

"K"

By Mary Roberts Rinehart

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(Continued from last week.)

SYNOPSIS.

CHAPTER I—At her home in the Street Sidney Page agrees to marry Joe Drummond "after years and years" and talks to K. Le Moyne, the new roomer.

CHAPTER II—Sidney's aunt Harriet who has been dressmaking with Sidney's mother, launches an independent modiste's parlor. Sidney gets Dr. Ed Wilson's influence with his brother, Doctor Max, the successful young surgeon, to place her in the hospital as a probationer nurse.

CHAPTER III—K. becomes acquainted in the Street. Sidney asks him to stay on as a roomer and explains her plans for financing her home while she is in the school.

CHAPTER IV—Doctor Max gets Sidney into the hospital school.

Men, like jewels, require a setting. A clerk on a high stool, poring over a ledger, is not unimpressive, or a cook over her stove. But place the cook on the stool, poring over the ledger! Doctor Max, who had lived all his life on the edge of Sidney's horizon, now, by the simple changing of her point of view, loomed large and magnificent. Perhaps he knew it. Certainly he stood very erect. Certainly, too, there was considerable manner in the way in which he asked Miss Harrison to go out and close the door behind her.

Sidney's heart, considering what was happening to it, behaved very well.

"For goodness' sake, Sidney," said Doctor Max, "here you are a young lady and I've never noticed it!"

This, of course, was not what he had intended to say, being staff and all that. But Sidney, visibly palpitant, was very pretty, much prettier than the Harrison girl, beating a tattoo with her heels in the next room.

Doctor Max, belonging to the class of man who settles his tie every time he sees an attractive woman, thrust his hands into the pockets of his long white coat and surveyed her quizzically.

"Did Doctor Ed tell you?"

"Sit down. He said something about the hospital. How's your mother and Aunt Harriet?"

"Very well—that is, mother's never quite well." She was sitting forward on her chair, her wide young eyes on him. "Is that—is your nurse from the hospital here?"

"Yes. But she's not my nurse. She's a substitute."

"The uniform is so pretty." Poo! Sidney! with all the things she had meant to say about a life of service and that, although she was young, she was terribly in earnest.

"It takes a lot of plugging before one gets the uniform. Look here, Sidney; if you are going to the hospital because of the uniform, and with any idea of soothing fevered brows and all that nonsense—"

She interrupted him, deeply flushed. Indeed, no. She wanted to work. She was young and strong, and surely a pair of willing hands—that was absurd about the uniform. She had no silly ideas. There was so much to do in the world, and she wanted to help. Some people could give money, but she couldn't. She could only offer service. And, partly through earnestness and partly through excitement, she ended in a sort of nervous sob, and, going to the window, stood with her back to him.

He followed her, and, because they were old neighbors, she did not resent it when he put his hand on her shoulder.

"I don't know—of course, if you feel like that about it," he said, "we'll see what can be done. It's hard work, and a good many times it seems futile. They die, you know, in spite of all we can do. And there are many things that are worse than death—"

His voice trailed off. When he had started out in his profession, he had had some such ideal of service as this girl beside him. He sighed a little as he turned away.

"I'll speak to the superintendent about you," he said. "Perhaps you'd like me to show you around a little."

"When? Today?"

He had meant in a month, or a year it was quite a minute before he replied:

"Yes, today, if you say. I'm operating at four. How about three o'clock?"

"Then we'll say at three," she said calmly, and took an orderly and unfurled departure.

She sent K. a note at noon, with word to Tillie at Mrs. McKee's to put it under his plate:

Dear Mr. Le Moyne—I am so excited I can hardly write. Doctor Wilson, the surgeon, is going to take me through the hospital this afternoon. Wish me luck.—Sidney Page.

K. read it, and, perhaps because the day was hot and his butter soft and the other "mealers" irritable with the heat, he ate little or no luncheon. Before he went out into the sun, he read the note again. To his jealous eyes

came a vision of that excursion to the hospital. Sidney, all vibrant eagerness, luminous of eye, quick of bosom; and Wilson, sardonically smiling amused and interested in spite of himself. He drew a long breath, and thrust the note into his pocket.

