

"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 Moynes, 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.

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.

On her first Sunday half-holiday, she was free in the morning, and went to church with her mother, going back to the hospital after the service. So it was two weeks before she saw Le Moynes again. Even then, it was only for a short time. Christine and Palmer Howe came in to see her, and to inspect the balcony, now finished.

But Sidney and Le Moynes had a few words together first.

There was a change in Sidney. Le Moynes was quick to see it. She was a trifle subdued, with a puzzled look in her blue eyes. Her mouth was tender, as always, but he thought it drooped. There was a new atmosphere of wistfulness about the girl that made his heart ache.

They were alone in the little parlor with its brown lamp and blue silk shade. K. never smoked in the parlor, but by sheer force of habit he held the pipe in his teeth.

"And how have things been going?" asked Sidney practically.

"Your steward has little to report. Aunt Harriet, who left you her love, has had the complete order for the Lorenz trousseau. I thought I'd ask you about the veil. We're rather in a quandary. Do you like this new fashion of draping the veil from behind the coiffure in the back?"

Sidney had been sitting on the edge of her chair, staring.

"There," she said—"I knew it! This house is fatal! They're making an old woman of you already." Her tone was tragic.

He sucked calmly at his dead pipe. "Katie has a new prescription—recipe—for bread. It has more bread and fewer airholes. One cake of yeast—"

Sidney sprang to her feet.

"It's perfectly terrible!" she cried. "Because you rent a room in this house is no reason why you should give up your personality and your—your intelligence. Mother says you water the flowers every morning, and lock up the house before you go to bed. I—I never meant you to adopt the family!"

K. removed his pipe and gazed earnestly into the bowl.

"Bill Taft has had kittens under the porch," he said. "And the groceryman has been sending short weight. We've bought scales now, and weigh everything."

"You are evading the question."

"Dear child, I am doing these things because I like to do them. For—for some time I've been floating, and now I've got a home."

Sidney gazed helplessly at his imperturbable face. He seemed older than she had recalled him: the hair over his ears was almost white. And yet he was just thirty. That was Palmer Howe's age, and Palmer seemed like a boy. But he held himself more erect than he had in the first days of his occupancy of the second floor front.

"And now," he said cheerfully, "what about yourself? You've lost a lot of illusions, of course, but perhaps you've gained ideals. That's a step."

"Life," observed Sidney, with the wisdom of two weeks out in the world, "life is a terrible thing. K. We think we've got it, and—it's got us."

"Undoubtedly."

"When I think of how simple I used to think it all was! One grew up and got married, and—perhaps had children. And when one got very old, one died. Lately I've been seeing that life really consists of exceptions—children who don't grow up, and grown-ups who die before they are old. And—this took an effort, but she looked at him squarely—and people who have children, but are not married. It all rather hurts."

"All knowledge that is worth while turns in the getting."

the room, touching its little familiar objects with tender hands. K. watched her. There was this curious element



They're Making an Old Woman of You Already.

n his love for her, that when he was with her it took on the guise of friendship and deceived even himself. It was only in lonely hours that it took its true form, became a hopeless yearning for the touch of her hand or a glance from her clear eyes.

"There is something else," she said absently. "I cannot talk it over with mother. There is a girl in the ward—"

"A patient?"

"Yes. She is quite pretty. She has had typhoid, but she is a little better. She's—not a good person."

"I see."

"At first I couldn't bear to go near her. I shivered when I had to straighten her bed. I—I'm being very frank, but I've got to talk this out with someone. I worried a lot about it, because, although at first I hated her, now I don't. I rather like her."

She looked at K. defiantly, but there was no disapproval in his eyes.

"Yes."

"Well, this is the question: She's getting better. She'll be going out soon. Don't you think something ought to be done to keep her from going back?"

There was a shadow in K.'s eyes now. She was so young to face all this; and yet, since face it she must, how much better to have her do it squarely.

"Does she want to change her mode of life?"

"I don't know, of course. There are some things one doesn't discuss. She cares a great deal for some man. The other day I propped her up in bed and gave her a newspaper, and after a while I found the paper on the floor, and she was crying. The other patients avoid her, and it was some time before I noticed it. The next day she told me that the man was going to marry someone else. 'He wouldn't marry me, of course, she said; but he might have told me.'"

Le Moynes did his best, that afternoon in the little parlor, to provide Sidney with a philosophy to carry her through her training. He told her that certain responsibilities were hers, but that she could not reform the world. Broad charity, tenderness and healing were her province.

"Help them all you can," he finished, "feeling inadequate and hopelessly dialectic. 'Cure them; send them out with a smile; and—leave the rest to the Almighty.'"

Sidney was resigned, but not content. Newly facing the evil of the world, she was a rampant reformer at once. Only the arrival of Christine and her fiancé saved his philosophy from complete rout. He had time for a question between the ring of the bell and Katie's deliberate progress from the kitchen to the front door.

"How about the surgeon, young Wilson? Do you ever see him?" His tone was carefully casual.

"Almost every day. He stops at the door of the ward and speaks to me. It makes me quite distinguished, for a probationer. Usually, you know, the staff never even see the probationers."

"And—the glamour persists?" He smiled down at her.

