

"K"

By
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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 Moine, the new roomer.

CHAPTER II—Sidney's aunt Harriet who has been dressing with Sidney's mother, launches an independent medical 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.

CHAPTER VIII—Joe reproaches Sidney. She confides to K. that Joe knows now she will not marry him.

CHAPTER IX—Sidney goes to training school and at home relies more and more on K. Max meets K. and recognizes him as Edwardes, a brilliant young surgeon who has been thought lost on the Titanic. K.'s loving cases lost him faith in himself and he quit and hid from the world.

CHAPTER X.

A few days after Wilson's recognition of K., two most exciting things happened to Sidney. One was that Christine asked her to be maid of honor at her wedding. The other was more wonderful. She was accepted, and given her cap.

Because she could not get home that night, and because the little house had no telephone, she wrote the news to her mother and sent a note to Le Moine.

K. found the note on the hall table when he got home that night, and carried it upstairs to read. Whatever faint hope he might have had that her youth would prevent her acceptance he knew now was over. With the letter in his hand, he sat by his table and looked ahead into the empty years. Not quite empty, of course. She would be coming home.

But more and more the life of the hospital would engross her. He surmised, too, very shrewdly, that had he ever had a hope that she might come to care for him, his very presence in the little house militated against him. There was none of the illusion of separation; he was always there, like Katie. When she opened the door, she called "Mother" from the hall. If Anna did not answer, she called him a much the same voice.

Sidney's letter was not the only one received that day. When, in response to Katie's summons, he rose heavily and prepared for dinner, he found an unopened envelope on the table. It was from Max Wilson:

Dear Le Moine—I have a feeling of delicacy about trying to see you again so soon. I'm bound to respect your seclusion. But there are some things that have got to be discussed.

It takes courage to step down from the pinnacle you stood on. So it's not cowardice that has set you down here. It's wrong conception. And I've thought of two things. The first, and best, is for you to go back. No one has taken your place, because no one could do the work. But if that's out of the question—and only you know that, for only you know the facts—the next best thing is this, and in all humanity I make the suggestion.

Take the State exams under your present name, and when you've got your certificate, come in with me. This isn't magnanimity. I'll be getting much more than I give.

Think it over, old man. M. W.

It is a curious fact that a man who is absolutely untrustworthy about women is often the soul of honor to other men. The younger Wilson, taking his pleasures lightly and not too discriminatingly, was making an offer that meant his ultimate eclipse, and doing it cheerfully, with his eyes open.

K. was moved. It was like Max to make such an offer, like him to do it as if he were asking a favor and not conferring one. But the offer left him untempted. He had weighed himself in the balance, and found himself wanting. No tablet on the college wall could change that. And when, late that night, Wilson found him on the balcony and added appeal to argument, the situation remained unchanged. He realized its hopelessness when K. lapsed into whimsical humor.

"I'm not absolutely useless when I am, you know, Max," he said. "I've raised three tomato plants, and a family of kittens this summer, helped to plan a trousseau, assisted in selecting wallpaper for the room just inside—did you notice it?—and developed a boy pitcher with a ball that twists around the bat like a Colles fracture around a splint!"

Wilson rose and flung his cigarette into the grass.

"I wish I understood you!" he said irritably.

K. rose with him, and all the suppressed feeling of the interview was crowded into his last words.

"I'm not as ungrateful as you think, Max," he said. "I—you've helped a lot. Don't worry about me. I'm as well off as I deserve to be, and better. Good night."

"Good night."

Wilson's unexpected magnanimity put K. in a curious position—left him, as it were, with a divided allegiance. Sidney's frank infatuation for the young surgeon was growing. He was quick to see it. And where before he might have felt justified in going to the length of warning her, now his hands were tied.

Sidney went on night duty shortly after her acceptance. She tumbled into her low bed at nine o'clock in the morning, those days, with her splendid hair neatly braided down her back and her prayers said, and immediately her active young mind filled with images—Christine's wedding, Doctor Max passing the door of the old ward and she not there, Joe—and she puzzled over Grace and her kind.

On her first night on duty a girl had been brought in from the Avenue. She had taken poison—nobody knew just what. When the internes had tried to find out, she had only said: "What's the use?"

And she had died.

Sidney kept asking herself, "Why?" those mornings when she could not get to sleep. People were kind—men were kind, really—and yet, for some reason or other, those things had to be. Why?

Carlotta Harrison went on night duty at the same time—her last night service, as it was Sidney's first. She accepted it stoically. She had charge of the three wards on the floor just below Sidney, and of the ward into which all emergency cases were taken. It was a difficult service, perhaps the most difficult in the house. Carlotta merely shrugged her shoulders.

"I've always had things pretty hard here," she commented briefly. "When I go out, I'll either be competent enough to run a whole hospital single-handed, or I'll be carried out feet first."

