

When does human nature crack under the strain of fear and tragedy? Must it pull down all loved ones in disaster?

# THE BREAKING POINT

By Mary Roberts Rinehart

Author of "Dangerous Days," "K," "The Amazing Interlude," and many other successful novels. Copyright, 1922, Mary Roberts Rinehart; published by arrangement with McClure's.

Can evil 'identity' be lost in good? See how this thrilling story of mystery, regeneration and love solves these problems.

**WHO'S WHO IN THE STORY**

**DR. DAVID LIVINGSTONE**, chief physician to the hospital, a small, round, genial man, who is a great favorite with the patients.

**DR. DICK LIVINGSTONE**, in whose name the story is told, a tall, thin, serious man, who is a great favorite with the patients.

**DR. CARLYLE**, a young man, who is a great favorite with the patients.

**DR. GREGORY**, a young man, who is a great favorite with the patients.

**DR. BARNETT**, a young man, who is a great favorite with the patients.

**DR. WARD**, a young man, who is a great favorite with the patients.

**DR. WHEELER**, a young man, who is a great favorite with the patients.

**DR. SAYRE**, a young man, who is a great favorite with the patients.



It was Jim Wheeler's turn to take up the shuttle. A girl met in some casual fashion, his own youth and the urge of it, perhaps, the unconscious family indulgence in an only son—and Jim wore his bit and passed on.

There had been mild contention in the Wheeler family during all the spring. Looking out from his quiet windows Walter Wheeler saw the young world going by as he worked, and going with it, much that legitimately belonged to it, and much that did not in the laxness of the new code, he laid to the automobile. And doggedly refused to buy one.

"We can always get a taxi," was his imperturbable answer to Jim. "I may as well get a taxi," he said, "and go to the office. I know you're pretty well too, Jim. Better than you know yourself. And if you had a car, you'd try your best to break your neck in it."

Now and then Jim got a car, however. Sometimes he rented one, sometimes he bought one, but he never had a car of his own.

"A fellow looks a fool without one," he would say to her. "Girls expect to be taken out. It's part of the game."

And Nina, always reached by that argument of how things looked, now and then reluctantly acquiesced. But she never bought a car. She had started for the seashore. Nina came in like a whirlwind, and roused the family peace immediately.

"Father," she said, "you must speak to Jim. He's taken our car twice at night without asking for it, and last night he broke a spring. Les is simply crazy."

"Taken your car?" Mrs. Wheeler exclaimed.

"Yes, I hate telling on him, but I spoke to him after the first time, and he did it again."

Mrs. Wheeler glanced at her husband anxiously. She often felt he was too severe with Jim.

"Don't worry," he said grimly. "He'll not do it again."

"If you only had a car of your own," Mrs. Wheeler protested.

"You know what I think about that, mother. I'm not going to have him just riding over the country, breaking his neck and getting into trouble. I've seen him riding in Wallace Sayre's car, and he drives like a fool or a madman."

It was an old dispute and a bitter one. Mr. Wheeler got up, whistled for the dog, and went out. His wife turned to Nina.

"I wish you wouldn't bring those things to your father, Nina," she said. "He's been very nervous lately, and he isn't always fair to Jim."

"Well, it's true Jim was fair to Leslie," Nina said, with family frankness. "I'll tell you something, mother. Jim has a girl somewhere, in town probably. I've taken her driving. I found a glove in the car. And he must be angry about her, or he'd never do what he's done."

"Do you know who it is?"

"No, somebody's. He's ashamed of it, probably, so he wouldn't be so clandestine about it."

"Nina, I hope like it. Jim's a man, mother. He's not a little boy. He'll go through his shady period, like the rest."

"That night it was Mrs. Wheeler's turn to be awake. Again and again she went over Nina's words, and her troubled mind found a basis in fact for them. Jim had been getting money from her, to supplement his small salary; he had been going out a great deal at night, and returning very late; once or twice in the morning he had looked ill and his eyes had been bloodshot, as though he had been drinking.

Elizabeth is Puzzled

ELIZABETH was finding this period of her tacit engagement rather puzzling. Her people puzzled her. Elizabeth did, at times. And nobody seemed anxious to make plans for the future, or even to discuss the wedding. She was a little hurt about this, remembering the excitement over Nina's.

But what chiefly bewildered her was the seeming necessity for secrecy. Even Nina had not told, although it bewildered her. Her own inclination was to tell about it from the house-tops. Her father had simply said: "I've told your mother, honey, and we'd better let it go at that, for a while. There's no hurry. And I don't want to lose you yet."