As he went down the Street, Wilson's car came around the corner. Le Moyne moved quietly into the shadow of the church and watched the car go by.

CHAPTER V.

"And so," K. Le Moyne, "you liked it all? It didn't startle you?"

"Well, in one way, of course—you see, I didn't know it was quite like that: all order and peace and quiet, and white beds and whispers, on top—you know what I mean—and the misery there just the same. Have you ever gone through a hospital?"

K. Le Moyne was stretched out on the grass, his arms under his head. For this excursion to the end of the street car line he had donned a pair



"I Haven't Promised to Marry Him."

of white flannel trousers and a belted Norfolk coat. Sidney had been divided between pride in his appearance and fear that the Street would deem him overdressed.

At her question he closed his eyes shutting out the peaceful arch of leaves and the bit of blue heaven over head. He did not reply at once.

"Good gracious, I believe he's asleep!" said Sidney.

But he opened his eyes and smiled at her.

"I've been around hospitals a little. I suppose now there is no question about your going?"

"The superintendent said I was young, but that any protegee of Doctor Wilson's would certainly be given a chance."

"It is hard work, night and day."

"Do you think I am afraid of work?"

"And—Joe?"

Sidney colored vigorously and sat erect.

"He is very silly. He's taken all sorts of idiotic notions in his head. I haven't promised to marry him."

"But he thinks you mean to. If you have quite made up your mind not to better tell him, don't you think? What—what are these idiotic notions?"

Sidney considered. "For one thing, he's jealous of you!"

"I see. Of course that is silly, although your attitude toward his suspicion is hardly flattering to me!"

He smiled up at her.

"I told him that I had asked you to bring me here today. He was furious. And that wasn't all."

"No?"

"He said I was flirting desperately with Doctor Wilson. You see, the day we went through the hospital, it was hot, and we went to Henderson's for soda water. And, of course, Joe was there. It was really dramatic."

K. Le Moyne was daily gaining the ability to see things from the angle of the Street. A month ago he could have seen no situation in two people, a man and a girl, drinking soda water together, even with a boy lover on the next stool. Now he could view things through Joe's tragic eyes. And there was more than that. All day he had noticed how inevitable the conversation turned to the young surgeon.

Sidney's active young brain, turned inward for the first time in her life, was still on herself.

"Mother is plaintively resigned—and Aunt Harriet has been a trump. She's going to keep her room. It's really up to you."

"To me?"

"To your staying on. Mother trusts you absolutely. I hope you noticed that you got one of the apostle spoons with the custard she sent up to you the other night. And she didn't object to this trip today. Of course, as she said herself, it isn't as if you were young, or at all wild."

In spite of himself, K. was rather startled. He felt old enough, God knew, but he had always thought of it as an age of the spirit. He rose to his feet and threw back his fine shoulders.

"Aunt Harriet and your mother and Christine and her husband-to-be, whatever his name is—we'll be a happy family. But, I warn you, if I ever hear of Christine's husband getting an apostle spoon—"

She smiled up at him. "You are looking very grand today. But you have grass stains on your white trousers."

"Perhaps Katie can take them out."

Quite suddenly K. felt that she thought him too old for such frivolity of dress. It put him on his mettle.

"How old do you think I am, Miss Sidney?"

"Not over forty, I'm sure."

"I'm almost thirty. It is middle age of course, but—it is not senility."

Clearly the subject of his years did not interest her vitally, for she harked back to the grass stains.

"I'm afraid you're not saving, as you promised. Those are new clothes, aren't they?"

"No, indeed. Bought years ago in England—the coat in London, the trousers in Bath, on a motor tour. Cost something like twelve shillings. Awfully cheap. They wear them for cricket."

That was a wrong move, of course Sidney must hear about England; and she marveled politely, in view of his poverty, about his being there. Poo! Le Moyne floundered in a sea of mendacity, rose to a truth here and there, clutched at luncheon, and achieved safety at last.

"To think," said Sidney, "that you have really been across the ocean! I never knew but one person who had been abroad. It is Dr. Max Wilson."

