"He got up and opened a table drawer. He got a copy of the coroner's inquest here. It will bear going over, and it may help you to remember,

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

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

A. "At 26 East 60th Street, New York City."

Q. "I shall have to ask you some questions that are necessarily painful at this time. I shall be as brief as possible. Perhaps it will be easier for you to tell so much as 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 end of my husband's arm."

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."

Witnesses examined 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 night before last. 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 car 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 fire all evening. I asked for his gun, but he said he didn't want to go where it was, and I went back to my horse and got my own. Along about eight 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.' 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'd 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 run 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, Livingston," 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 watched 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 staircase, cross

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had ever gone to trial she'd have 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?"

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 conceal it if I discovered it. A man who is drunk is not guilty of what he does. I did not find it. I went back that night, when the people had gone, and found it beneath the carved wood box, by the fireplace. I did not know that the sheriff had placed a man outside the window."

"Get that too," Bassett said, putting down the paper. "The Frenchman was fond of you, and he was doing his blundering best. But the sheriff expected you back and 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 w—v 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 starting? Not at all. Listen to this: Q. "You recognize this revolver as the one you found?"

A. "Yes."

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