But there were other things. Dick himself varied. He was always gentle and very tender, but there were times when he seemed to hold himself aloof from her, would seem aloof and remote, but all the time watching her almost fiercely. But after that, as though he had tried an experiment in separation and failed with it, he would watch her, not touching her but watching her intently.

She thought men in love were queer and quite incomprehensible. Because he varied in other ways, too. He was bold and gay sometimes, and again silent and almost brooding. She thought at those times that perhaps he was tired, what with David's work and his own, and sometimes she wondered if he were still worrying about that vile story. But once or twice, after he had gone, she went upstairs and looked carefully into her mirror. Perhaps she had not looked her best that day. Girl-like, she set great value on looks in love. She wanted brightly to be beautiful to him. She wished she could look like Beverly Carlyle, for instance. Two days before David and Lucy's departure he had brought her her engagement ring, a square-cut diamond set in platinum. He kissed it first and then her finger, and slipped it on her. It became a rite done as he did it, and she had a sense of something done that could never be undone. When she looked up at him he was very pale.

"Forsaking all others, so long as we both shall live," he said unsteadily. "So long as we both shall live," she repeated.

However she had to take it off later.

"You can understand how anxious I am to have him marry the right sort of girl."

for Mrs. Wheeler, it developed, had very pronounced ideas of engagement rings. They were put on the day the notices were sent to the newspapers, and not a day later she had a white ribbon, inside her corsage, until such time as her father would consent to announce that he was about to have a daughter. This Elizabeth found her engagement full of unexpected turns and twists, and nothing precisely as she had expected. But she accepted things as they came, being of the type around which the dramas of life are enacted, while remaining totally undramatic herself. She lived her quiet days, somewhat about Jim on company, hummed little melodies for her lullaby, and slept at night with her ring on her finger and a sense of being wrapped in protecting love that was no longer limited to the white Wheeler house, but now extended two blocks away and round the corner to a shabby old brick house in a more or less shabby yard.

They were very gay in the old brick house that night before the departure, very noisy over the fish and David's brooding lamb chops. Dick drank a bottle of Lucy's home-made wine, and even David got a little of it. They toasted the seashore, and the departed nurse, and David quoted Robert Burns on company, hummed little melodies for her lullaby, and slept at night with her ring on her finger and a sense of being wrapped in protecting love that was no longer limited to the white Wheeler house, but now extended two blocks away and round the corner to a shabby old brick house in a more or less shabby yard.

When they left the laboratory, there were patients in the waiting-room, but he held her in his arms in the office for a moment or two, very quietly, and because the door was thin, they made a sort of game of it and pretended she was a patient.

"How did you sleep last night?" he said, in a high, professional and very distinct voice. Then he kissed her, and very gently.

"Very badly, doctor," she said, also very clearly, and whispered, "I lay awake and thought about you, done."

"I'll better give you this sleeping powder." Oh, frightful professional, but the powder turned out to be another kiss. It was a wonderful game.

When she slipped out into the hall she went to Lucy's tiny sitting-room.

Anxiety gripped her. There were so many temptations for young men, so many who wanted to waylay them. A girl. Not a good girl, perhaps.

She raised herself on her elbow and looked at her sleeping husband.

Men were like that; they begot children and then forgot them. They never looked ahead or worried. They were taken up with business, and all they forgot that once they too had been young and liable to temptation.

She got up some time later, and tiptoed to the door of Jim's room. Inside she could hear his heavy, regular breathing. Her boy. Her only son.

She went back and crawled carefully into the bed.

There was an acrimonious argument between Jim and his father the next morning, and Jim slammed out of the house, leaving chaos behind him. It was then that Elizabeth learned that her father was going away. He said: "Maybe I'm wrong, mother. I don't know. Perhaps when I come back, I'll look around for a car. I don't want him driven to doing underhand things."

"Are you going away?" Elizabeth asked, surprised.

"It appears so. It's part of the game. It was all arranged and nobody had told her anything about it. Yet, as Dick explained it to her later, it was simple enough. He rather needed a rest, and besides, it was right that he should know all about Dick's life before he came to Haverly.

"He's going to make me a present of something highly valuable, you know."

"But it looks as though he didn't trust you!"

"He's been very polite about it; but of course, in his eyes I'm a common thief, stealing."

She would not let him go on.

