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The Breaking Point

By Mary Roberts Rinehart

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(Continued From Yesterday.)
Elizabeth had quite definitely put Dick out of her heart. On the evening of the day she learned he had come back and had not seen her, she deliberately killed her love and decently interred it. She burned her notes and his one letter and put away her ring, perceiving the ring not as a relic but as a shameful business to be done with quickly. She tore his photograph into bits and threw them into her waste basket, and having thus house-cleaned her room, set to work to house-clean her heart.

She found very little to do. She was numb and totally without feeling. The little painful constriction in her chest which had so often come lately with her thoughts of him was gone. She felt extraordinarily empty, but not light, and her feet dragged about the room.

She felt no sense of Dick's unworthiness, but simply that she was up against something she could not fight, and no longer wanted to fight. She was beaten, but the strange thing was that she did not care. Only, she would not be pitied. As the days went on, she regretted the pity that kept her in ignorance for so long and had let her wear her heart on her sleeve, and she wondered sometimes whether the story of his loss of memory had not been false, evolved out of that pity and the desire to save her pain.

David sent for her, but she sent him a little note, formal and restrained. She would come in a day or two, but now she must get her bearings. He was to know that she was not angry, and felt it all for the best, and she was very lovingly his, Elizabeth.

She knew now that she would marry Willie Sayre. He would have to know the truth about her, that she did not love anyone, not even her father and her mother. She pretended to care for fear of hurting them, but she was actually frozen quite hard. She did not believe in love. It was a terrible thing, to be avoided by anyone who wanted to get along, and this avoiding was really quite simple. One simply stopped feeling.

On the Sunday after she had come to this comfortable knowledge she sat in the church as usual, in the choir stalls, and suddenly she hated the church. She hated the way the larynx of Henry Wallace, the tenor, stuck out like a crab-apple over his low collar. She hated the fat double chin of the bass.

She hated the talk about love and the sure rewards of virtue, and the faces of the congregation, smug and sure of salvation.

She went to the choir master after the service to hand in her resignation. And did not, because it had occurred to her that it might look, to use Nina's word, as though she were crushed. Crushed! That was funny.

Willie Sayre was waiting for her outside, and she went up with him to lunch, and afterwards they played golf. They had rather an amusing game, and once she had to sit down on a bunker and laughed until she was weak, while he fought his way out of a pit. Crushed indeed!

So the weaving went on, almost completed now. With Willie Sayre bidding his time, but fairly sure of the result. With Jean Melis happening on a two days' old paper, and reading over and over a notice addressed to him. With Leslie Ward neither better nor worse than his kind, seeking adventure in a byway, which was East 88th Street. And with Dick wandering the streets of New York after twilight, and standing once, with his coat collar turned up against the rain, outside of the Metropolitan Club, where the great palatial of his father hung over a mantel-piece.

Now that he was near Beverly, Dick hesitated to see her. He felt no resentment at her long silence, or at his exile which had resulted from it. He made excuses for her, recognized his own contribution to the catastrophe, knew too, that nothing was to be gained by seeing her again. But he determined finally to see her once more, and then to go away, leaving her to peace and to success.

She would know now that she had nothing to fear from him. All he wanted was to satisfy the hunger that was in him by seeing her, and then to go away.

Curiously, that hunger to see her had been abeyance while Basil was with him. It was only when he was alone again that it came up and although he knew that he was conscious of another fact; that every word, every picture of her on the great boardings which waited in every empty lot, everything, indeed, which brought her into the reality of the present, loosened by so much her hold on him out of the past.

When he finally went to the 86th Street house it was on impulse. He had meant to pass it but he found himself stopping and half angrily made his determination. He would follow the cursed thing through now and get it over. Perhaps he had discounted it too much in advance, waited too long, hoped too much. Perhaps it was simply that that last phase was already passing. But he felt no thrill, no expectancy, as he rang the bell and was admitted to the familiar hall.

It was peopled with ghosts, for him. Upstairs, in the drawing room that extended across the front of the house, he had told him of her engagement to Howard Lucas. Later on, coming back from Europe, he had gone back there to find Lucas installed in the house, his cigars on the table, his photograph on the piano, his books scattered about, and Lucas himself, smiling, handsome and triumphant on the hearth rug, dressed for dinner except for a broadened dressing gown, putting his hand familiarly on Beverly's shoulder, and calling her "old girl."

He wandered into the small room to the right of the hall, where in other days he had waited to be taken upstairs, and stood looking out of the

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window. He heard some one, a caller, come down, get into his overcoat in the hall and go out, but he was not interested. He did not know that Leslie Ward had stood outside the door for minutes, saw and recognized him, and then slumped out.

He was quite steady as the caller preceded him up the stairs. He even noticed certain changes in the house, the door at the landing converted into an arch, leaded glass in the dining room windows beyond it. But he caught a glimpse of himself in a mirror

trast to the former days. He faced her, still with that unexpected composure, and he saw her very little changed. Even the movement with which she came toward him with both hands out was familiar.

"Jud!" she said. "Oh, my dear!" He saw that she was profoundly moved, and suddenly he was sorry for her. Sorry for the years behind them both, for the burden she had carried, for the tears in her eyes.

"Dear old Ber!" he said. She put her head against his shoulder, and cried unrestrainedly, and he held her there, saying small gentle soothing things, smoothing her hair. But all the time he knew that life had been playing him another trick; he felt a great tenderness for her and profound pity, but he did not love her, or want her. He saw that after all the suffering and waiting, the death and exile, he was left at the end with nothing. Nothing at all.

When she was restored to a sort of tense composure, he found to his discomfort that woman-like she intended to abuse herself thoroughly and completely. She implored his forgiveness for his long exile, gazing at him humbly, and when he said in a matter-of-fact tone that he had been happy, with

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a look that showed she thought he was lying to save her unhappiness. "You are trying to make it easier for me. But I know, Jud." (To be Continued)

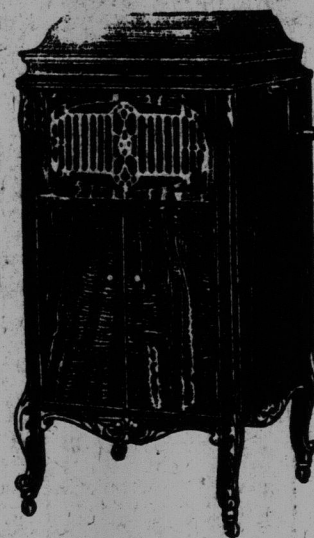
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For this jam it is necessary that each berry be broken up. Therefore, wash berries in cold water, remove stems, and wash again. Then, in a large bowl, add 7 level cups (8 lbs.) sugar and mix well. Use hottest fire and stir constantly before boiling. Boil hard for one full minute, remove from fire and stir in 1/2 bottle (scant 1/2 cup) Certo. From this jam is taken the fire and stirred not over 5 minutes by the clock, before pouring. In the meantime skin, and stir occasionally to cool slightly, then pour quickly. If in jars seal at once and leave for 10 minutes to sterilize the tops. Use same recipe for Raspberry, Strawberry or Logberry Jam.

Pineapple and Strawberry Jam
Crush well about 1 qt. ripe berries. Put pineapple through food cutter, or chop very fine. Measure 1 level cup (1 lb.) of each into large bottle. Add 7 level cups (8 lbs.) sugar. Stir thoroughly. Boil hard for one full minute, remove from fire and stir in 1/2 bottle (scant 1/2 cup) Certo. Skin and pour quickly.

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