Sidney was glad to have her so near. She knew her better than she knew the other nurses. Small emergencies were constantly arising and finding her at a loss. Once at least every night Miss Harrison would hear a soft hiss from the back staircase that connected the two floors, and, going out, would see Sidney's flushed face and slightly crooked cap bending over the stair rail.

"I'm dreadfully sorry to bother you," she would say, "but So-and-So won't have a fever bath," or, "I've a woman here who refuses her medicine." Then would follow rapid questions and equally rapid answers. Much as Carlotta disliked and feared the girl overhead, it never occurred to her to refuse her assistance. Perhaps the angels who keep the great record will put that to her credit.

Sidney saw her first death shortly after she went on night duty. It was the most terrible experience of all her life—it seemed to her that she could not stand it. Added to all her other new problems of living was this one of dying.

She made mistakes, of course, which the kindly nurses forgot to report—basins left about, errors on her records. She rinsed her thermometer in hot water one night, and started an interne by sending him word that Mary McGuire's temperature was 110 degrees. She let a delirious patient escape from the ward another night and go airily down the fire escape before she discovered what had happened! Then she distinguished herself by flying down the iron staircase and bringing the runaway back single-handed.

For Christine's wedding the Street threw off its drab attire and assumed a wedding garment. In the beginning it was incredulous about some of the details. The wedding was to be at five o'clock. This, in itself, defied all traditions of the Street, which was either married in the very early morning at the Catholic church or at eight o'clock in the evening at the Presbyterian. There was something reckless about five o'clock. The Street felt the dash of it. It had a queer feeling that perhaps such a marriage was not quite legal.

The younger Wilson was to be one of the ushers. When the newspapers came out with the published list and this was discovered, as well as that Sidney was the maid of honor, there was a distinct quiver through the hospital training school. A probationer was authorized to find out particulars. It was the day of the wedding then, and Sidney, who had not been to bed at all, was sitting in a sunny window in the dormitory annex, drying her hair.

The probationer was distinctly uneasy.

"I—I just wonder," she said, "if you would let some of the girls come in to see you when you're dressed?"

"Why, of course I will."

"It's awfully thrilling, isn't it? And— isn't Doctor Wilson going to be an usher?"

Sidney colored. "I believe so."

The probationer had been instructed to find out other things; so she set to work with a fan at Sidney's hair.

"You've known Doctor Wilson a long time, haven't you?"

"Ages."

"He's awfully good-looking, isn't he?"

Sidney considered. She was not ignorant of the methods of the school.

If this girl was pumping her—"I'll have to think that over," she said, with a glint of mischief in her eyes. "When you know a person terribly well, you hardly know whether he's good-looking or not."

"I suppose," said the probationer, cunning the long strands of Sidney's hair through her fingers, "that when you are at home you see him often."

Sidney got off the window sill, and, taking the probationer smilingly by the shoulders, faced her toward the door. "You go back to the girls," she said, "and tell them to come in and see me when I am dressed, and tell them this: I don't know whether I am to walk down the aisle with Doctor Wilson, but I hope I am. I see him very often. I like him very much. I hope he likes me. And I think he's handsome."

She shoved the probationer out into the hall and locked the door behind her.

That message in its entirety reached Carlotta Harrison. Her smoldering eyes flamed. The audacity of it startled her. Sidney must be very sure of herself. When the probationer who had brought her the report had gone out, she lay in her long, white nightgown, hands clasped under her head, and stared at the vaultlike ceiling of her little room.

She saw there Sidney in her white dress going down the aisle of the church; she saw the group around the altar; and, as surely as she lay there, she knew that Max Wilson's eyes would be, not on the bride, but on the girl who stood beside her.

The curious thing was that Carlotta felt that she could stop the wedding if she wanted to. She'd happened on a bit of information—many a wedding had been stopped for less. It rather obsessed her to think of stopping the wedding, so that Sidney and Max would not walk down the aisle together.

There came, at last, an hour before the wedding, a lull in the feverish activities of the previous month. Everything was ready. In the attic, in the center of a sheet, before a toilet table which had been carried upstairs for her benefit, sat, on this her day of days, the bride. All the second story had been prepared for guests and presents. Christine sat alone in the center of her sheet. The bridesmaids had been sternly forbidden to come into her room.

"I haven't had a chance to think for a month," she said. "And I've got some things I've got to think out."

But, when Sidney came, she sent for her. Sidney found her sitting on a stiff chair, in her wedding gown, with her veil spread out on a small stand.

"Close the door," said Christine. And, after Sidney had kissed her:

"I've a good mind not to do it."

"You're tired and nervous, that's all."

"I am, of course. But that isn't what's wrong with me. Throw that veil some place and sit down."

Christine was undoubtedly rouged, a very delicate touch. Sidney thought brides should be rather pale. But under her eyes were lines that Sidney had never seen there before.

