

"K"

By Mary Roberts Rinehart

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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 dreading with Sidney's mother, launches an independent modiste's parlor. Sidney goes to Dr. Ed Wilson's influenza clinic, where Sidney is drying her clothes, and is insanely jealous.

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.

CHAPTER V.—Sidney and K. spend an afternoon in the country. Sidney falls into the river.

CHAPTER VI.—Max asks Carlotta Harrison, a probationer, to take a motor ride with him. Joe finds Sidney and K. at the country hotel, where Sidney is drying her clothes, and is insanely jealous.

CHAPTER VII.—While Sidney and K. are dining on the terrace, Max and Carlotta appear. K. does not see them, but for some reason seeing him disturbs Carlotta strangely.

After all, the evening was a disappointment to him. The spontaneity had gone out of it, for some reason. The girl who had thrilled to his glance those two mornings in his office, whose somber eyes had met his, fire for fire, across the operating room, was not playing up. She sat back in her chair, eating little, starting at every step. Her eyes, which by every rule of the game should have been gazing into his, were fixed on the oilcloth-covered passage outside the door.

"I think, after all, you are frightened."

"Terribly."

"A little danger adds to the zest of things. You know what Nietzsche says about that."

"I am not fond of Nietzsche." Then, with an effort: "What does he say?"

"Two things are wanted by the true man—danger and play. Therefore he seeketh woman as the most dangerous of toys."

"Women are dangerous only when you think of them as toys. When a man finds that a woman can reason—do anything but feel—he regards her as a menace. But the reasoning woman is really less dangerous than the other sort."

This was more like the real thing. To talk careful abstractions like this, with beneath each abstraction its concealed personal application, to talk of woman and look in her eyes, to discuss new philosophies with their freedoms, to discard old creeds and old moralities—that was his game. Wilson became content, interested again. The girl was nimble-minded. She challenged his philosophy and gave him a chance to defend it. With the conviction, as their meal went on, that Le Moyne and his companion must surely have gone, she gained ease.

It was only by wild driving that she got back to the hospital by ten o'clock.

Wilson left her at the corner, well content with himself. As he drove up the Street he glanced across at the Page house. Sidney was there on the doorstep, talking to a tall man who stood below and looked up at her. Wilson settled his tie, in the darkness. Sidney was a mighty pretty girl. The June night was in his blood. He was sorry he had not kissed Carlotta good night. He rather thought, now he looked back, she had expected it.

As he got out of his car at the curb, a young man who had been standing in the shadow of the treebox moved quickly away.

Wilson smiled after him in the darkness.

"That you, Joe?" he called. But the boy went on.

Sidney entered the hospital as a probationer early in August. Christine was to be married in September to Palmer Howe, and, with Harriet and K. in the house, she felt that she could safely leave her mother.

The balcony outside the parlor was already under way. On the night before she went away Sidney took chairs out there and sat with her mother until the dew drove Anna to the lamp in the sewing room and her "Daily Thoughts" reading.

Sidney sat alone and viewed her world from this new and pleasant angle. She could see the garden and the whitewashed fence with its morning glories, and at the same time, by turning her head, view the Wilson house across the Street. She looked mostly at the Wilson house.

K. Le Moyne was upstairs in his room. She could hear him tramping up and down, and catch, occasionally, the bitter-sweet odor of his old brier pipe.

All the small loose ends of her life were gathered up—except Joe. She would have liked to get that clear, too.

She wanted him to know how she felt about it all—that she liked him as much as ever, that she did not want to hurt him. But she wanted to make it clear, too, that she knew now that she would never marry him. She thought she would never marry him, but if she did, it would be a man doing a man's work in the world. Her eyes turned wistfully to the house across the Street.

K.'s lamp still burned overhead, but his restless tramping about had ceased. He must be reading—he read a great deal. She really ought to go to bed. A neighborhood cat came stealthily across the Street, and stared up at the little balcony with green-glowing eyes.

"Come on, Bill Taft," she said. "Come on."

Joe Drummond, passing the house for the fourth time that evening, heard her voice, and hesitated uncertainly on the pavement.

"Joe! Come in."

"It's late; I'd better get home."

The misery in his voice hurt her. "I'll not keep you long. I want to talk to you."

He came slowly toward her.

"Well?" he said hoarsely.

"Why haven't you been to see me? If I have done anything—" Her voice was a-tingle with virtue and outraged friendship.

"You haven't done anything but—show me where I get off."

He sat down on the edge of the balcony and stared out blankly.

"If that's the way you feel about it—"

"I'm not blaming you. I was a fool to think you'd ever care about me. I don't know that I feel so bad—about the thing. I've been around seeing some other girls, and I notice they're glad to see me, and treat me right, too."

There was boyish bravado in his voice. "But what makes me sick is to have everyone saying you've jilted me."

"Good gracious! Why, Joe, I never promised."

"Well, we look at it in different ways; that's all. I took it for a promise."

Then suddenly all his carefully conserved indifference fled. He bent forward quickly, and, catching her hand, held it against his lips.

