

# 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)

He himself had been totally incurable. He lived a sort of animal life of food and sleep, and later on small tentative excursions around the room on legs that shook when he walked. The snow came and almost covered the cabin, and David had read a great deal, and talked at intervals. David had tried to fill up the gap in his mind. That was how he learned that David was his father's brother, and that his father had recently died.

Going over it all now, it had certain elements that were not clear. They had, for instance, never gone back to the ranch at all. With the first clearing of the snow in the spring John Donaldson had appeared again, leading two saddled horses and driving a pack animal and they had started off, leaving him standing in the clearing and staring after them. But they had not followed Donaldson's trail. They had started west, over the mountains, and David did not know the country. Once they were lost for three days.

He looked at the figure on the bed. Only ten years, and yet at that time David had been vigorous, seemed almost young. He had aged in that ten years. On the bed he was an old man, a tired old man at that. On that long ride he had been tireless. He had taken on the burden of the night camp, and had backed a trail with his hat-chet across snow-fields, while Dick, still weak but furiously protesting, had been compelled to stand and watch.

Now, with the perspective of time behind him, and with the clearly defined issue of David's protest against his return to the west, he again went over the details of that winter and spring. Why had they not taken Donaldson's trail? Or gone back to the ranch? Why, since Donaldson could make it had not other visitors come? Another doctor, the night he almost died, and David sat under the lamp behind the close-screened windows, and read the very pocket prayer-book that now lay on the stand beside the bed? Why had they burned his clothes, and Donaldson brought a new outfit? Why did Donaldson, for all Dick's requests, never bring a razor, so that when they struck the railroad, miles from anywhere, they were both full bearded?

He brought himself up sharply. He had allowed his imagination to run away with him. He had been depicting a flight, and no one who knew David could imagine him in flight. Nevertheless, he was conscious of a



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She wondered, sometimes, if it was, after all, because of Dick's growing interest in Elisabeth Wheeler. She knew that he was seeing her daily, although he was too busy now for more than a hasty call. She felt that she could even tell when he had seen her; he would come in, glowing and almost excited, and as if to make up for the moments stolen from David, would leap up the stairs two at a time and burst into the invalid's room like a cheerful cyclone. Wasn't it possible that David had begun to feel as she did, that the

to you. You're thrown away here. Besides—," he hesitated. Then "We might as well face it. The day of general practitioners has gone."

"I don't believe it," Dick said stoutly. "Maybe we are only the signposts to point the way to the other fellows, post."

"What I've been thinking," David pursued his own train of thought, "is this: I want you to go to John Hopkins and take up the special work you've been wanting to do. I'll be up and around in a week."

"Call the nurse, Aunt Lucy," said Dick. "He's raving."

"Not at all," David retorted testily. "I've told you. This whole town only comes here now to be told what specialists to go to, and you know it."

"I don't know anything of the sort," "If you don't, it's because you won't face the facts."

Dick chuckled, and threw an arm over David's shoulder. "You're trying to get rid of me, for some reason. Don't tell me you're going to get married!"

But David did not smile. Lucy, watching him from her post by the window, saw his face and felt a spasm of fear. At the most she had feared a mental conflict in David. Now she saw that it might be something infinitely worse, something impending and immediate. She could hardly reply when Dick appealed to her.

"Are you going to let him get rid of me like this, Aunt Lucy?" he asked. "Sentenced to Johns Hopkins, like Napoleon to St. Helena! Are you with me, or for him?"

"I don't know, Dick," she said, with her eyes on David. "If it's for your good—"

matter to me, David."

David nodded silently.

"But now you want me to go away. To leave her. You're rather urgent about it. And I feel—well, I begin to think you have a reason for it."

David clenched his hands, under the bedclothing, but his eyes met Dick fairly.

"She's a good girl," he said. "And she's entitled to more than you can give her, the way things are."

"That's the reason," David said stoutly. "She would wait for you. She's that sort. I've known her all her life. She's as steady as a rock. But she's been brought up to have a lot of things. Walter Wheeler is well off. You do as I want you to pack your things and go to Baltimore. Get Reynolds down here to look after the work until I'm around again."

But Dick evaded the direct issue thus opened, and followed another line of thought.

But when he saw David formulating a further protest, he dropped the subject.

"I'll not do it until we've gone into it together," he promised. "There's plenty of time. You settle down now and get ready for sleep."

When the nurse came in at eleven o'clock she found Dick gone and David very still, with his face to the wall. It was the end of May before David began to move about his upper room. The trees along the shaded streets had burst into full leaf by that time, and Mike was enjoying that garden's life.

"She went out after a time, leaving them at it hammer and tongs. David was vanquished in the end, but Dick, going down to the office later on, was puzzled. Somehow, it was borne in on him that behind David's insistence was a reason, unspoken but urgent, and the only reason that occurred to him as possible was that David did not, after all, want him to marry Elisabeth Wheeler. He put the matter to the test that night, wandering in, as was his custom before going to bed, in dressing-gown and slippers, for a brief chat. The nurse was down-stairs, and Dick doctored about the room restlessly. Then he stopped and stood by the bed, looking down.