"I think he is very wonderful," said Sidney valiantly.

Christine Lorenz, while not large, seemed to fill the little room. Her voice, which was frequent and penetrating, her smile, which was wide and showed very white teeth that were a trifle large for beauty, her all-embracing good nature, dominated the entire lower floor. K., who had met her before, retired into silence and a corner. Young Howe smoked a cigarette in the hall.

"You poor thing!" said Christine, and put her cheek against Sidney's.

"Why, you're positively thin! Palmer gives you a month to tire of it all; but I said—"

"I take that back," Palmer spoke insolently from the corridor. "There is the look of willing martyrdom in her face."

was losing more than she was gaining. Christine had stepped out on the balcony, and was speaking to K. just in side.

"It's rather a queer way to live, of course," she said. "But Palmer is a pauper, practically. We are going to take our meals at home for a while. You see certain things that we want we can't have if we take a house—a car, for instance. We'll need one for running out to the Country club to dinner. And we're getting the Rosenfeld boy to drive it. He's crazy about machinery, and he'll come for practically nothing."

K. had never known a married couple to take two rooms and go to the bride's mother's for meals in order to keep a car. He looked faintly dazed. Also, certain sophistries of his former world about a cheap chauffeur being costly in the end rose in his mind and were carefully suppressed.

"You'll find a car a great comfort. I'm sure," he said politely.

Christine considered K. rather distinguished. She liked his graying hair and steady eyes, and insisted on considering his shabbiness a pose. She was conscious that she made a pretty picture in the French window, and preened herself like a bright bird.

"You'll come out with us now and then, I hope."

"Thank you."

"Isn't it odd to think that we are going to be practically one family?"

"Odd, but very pleasant."

He caught the flash of Christine's smile, and smiled back. Christine was glad she had decided to take rooms, glad that K. lived there. This thing of marriage being the end of all things was absurd. A married woman should have many friends; they kept her up. She would take him to the Country club. The women would be mad to know him. How clear-cut his profile was!

CHAPTER IX.

The hot August days dragged on. Merciless sunlight beat in through the slatted shutters of ward windows. At night, from the roof to which the nurses retired after prayers for a breath of air, lower surrounding roofs were seen to be covered with sleepers. Children dozed precariously on the edge of eternity; men and women sprawled in the grotesque postures of sleep.

There was a sort of feverish irritability in the air. Even the nurses, stolidly unmindful of bodily discomfort, spoke curly or not at all. Miss Dana, in Sidney's ward, went down with a low fever, and for a day or so Sidney and Miss Grange got along as best they could. Sidney worked like two or more, performed marvels of bed making, learned to give alcohol baths for fever with the maximum of result and the minimum of time, even made rounds with a members of the staff and came through creditably.

Dr. Ed Wilson had sent a woman patient into the ward, and his visits were the breath of life to the girl.

"How're they treating you?" he asked her, one day, abruptly.

"Very well."

"Look at me squarely. You're pretty and you're young. Some of them will try to take it out of you. That's human nature. Has anyone tried it yet?"

Sidney looked distressed.

"Positively, no. It's been hot, and of course it's troublesome to tell me everything. I—I think they're all very kind."

He reached out a square, competent hand, and put it over hers.

"We miss you in the Street," he said. "It's all sort of dead there since you left."

(Continued next week.)

THE MONTH OF MARCH.

In winsome disarray she hesitates Upon the threshold, frightened where she stands;

The wind has tossed her garments, loosed her hair,

About her brow it blows in wanton strands;

Wistful her eyes, her mute lips, trembling, plead With me to voice her tender spirit's need.

And that she fears to speak I love her more,

I, the stern Earth, am thrilling with her grace,

Noting where depths of shadow, glints of sun

Are met together in her lovely face: Sweet prayer unsaid—Sweet song my life shall sing—

Sweet maid of March, your heart has brought the Spring!

—Edith Livingston Smith in March Ainslee's.

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Honolulu.—So excellent is the standard of public school instruction in the Hawaiian Islands that the new type of model bungalow schoolhouses, which are added to main school buildings on the unit plan, have won a gold medal at the San Diego Exposition.

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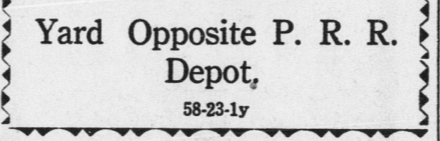
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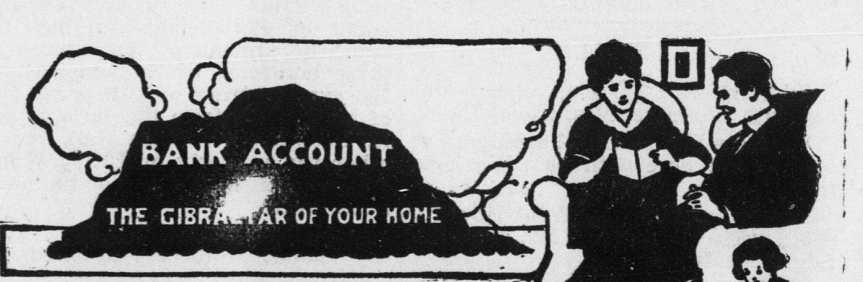
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