"I'm crazy about you, Sidney. That's the truth. I wish I could die!"

The cat, finding no active antagonism, sprang up on the balcony and rubbed against the boy's quivering shoulders; a breath of air stroked the morning-glory vine like the touch of a friendly hand. Sidney, facing for the first time the stigma of love and despair, sat, rather frightened, in her chair.

"You don't mean that?"

"I mean it, all right. If it wasn't for the folks, I'd jump in the river. I lied when I said I'd been to see other girls. What do I want with other girls? I want you!"

"This is wild, silly talk. You'll be sorry tomorrow."

"It's the truth," doggedly.

But he made a clutch at his self-respect. He was acting like a crazy boy, and he was a man, all of twenty-two!

"When are you going to the hospital?"

"Tomorrow."

"Is that Wilson's hospital?"

"Yes."

Alas for his resolve! The red haze of jealousy came again. "You'll be seeing him every day, I suppose."

"I dare say. I shall also be seeing twenty or thirty other doctors, and a hundred or so men patients, not to mention visitors. Joe, you're not rational."

"No," he said heavily. "I'm not. If it's got to be someone, Sidney, I'd rather have it the roomer upstairs than Wilson. There's a lot of talk about Wilson."

"It isn't necessary to malign my friends."

He rose.

"Wilson had better look out. I'll be watching. If I see him playing any of his tricks around you—well, he'd better look out!"

That, as it turned out, was Joe's farewell. He had reached the breaking-point. He gave her a long look, linked, and walked rapidly out to the Street. Some of the dignity of his retreat was lost by the fact that the cat followed him, close at his heels.

Sidney was hurt, greatly troubled. She even shed a tear or two, very surreptitiously; and then, being human and much upset, and the cat startling her by its sudden return, she shooed it off the veranda and set an imaginary dog after it. Whereupon, feeling somewhat better, she went in and locked the balcony window and proceeded upstairs.

Le Moyne's light was still going. The rest of the household slept. She paused outside the door.

"Are you sleepy?"—very softly.

There was a movement inside, the sound of a book put down. Then: "No, indeed."

"I may not see you in the morning I leave tomorrow."

"Just a minute."

From the sounds, she judged that he was putting on his shabby gray coat. The next moment he had opened the door and stepped out into the corridor.

"I believe you had forgotten?"

"? Certainly not. I started downstairs a while ago, but you had a visitor."

"Only Joe Drummond."

He gazed down at her quizzically. "And—is Joe more reasonable?"

"He will be. He knows that I—that I shall not marry him."

"Poor chap! He'll buck up, of course. But it's a little hard just now when do you leave?"

"Just after breakfast."

"I am going very early. Perhaps—"

He hesitated. Then, hurriedly: "I got a little present for you—nothing much, but your mother was quite willing. In fact, we bought it together."

He went back into his room, and returned with a small box. She opened it with excited fingers. Ticking away on its satin bed was a small gold watch.

"You'll need it, you see," he explained nervously.

"A watch," said Sidney, eyes on it. "A dear little watch, to pin on and not put in a pocket. Why, you're the best person!"

"I was afraid you might think it presumptuous," he said. "I haven't any right, of course. And then, your mother said you wouldn't be offended—"

"Don't apologize for making me so happy!" she cried. "It's wonderful, really. And the little hand is for pulses! How many queer things you know!"

After that she must pin it on, and slip in to stand before his mirror and inspect the result. It gave Le Moyne a queer thrill to see her there in the

room, among his books and his pipes. It made him a little sick, too, in view of tomorrow and the thousand-odd tomorrows when she would not be there.

"I've kept you up shamefully," she said at last, "and you get up so early. I shall write you a note from the hospital, delivering a little lecture on extravagance—because how can I now, with this joy shining on me? And about how to keep Katie in order about your socks, and all sorts of things. And—and now, good night."

She had moved to the door, and he followed her, stooping a little to pass under the low chandelier.

"Good night," said Sidney.

"Good-by—and God bless you."

She went out, and he closed the door softly behind her.

CHAPTER VIII.

Sidney never forgot her early impressions of the hospital, although they were chaotic enough at first. There were uniformed young women coming and going, efficient, cool-eyed, low of voice. There were long vistas of shining floors and lines of beds. There were brisk internes with duck clothes and brass buttons, who eyed her with friendly, patronizing glances. There were bandages and dressings, and great white screens, behind which were played little or big dramas, baths or deaths, as the case might be. And over all brooded the mysterious authority of the superintendent of the training school, dubbed the Head, for short.

Twelve hours a day, from seven to seven, with the off-duty intermission, Sidney labored at tasks which revolted her soul. She swept and dusted the wards, cleaned closets, folded sheets and towels, rolled bandages—did everything but nurse the sick, which was what she had come to do.

At night she did not go home. She sat on the edge of her narrow, white bed and soaked her aching feet in hot water and witch-hazel, and practiced taking pulses on her own slender wrist with K.'s little watch.