"I'm not going to be foolish, Sidney. I'll go through with it, of course. It would put mamma in her grave if I made a scene now."

She suddenly turned on Sidney.

"Palmer gave his bachelor dinner at the Country club last night. They all drank more than they should. Somebody called father up today and said that Palmer had emptied a bottle of wine into the piano. He hasn't been here today."

"He'll be along. And as for the other—perhaps it wasn't Palmer who did it."

"That's not it, Sidney. I'm frightened."

Three months before, perhaps, Sidney could not have comforted her; but three months had made a change in Sidney. The complacent sophistries of her girlhood no longer answered for truth. She put her arms around Christine's shoulders.

"A man who drinks is a broken reed," said Christine. "That's what I'm going to marry and lean on the rest of my life—a broken reed. And that isn't all!"

She got up quickly, and, trailing her long satin train across the floor, bolted the door. Then from inside her courage she brought out and held to Sidney a letter. "Special delivery. Read it."

It was very short; Sidney read it at a glance:

Ask your future husband if he knows a girl at 213 — Avenue.

Three months before, the Avenue would have meant nothing to Sidney. Now she knew. Christine, more sophisticated, had always known.

"You see," she said. "That's what I'm up against."

Quite suddenly Sidney knew who the girl at 213 — Avenue was. The paper she held in her hand was hospital paper with the heading torn off. The whole sordid story lay before her: Grace Irving, with her thin face and cropped hair, and the newspaper on the floor of the ward beside her!

She picked up her veil and set the coronet on her head. Sidney stood with the letter in her hands. One of K.'s answers to her hot question had been this: "There is no sense in looking back unless it helps us to look ahead. What your little girl of the ward has been is not so important as what she is going to be."

Christine had finally adjusted her veil. She rose and put her hands on Sidney's shoulders.

"The simple truth is," she said quietly, "that I might hold Palmer if I cared—terribly. I don't. And I'm afraid he knows it. It's my pride that's hurt, nothing else."

And thus did Christine Lorenz go down to her wedding.

Sidney stood for a moment, her eyes on the letter she held. Already, in her new philosophy, she had learned many strange things. One of them was this—that women like Grace Irving did not betray their lovers; that the code of the underworld was "death to the squealer"; that one played the game, and won or lost, and if he lost, took his medicine. If not Grace, then who? Somebody else in the hospital who knew her story, of course. But who? And again—why?

Before going downstairs, Sidney placed the letter in a saucer and set fire to it with a match. Some of the radiance had died out of her eyes.

To K., sitting in the back of the church between Harriet and Anna, the wedding was Sidney—Sidney only. Afterward he could not remember the wedding party at all. The service for him was Sidney, rather awed and very serious, beside the altar. It was Sidney who came down the aisle to the triumphant strains of the wedding march, Sidney with Max beside her!



Sidney Read It at a Glance.

ney who came down the aisle to the triumphant strains of the wedding march, Sidney with Max beside her!

On his right sat Harriet, having reached the first pinnacle of her new career. The wedding gowns were successful. They were more than that—they were triumphant. Sitting there she cast comprehensive eyes over the church, filled with potential brides. But to Anna, watching the ceremony with blurred eyes and ineffectual bluish lips, was coming her hour. Sitting back in the pew, with her hands folded over her prayerbook, she said a little prayer for her straight young daughter, facing out from the altar with clear, unafraid eyes.

As Sidney and Max drew near the door, Joe Drummond, who had been standing at the back of the church, turned quickly and went out. He stumbled, rather, as if he could not see.

(Continued next week.)

Red Cross Seals Raised a Million.

Red Cross Christmas seals raised in the 1916 sale \$1,000,000 for the tuberculosis campaign, according to the National Association for the Study and Prevention of Tuberculosis, which has just announced the results of the recent holiday campaign. All reports are not in, but carefully revised estimates of the few yet outstanding indicate that more than one hundred million seals were sold.

All the proceeds of the sale, amounting to a tax for health work of one cent on each person in the country except the insular possessions, are devoted to preventive tuberculosis work in the States and communities in which the seals are sold.

The National Association points with gratification to the fact that it realized its slogan "one seal for each inhabitant in the United States." Seals have been sold annually at the holiday season, beginning with 1908. They have been the means of raising a total of \$4,206,051 for tuberculosis work. In addition to the thousands of tuberculosis beds which this sum has made possible, the seals have also aided in the establishment of hundreds of open-air schools, employment of thousands of tuberculosis visiting nurses, and have been an indirect cause of tremendous advances in the whole field of public health work.

Last fall agents sold seals in every State and territory of the United States, except Guam, Tahiti and Samoa. Counting the school children, some 300,000, the total number of agents of the country approached 500,000. These included club women, school teachers, merchants, bankers, postmasters, and in fact, every kind of business men and women.

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