

The Breaking Point

By Mary Roberts Rinehart

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(Continued From Yesterday.)

"You must remember this, sir," had been with Mr. Clift for a long time. I knew the situation. And I thought that he had gone away that night to throw suspicion from her to himself. I was not certain what to do. I would have told all in court, but it never came for trial.

Bassett was satisfied on a fairly content. After the Frenchman's departure he sat for some time, making careful notes and studying them. Supposing the man Mills had seen were Clifton Hines, a good many things would be cleared up. Some new element he had to have, if Gregory's story was to be disproved, some new and different motive. Suppose, for instance, that he got up and paced the floor back and forward, forward and back. There was just one possibility, and just one way of verifying it. He sat down and wrote out a long telegram, and then got his hat, and carried it to the telephone office himself. He had made his last throw.

He received a reply the following day, and in a state of exhilaration bordering on madness packed a bag, and as he packed it addressed it, after the fashion of lonely men the world over.

"Just one more trip, friend cowhide," he said, "and then you and I are going to settle down again to work. But it's some trip, old arm-breaker."

He put in his pajamas and handkerchiefs, his clean socks and collar, and then he got his revolver from a drawer and added it. Just twenty-four hours later he knocked at Dick's door in a boarding house on West Ninth Street, found it unlocked, and went in. Dick was asleep, and Bassett stood looking down at him, with an odd sort of paternal affection. Finally he bent down and touched his shoulder.

"Wake up, old top," he said. "Wake up. I have some news for you."

To Dick the last day or two had been nightmares of loneliness. He threw caution to the winds and walked over after hour, only to find that the street was empty, and that he was alone. He was going to one, depressed him and emphasized his isolation. He had deliberately put away from him the anchor that had been Elizabeth, and followed a treacherous memory, and now he was adrift.

He was homesick, for David, for Lucy, and with a tightening of the heart he admitted it to Elizabeth. And he had no home. He thought of Reynolds, bent over the desk in his office; he saw the quiet tread of his feet in the town, and Reynolds, passing from house to house in the town, doing his work, usurping his place in the confidence and friendship of the people; he saw the very children named for him asking: "Who was I named for, mother?" He saw David and Lucy gone, and the old house abandoned.

He had moments when he wondered what would happen if he took Beverly at her word. Suppose she made her confession, re-opened the thing, to fill the papers with great headlines, "Judson Clark not guilty. A strange story." He saw himself going back to the curious glances of the town, never to

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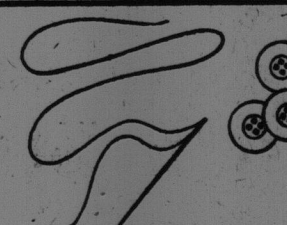
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knew that Mrs. Hines was not my mother. I finally learned that I was the son of Elihu Clark and Harriet Burgess.

"I felt that I should have some part of the estate, and I developed a hatred of Judson Clark, whom I knew. I made one attempt to get money from him by mail, threatening to expose his father's story, but I did not succeed.

"I visited my mother, Hattie Thorwald, and threatened Clark in her presence. I also threatened Henry Livingstone, and his death came during a dispute over the matter, but I did not kill him. He fell down and hit his head. He had a weak heart.

"My foster sister had gone on the stage, and Clark was infatuated with her. I saw her a number of times, but he did not connect me with the letters I had sent. My foster sister's stage name is Beverly Carlyle.

"She married Howard Lucas and they visited the Clark ranch at Norada, Wyoming, in the fall of 1910. I saw my sister there several times, and as she knew the way I felt she was frightened. My mother, Hattie Thorwald, was a sort of maid to her, and together they tried to get me to go away."

Bassett looked up.

"Up to that point," he said, "I wrote it myself before I saw him." There was a note of triumph in his voice.

"The rest is his."

"On the night Lucas was killed I was to go away. Bev had agreed to give me some money for the piece had quit in June and I was hard up. She was going to borrow it from Jud Clark, and that set me crazy. I felt it ought to be mine, or a part of it anyhow.

"I was to meet my mother in the grounds, but I missed her, and I went to the house. I wasn't responsible for what I did. I was crazy I guess, saw Donaldson on the side porch, and beyond him were Lucas and Clark playing roulette. It made me wild. I couldn't have played roulette that night for pennies.

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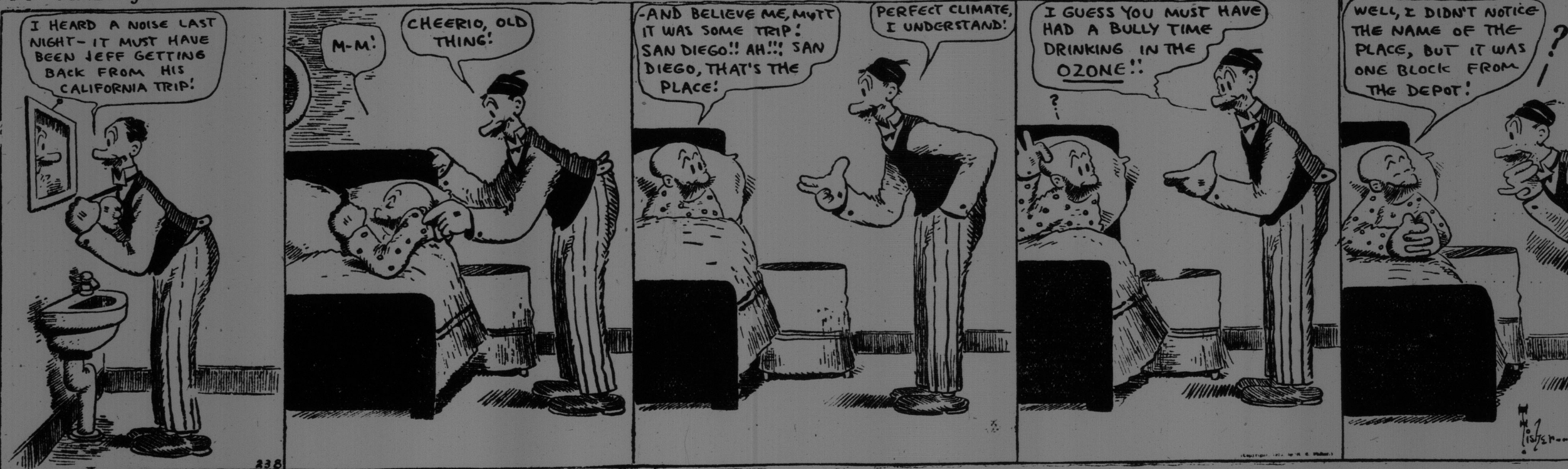
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By "BUD" FISHER

pointed it at Clark. I'd have shot him, too, but Bev came into the room. "I want to exonerate Bev. She has been better than most sisters to me, and she has lied to try to save me. She came up behind me and grabbed my arm. Lucas had heard her, and he turned. I must have closed my hand on the trigger, for it went off and hit him."

(To be Continued)

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