Out of all the long, hot days, two periods stood out clearly, to be waited for and cherished. One was when early in the afternoon, with the ward in spottless order, the shades drawn against the August sun, the tables covered with their red covers and the only sound the drone of the bandage machine as Sidney steadily turned it. Doctor Max passed the door on his way to the surgical ward beyond, and gave her a cheery greeting. At these times Sidney's heart beat almost in time with the ticking of the little watch.

The other hour was at twilight, when, work over for the day, the night nurse, with her rubber-soled shoes and tired eyes and jangling keys, having reported and received the night orders, the nurses gathered in their small parlor for prayers. It was months before Sidney got over the exaltation of that twilight hour, and never did it cease to bring her healing and peace. In a way, it crystallized for her what the day's work meant: charity and its sister service, the promise of rest and peace. Into the little parlor fled the nurses, and knelt, folding their tired hands.

"The Lord is my shepherd," read the

Head out of her worn Bible; "I shall not want."

And the nurses: "He maketh me to lie down in green pastures; he leadeth me beside the still waters."

And so on through the psalm to the assurance at the end, "And I will dwell in the house of the Lord forever."

Now and then there was a death behind one of the white screens. It caused little change in the routine of the ward. A nurse stayed behind the screen, and her work was done by the others. When everything was over, the time was recorded exactly on the record, and the body was taken away.

At first it seemed to Sidney that she could not stand this nearness to death. She thought the nurses hard because they took it quietly. Then she found that it was only stoicism, resignation, that they had learned. These things must be, and the work must go on. Their philosophy made them no less tender. Some such patient detachment must be that of the angels who keep the Great Record.

(Continued next week.)

HIGHEST PAID WOMAN WRITER

Mary Roberts Rinehart, Author of "K," Commands Big Money for Her Stories.

Mary Roberts Rinehart, the author of our new serial, "K," is conceded the foremost writer of mystery stories and highest paid woman author in America. Her first story, "The Circular Staircase," was a huge success and established her reputation. Subsequent stories including "The Man in Lower Ten," and "When a Man Marries," were even more popular and demonstrated that her first work was not a "flash in the pan."

Immediately the European war started, Mrs. Rinehart went abroad for one of the big weekly periodicals and her reports from the stricken territory were among the best written.

Mrs. Rinehart is not a college woman. She went through high school like hundreds of thousands of other girls, and then looked about her to discover in what manner she could make a living. Trained nursing looked good, so as Mary Roberts she took a course at Pittsburgh Training school. There she met young Dr. Stanley Rinehart, just starting his career, and a friendship began that ended in marriage.

It has long been said that a family physician and a parish priest eventually learn all the tragedy and human weakness and mystery and intrigue and goodness and villainy there is in the world. Undoubtedly the family physician confides freely in his wife, if she is a person of discretion; and if she has imagination and talent she may turn what she learns into good fiction. This seems to have been the case with Mrs. Rinehart.

She was married 12 years and had reached her thirty-second year before she turned her hand to literature. Almost everybody enjoys her work because she writes from the point of view of one who knows life in all its queer phases.

Without a doubt, that is the reason "K" is such an interesting story. It shows genuine knowledge of human relations from many angles. In this story Mrs. Rinehart has taken the kind of persons that people have known all their lives—our neighbors' sons and daughters and wives and sisters and babies and grandparents—and has made them living characters in a fascinating story. You see them in their strength and weakness, their joy and sorrow, their ambition and hope, their love and hate.

One installment of "K" will appear in every issue of this paper until it is completed, and after reading the first one you will not be satisfied until you have read them all.

Great Britain Opens Safety Lane.

New York, Feb. 21.—Additional and convincing evidence that the British government has established a safety lane through the "barred" submarine zone outlined by Germany was produced today when private advices received here announced the safe arrival of the big White Star liner Adriatic at Liverpool. The vessel carried a big cargo of ammunition. There was one American passenger on the Adriatic, which was rumored sunk.

The Cunard liner Carpathia today slipped into New York harbor unannounced, having negotiated the barred zone safely. The Holland-American liner Ryndman also reached port today. She was recalled while enroute to Rotterdam as she was about to enter the barred zone.

The French liner Espagne, carrying 67 Americans among her 230 passengers, sailed for Bordeaux today. She will pass through the barred zone. Most of the Americans aboard are volunteers for the American ambulance corps in France.

When to Hatch to Insure Winter Eggs.

Poultry owners who desire to have a supply of eggs from their hens during the fall and winter, when there is a scarcity and high prices prevail, should arrange to hatch their pullets in March and April. Birds hatched at this time will be well matured in the fall.

The Department of Agriculture has just issued a new publication on the winter care of fowl. It is called circular No. 71, on "Winter Egg Production," and as long as the supply lasts copies may be obtained by writing to Congressman John R. K. Scott, House of Representatives, Washington, D. C.

This publication also gives directions relative to housing and feeding together with the other requirements for securing the best results in egg laying during the fall and winter months, and will prove a valuable guide to every poultry owner.



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