"A few nights ago, David, I asked you if you thought it would be right for me to marry; if my situation justified it, and if to your knowledge there was any other reason why I could not or should not. You said there was not."

"There is no reason, of course. If she'll have you."

"I don't know that. I know that whether she will or not is a pretty vital

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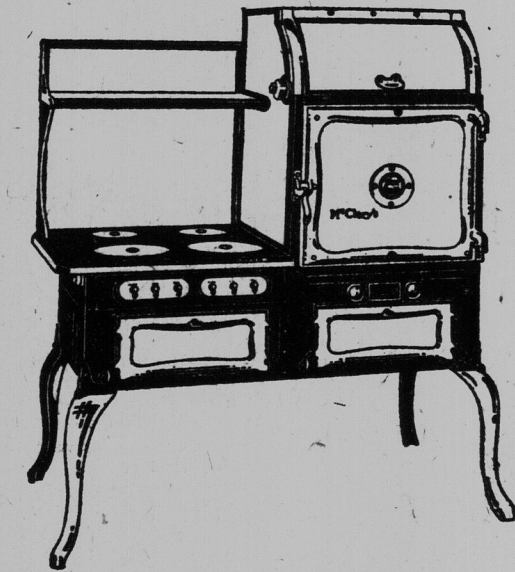
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terral of paradise when flowers grow faster than the weeds beside them. Harrison Miller, having rolled his lawn through all of April, was heard abroad in the early mornings with the lawn mower or, hoe in hand, was to be seen behind his house in his vegetable patch. Cars rolled through the streets, the rear seats laden with blossoming holly from the country lanes, and the Wheeler dog was again burying bones in the soft, warm ground under the hedge.

Elisabeth Wheeler was very happy. Her look of expectant waiting, one vague, had crystallized now into definite form. She was waiting, timidly and shyly, but with infinite content, in time everything would come. And in the meantime there was today, and sometime today a shabby car would stop at the door, and there would be five minutes, or ten. And then Dick would have to hurry to work, or back to David. After that, today was over, but there would always be tomorrow.

Now and then, at choir practice or at the eyes it was almost as though they said: "I know I told you. But if you ever tell him, I'll kill you."

(To be continued)



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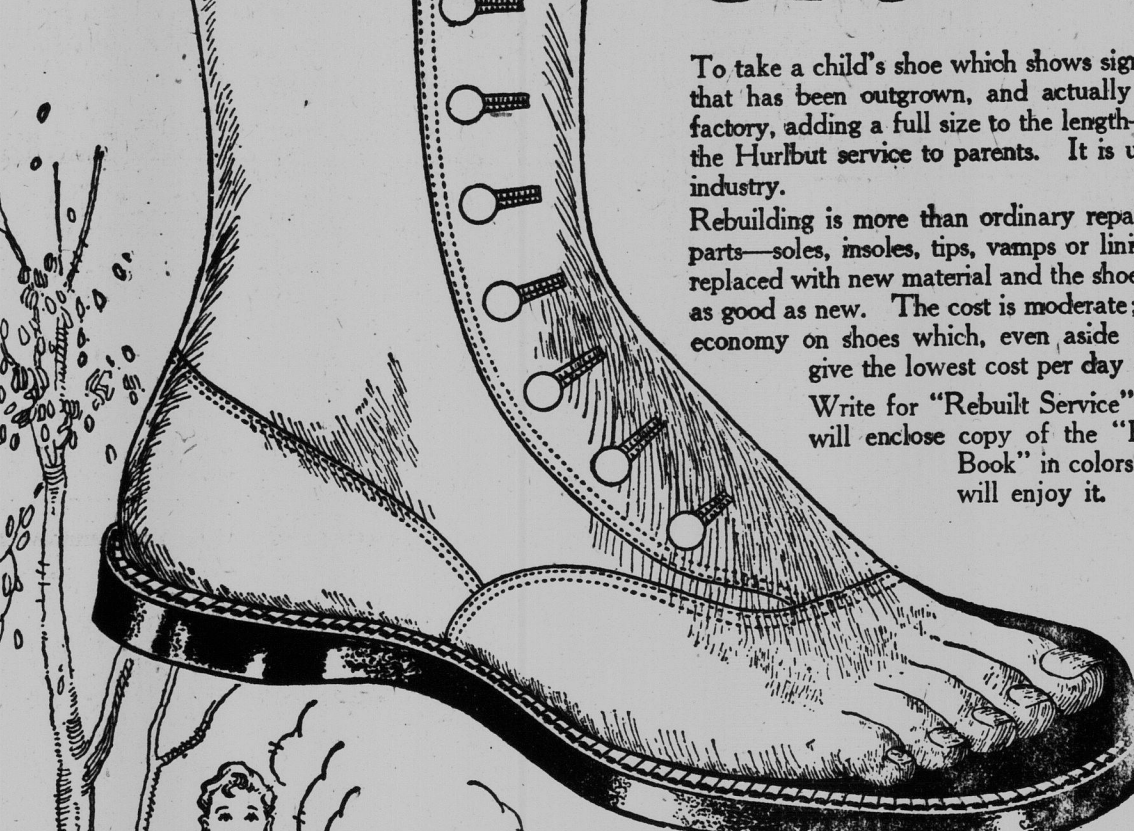
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