Back again to Doctor Max! Le Moyne, unpacking sandwiches from a basket, was aroused by a sheer resentment to indiscrimination.

"You like this Wilson chap pretty well, don't you?"

"What do you mean?"

"You talk about him rather a lot."

This was sheer recklessness, of course. He expected fury, annihilation. He did not look up, but busied himself with the luncheon. When the silence grew oppressive, he ventured to glance toward her. She was leaning forward, her chin cupped in her palms staring out over the valley that stretched at their feet.

"Don't speak to me for a minute or two," she said. "I'm thinking over what you have just said."

Down through the valley ran a shallow river, making noisy pretensions to both depth and fury. He remembered just such a river in the Tyrol, with this same Wilson on a rock, holding the hand of a pretty Austrian girl, while he snapped the shutter of a camera. He had that picture somewhere now; but the girl was dead, and, of the three, Wilson was the only one who had met life and vanquished it.

"I've known him all my life," Sidney said at last. "You're perfectly right about one thing: I talk about him and I think about him. I'm being candid, because what's the use of being friends if we're not frank? I admire him—you'd have to see him in the hospital, with everyone deferring to him and all that, to understand. And when you think of a man like that who holds life and death in his hands of course you rather thrill. I—I honestly believe that's all there is to it."

"If that's the whole thing, that's hardly a mad passion." He tried to smile; succeeded faintly.

"Well, of course, there's this, too. I know he'll never look at me. I'll be one of forty nurses; indeed, for three months I'll be only a probationer. He'll probably never even remember I'm in the hospital at all."

"I see. Then, if you thought he was in love with you, things would be different?"

"If I thought Dr. Max Wilson was in love with me," said Sidney solemnly, "I'd go out of my head with joy."

To hide the shock with which he realized that she was, unknown to herself, already in the throes of a romantic attachment for Wilson, K. suggested of a descent to the river. She accepted eagerly, and he helped her down. That was another memory that outlasted the day—her small warm hand in his; the time she slipped and he caught her; the pain in her eyes at one of his thoughtless remarks.

"I'm going to be pretty lonely," he said, when she had paused in the descent and was taking a stone out of her low shoe. "I shall hate to come home at night." And then, seeing her wince: "I've been whining all day. For heaven's sake, don't look like that. If there's one sort of man I detest more than another, it's a man who is sorry for himself. Do you suppose your mother would object if we stayed out here at the hotel for supper? I've ordered a moon, orange-yellow and extra size."

"I should hate to have anything ordered and wasted."

"Then we'll stay."

"It's fearfully extravagant."

"I'll be thrifty as to moons while you are in the hospital."

So it was settled. And, as it happened, Sidney had to stay, anyhow.

For, having perched herself out in the river on a sugar-loaf rock, she slid slowly but with a dreadful inevitability, into the water. K. happened to be looking in another direction. So it occurred that at one moment Sidney sat on a rock, duffy white from head to feet, entrancingly pretty, and knowing it, and the next she was standing neck deep in water, much too startled to scream, and trying to be dignified under the rather trying circumstances. K. had not looked around. The splash had been a gentle one.

"If you will be good enough," said Sidney, with her chin well up, "to give me your hand or a pole or something—because if the river rises an inch I shall drown."

To his undying credit, K. Le Moyne did not laugh when he turned and saw her. He went out on the sugar-loaf, and lifted her bodily up its slippery sides. He had prodigious strength, in spite of his leanness.

"Well!" said Sidney, when they were both on the rock, carefully balanced. "Are you cold?"

"Not a bit. But horribly unhappy. I must look a sight." Then, remembering her manners, as the Street had it, she said primly:

"Thank you for saving me."

"There wasn't any danger, really, unless—unless the river had risen."

And then, suddenly, he burst into delighted laughter, the first, perhaps, for months. He shook with it, struggled at the sight of her injured face to restrain it, achieved finally a degree of sobriety by fixing his eyes on the river bank.

"When you have quite finished," said Sidney severely, "perhaps you will take me to the hotel. I dare say I shall have to be washed and ironed."

