

"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 dresmaking 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 Harriett, 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 Edward, a brilliant young surgeon who has been thought lost on the Titanic. K.'s losing cases lost him faith in himself and he quit and hid from the world.

CHAPTER X.—Carlotta fears Sidney. Christine Lorenz and Palmer Howe are married. The hard facts of her new life puzzle Sidney.

CHAPTER XI.—Max continued his flirtation with Carlotta, who becomes jealous of Sidney. K. coaches Max in his work but remains a clerk in the gas office.

Outside of her small immediate circle Anna's death was hardly felt. The little house went on much as before. Harriet carried back to her business a heaviness of spirit that made it difficult to bear with the small irrita-



"Take Me Away, K.," She Said Pitifully.

tions of her day. On Sidney—and in less measure, of course, on K.—fell the real brunt of the disaster. Sidney kept up well until after the funeral, but went down the next day with a low fever.

"Overwork and grief," Doctor Ed said, and sternly forbade the hospital again until Christmas. Morning and evening K. stopped at her door and inquired for her, and morning and evening came Sidney's reply:

"Much better. I'll surely be up to-morrow."

But the days dragged on and she did not get about.

Downstairs, Christine and Palmer had entered on the round of midwinter gaieties. Palmer's "crowd" was a lively one. There were dinners and dances, week-end excursions to country houses. The Street grew accustomed to seeing automobiles stop before the little house at all hours of the night. Johnny Rosenfeld, driving Palmer's car, took to falling asleep at the wheel in broad daylight, and voiced his discontent to his mother.

"You never know where you are with them guys," he said briefly. "We start out for half an hour's run in the evening, and get home with the milk wagons. And the more some of them have done to drink, the more they want to drive the machine. If I get a chance, I'm going to beat it while the wind's my way."

But, talk as he might, in Johnny Rosenfeld's loyal heart there was no thought of desertion. Palmer had giv-

en him a man's job, and he would stick by it, no matter what came. One such night Christine put in, lying wakefully in her bed, while the clock on the mantel tolled hour after hour into the night. Palmer did not come home at all. He sent a note from the office in the morning:

"I hope you are not worried, darling. The car broke down near the Country club last night, and there was nothing to do but to spend the night there. I would have sent you word, but I did not want to rouse you. What do you say to the theater tonight and supper afterward?"

Christine was learning. She telephoned the Country club that morning, and found that Palmer had not been there. But, although she knew now that he was deceiving her, as he always had deceived her, as probably he always would, she hesitated to confront him with what she knew. She shrank, as many a woman has shrunk before, from confronting him with his lie.

But the second time it happened she was roused. It was almost Christmas then, and Sidney was well on the way to recovery, thinner and very white, but going slowly up and down the staircase on K.'s arm, and sitting with Harriet and K. at the dinner table. She was begging to be back on duty for Christmas, and K. felt that he would have to give her up soon.

At three o'clock one morning Sidney roused from a light sleep to hear a rapping on her door.

"Is that you, Aunt Harriet?" she called.

"It's Christine. May I come in?"

Sidney unlocked her door. Christine slipped into the room. She carried a candle, and before she spoke she looked at Sidney's watch on the bedside table.

"I hoped my clock was wrong," she said. "I am sorry to waken you, Sidney, but I don't know what to do."

"Are you ill?"

"No. Palmer has not come home."

"What time is it?"

"After three o'clock."

Sidney had lighted the gas and was throwing on her dressing gown.

"When he went out did he say—"

"He said nothing. We had been quarrelling. Sidney, I am going home in the morning."

"You don't mean that, do you?"

"Don't I look as if I mean it? How much of this sort of thing is a woman supposed to endure?"

"Perhaps he has been delayed. These things always seem terrible in the middle of the night, but by morning—"

Christine whirled on her.

"This isn't the first time. You remember the letter I got on my wedding day?"

"Yes."

"He's gone back to her."

"Christine! Oh, I'm sure you're wrong. He's devoted to you. Oh, I don't believe it!"

"Believe it or not," said Christine loggishly, "that's exactly what has happened. I got something out of that little rat of a Rosenfeld boy, and the rest I know because I know Palmer. He's out with her tonight."

The hospital had taught Sidney one thing: that it took many people to make a world, and that out of these some were inevitably vicious. But vice had remained for her a clear abstraction. There were such people, and because one was in the world for service one cared for them. Even the Saviour had been kind to the woman of the streets.

But here abruptly Sidney found the great injustice of the world—that because of this vice the good suffer more than the wicked. Her young spirit rose in hot rebellion.

"It isn't fair!" she cried. "It makes me hate all the men in the world. Palmer cares for you, and yet he can do a thing like this!"