A certain immaturity, the blind confidence of youth in those it loves, explaining Elizabeth's docility at that time. But underneath her submission that day was a growing uneasiness, fiercely suppressed. Buried deep, the battle between absolute trust and fear was beginning, a battle which was so rapidly to mature her.

Nina, shrewd and suspicious, sensed something of nervous strain in her when she came in, later that day, to borrow a hat.

"Look here, Elizabeth," she began. "I want to talk to you. Are you going to live in this hole all your life?"

"Hide nothing," Elizabeth said hotly. "Really, Nina, I do think you might be more careful of what you say."

"Well, it's a dear old hole," Nina said negligently. "But hole it is, nevertheless. Why in the world mother don't manage her servants—but no matter about that now, Elizabeth, there's a lot of talk about you and Dick Livingstone. And that I don't intend to lift my finger," Elizabeth interrupted.

"Then you're a fool. And it is Dick Livingstone."

"It is, Nina."

Nina's ambitious soul was harrowed. "That steady old house," she said, "and two old people! A general household girl, and you cooking on her Thursday out! I wish you joy of it."

"I wonder," Elizabeth said calmly, "whether it ever occurs to you that I may not love those houses and servants? Or that my life is my own, to live exactly as I please? Because that is what I intend to do."

Nina rose angrily.

"Thanks," she said. "I wish you

joy of it." And went out, slamming the door behind her.

Then with only a day or so remaining before Dick's departure, and Jim's hand already reaching for the shuttle, Elizabeth found herself the object of certain unmistakable advances from Mrs. Sayre herself, and that at a rose luncheon at the house on the hill.

The talk about Dick and Elizabeth had been slow in reaching the house on the hill. When it came, via a little group on the terrace after the luncheon, Mrs. Sayre was upset and angry and inclined to blame Wallie. Everything that he had wanted had come to him, all his life, and he did not know how to go after things. He had sat by, and let this shabby-genteel doctor, years older than the girl, walk away with her.

Not that she gave up entirely. She knew the town and its tendency toward overstatement. And so she made a desperate attempt that afternoon to tempt Elizabeth. She took her through the upper floors of the house. She showed her pictures of their boat at Miami, and of the house at Marblehead. Elizabeth was politely interested and completely unresponsive.

"When you think," Mrs. Sayre said at last, "that Wallie will have to assume a great many burdens one of these days, you can understand how anxious I am to have him marry the right sort of girl."

She thought Elizabeth flushed slightly.

"I am sure he will, Mrs. Sayre," Mrs. Sayre tried a new direction. "It will have all I have, my dear, and it is a great responsibility. Used properly, money can be an agent of great good. Wallie's wife can be a power, if she so chooses. She can look after the poor. I have a long list of pensioners, but I am too old for personal service."

"That would be wonderful," Elizabeth said gravely. For a moment she wished Dick were rich. There was so

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A. More than \$300,000,000 worth.

Q. How has this business grown?

A. As follows:

Year	Property Safeguarded (\$)
1866	100,000
1871	150,000
1876	200,000
1881	300,000
1886	400,000
1891	500,000
1896	700,000
1901	1,000,000
1906	1,500,000
1911	2,000,000
1916	3,000,000
1922	300,000,000

Q. How large are the individual Trust accounts?

A. They vary from a few hundred to several million dollars.

Q. What do these facts indicate?

A. That Fidelity Trust Company has been rendering satisfactory Trust service for fifty-six years.

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THE GOVERNOR

September 29th, 1922.

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A tragedy of unequalled horror has taken place in Smyrna. Hundreds of thousands, naked and starving, are crying to the world for help. The citizens of Pennsylvania have never failed to respond whenever called upon in any great emergency.

The Near East Relief, incorporated by Congress, has been administering aid in that section of the world for a number of years, and has already exhausted its supplies that were sent over the 110,000 orphans in its care. It must provide ships for the evacuation of refugees, and temporarily care for those who have been moved out of the danger zone, that they do not bring death and disease to the countries whither they are moved.

Immediate funds are needed to purchase food and relief supplies wherever they can be bought nearest to the place of misfortune, to furnish the medical attention needed, and hire ships to evacuate the remaining refugees as soon as possible.

I am sure the citizens of Pennsylvania will respond generously by forwarding their contributions to Drexel & Co., Treasurers, Addressed c/o Near East Relief, N. E. corner Broad and Locust Streets, Philadelphia. The contribution should be marked "Smyrna Emergency Fund."

*Wm. S. Spruill*  
Governor of Pennsylvania.