He drew her cautiously to her feet. Her wet skirts clung to her; her shoes were sodden and heavy. She clung to him frantically, her eyes on the river below. With the touch of her hands the man's mirth died. He held her very tenderly, as one holds something infinitely precious.

(Continued next week.)

St. Valentine.

How the dear old Patron Saint of Lovers must sigh as he thinks of the changes that 100 years have wrought! A century ago he was Eros' chosen henchman. A hundred years ago the fond Lover evoked him humbly, the while pondering for months ahead as to the best rhymes to accompany the inevitable Bleeding Heart (personally drawn and painted.) Not to write burning verses to his Charmer's eyebrow or lily-white hand would indeed have proved her wooer lacking in the finer arts of Love. With quill in hand, and sand box near, every Romeo burned midnight candles and filled words to the measure of his Passion.

Circled 50 years. Again the Lover sought upon St. Valentine's day some gallant way to prove his preference. Progress was his ally. For a few pence he might buy his Heart (sore pierced indeed) and flaming verses, compared with which his own were rustic drivel. To the Stationer's he ran, to find in lacy cages of (paper) Love hidden, armed with cruel darts and o'er-burning words. From many, Lovelace chose the gem to suit his case, thereafter dropping it in the penny-post most gaily.

Today at St. Valentine's shrine few Lovers go to pray. Rather have they the air of Patrons who graciously remember the Old Saint as do they childish myths to smile or scoff at. Occasionally they make him serve, as when they would offer a Dame of High Degree or Maid of Import costly trophies or flowers worth their weight in gold. As St. Valentine knows, Lovers still love, but "not in the manner of long ago, humbly, doubting their prowess and putting it to the test in simple ways." Modern Wooers find their days are too short for dalliance, for verse-making or gentle wooing.

The present-day Romeo finds a dozen "beauties" or orchids, or a jeweled bauble, quite as effective and much more to his taste, and his Lady's, than Bleeding Hearts and toil-won rhymes—if he remembers St. Valentine's day at all. And yet to the heart of every woman not caloused by the vanities, the personal note strongly appeals. Verses written for Her by Him would be treasured by the right sort of a girl as nothing that could be had for gold.

Love is no less Love because its methods differ. The Eternal difference between the man and the woman in love is, the latter places her abiding trust in sentiment that is richly verbal. Unspoiled women love St. Valentine as fondly as cynical men despise him. True, there are today men—elderly men, those simple souls who give savor to humanity—who still write verses to living or dead loves, in honor of the Old Saint. And the children—they never forget him, as Postmen can vouch. Lovers of today, however, unless, as has been suggested, he furnishes an excuse for a frolic, a surreptitious offering, or an indulgence to a childish sweetheart or wife.

This Barbarous System Was Used in Europe For Centuries.

The use of torture in order to elicit information from persons accused of crime, barbarous as it is, was little practiced before mediæval times. Under Greek and Roman law torture was only allowed upon slaves, though in the latter days of the empire it was employed against free citizens if they had been accused of treason to the emperor.

It seems to have become part of the law in Europe about the thirteenth century. From the fourteenth century downward torture was a part of the legal system of most European countries. The Italian municipalities used it to a very large extent. In Germany elaborate apparatus existed for its infliction in the dungeons of the feudal castles and in the town halls of the cities.

It was used in the prisons of Germany when the philanthropist Howard visited them in 1770. In France it was part of the law until abolished by the revolution, and in Scotland it was used until the reign of Queen Anne. The use of torture seems never to have been wholly sanctioned by the law of England, although it was used frequently by order of the king in the Tudor period. The royal council claimed the power of directing torture warrants against state prisoners in the tower, and under James I. and Charles I. torture was resorted to in state trials.—Chicago Herald.

Faith of Partners.

A member of the New York supreme court, reproving a New York firm of architects for canceling an agreement, says, "Authorities unanimously agree that there is scarcely any relation in life which calls for more absolute good faith than the relation of partners."

Also, "A purer and more elevated morality is demanded of partners than the common morality of the trade." The meaning is that an individual who transacts business for himself may look out solely for himself, while a partner must never consider his own advantage apart from that of his associates.—Exchange.

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