Christine was pacing nervously up and down the room. Mere companionship had soothed her. She was now, on the surface at least, less excited than Sidney.

"They are not all like Palmer, thank heaven," she said. "There are decent men. My father is one, and your K., here in the house, is another."

At four o'clock in the morning Palmer Howe came home. Christine met him in the lower hall. He was rather pale, but entirely sober. She confronted him in her straight white gown and waited for him to speak.

"I am sorry to be so late, Chris," he said. "The fact is, I am all in. I was driving the car out Seven Mile run. We blew out a tire and the thing turned over."

Christine noticed that his right arm was hanging inert by his side.

CHAPTER XIII.

Young Howe had been firmly resolved to give up all his bachelor habits with his wedding day. In his indolent, rather selfish way, he was much in love with his wife.

But with the inevitable misunderstandings of the first months of marriage had come a desire to be appreciated once again at his face value. Grace had taken him, not for what he was, but for what he seemed to be. With Christine the veil was real. She knew him now—all his small infidelities, his affectations, his weaknesses. Later on, like other women since the world began, she would learn to dissemble, to affect to believe him what he was not.

Grace had learned this lesson long ago. It was the A B C of her knowledge. And so, back to Grace came Palmer Howe, not with a suggestion to renew the old relationship, but for comradeship.

Christine sulked—he wanted good cheer; Christine was intolerant—he wanted tolerance; she disapproved of him and showed her disapproval—he wanted approval. He wanted life to be comfortable and cheerful, without recriminations, a little work and morn-

ing, a drink when one was thirsty. Distorted though it was, and founded on a wrong basis, perhaps, deep in his heart Palmer's only longing was for happiness; but this happiness must be of an active sort—not content, which is passive, but enjoyment.

"Come on out," he said. "I've got a car now. No taxi working its head off for us. Just a little run over the country roads, eh?"

It was the afternoon of the day before Christine's night visit to Sidney. The office had been closed, owing to a death, and Palmer was in possession of a holiday.

"Come on," he coaxed. "We'll go out to the Climbing Rose and have supper."

"I don't want to go."

"That's not true, Grace, and you know it."

"You and I are through."

"It's your doing, not mine. The roads are frozen hard; an hour's run into the country will bring your color back."

"Much you care about that. Go and ride with your wife," said the girl, and flung away from him.

The last few weeks had filled out her thin figure, but she still bore traces of her illness. Her short hair was curled over her head. She looked curiously boyish, almost sexless.

Because she saw him wince when she mentioned Christine, her ill temper increased. She showed her teeth.

"You get out of here," she said suddenly. "I didn't ask you to come back. I don't want you."

"Good heavens, Grace! You always knew I would have to marry some day."

"I was sick; I nearly died. I didn't hear any reports of you hanging around the hospital to learn how I was getting along."

He laughed rather sheepishly.

"I had to be careful. You know that as well as I do. I know half the staff there. Besides, one of—"

He hesitated over his wife's name. "A girl I know very well was in the training school. There would have been the devil to pay if I'd as much as called up."

"You never told me you were going to get married."

Cornered, he slipped an arm around her. But she shook him off.

"I meant to tell you, honey; but you got sick. Anyhow, I—I hated to tell you, honey."

He had furnished the flat for her. There was a comfortable feeling of coming home about going there again. And, now that the worst minute of



"I'm Going to Be Straight, Palmer,"

their meeting was over, he was visibly happier. But Grace continued to stand eyeing him sullenly.

"I've got something to tell you," she said. "Don't have a fit, and don't laugh. If you do, I'll—I'll jump out of the window. I've got a place in a store. I'm going to be straight, Palmer."

"Good for you!"

He meant it. She was a nice girl and he was fond of her. The other was a dog's life. And he was not unselfish about it. She could not belong to him. He did not want her to belong to anyone else.

"One of the nurses in the hospital, a Miss Page, has got me something to do at Linton & Hofburg's. I am going on for the January white sale. If I make good they will keep me."

He had put her aside without a quail; and now he met her announcement with approval. He meant to let her alone. They would have a holiday together, and then they would say good-by. And she had not fooled him. She still cared. He was getting off well, all things considered. She might have raised a row.

"Good work!" he said. "You'll be a lot happier. But that isn't any reason why we shouldn't be friends, is it? Just friends; I mean that. I would like to feel that I can stop in now and then and say how do you do."

"I promised Miss Page."

"Never mind Miss Page."

The mention of Sidney's name brought up in his mind Christine as he had left her that morning. He scowled. Things were not going well at home. There was something wrong with Christine. She used to be a good sport, but she had never been the same since the day of the wedding. He thought her attitude toward him was one of suspicion. It made him uncomfortable. But any attempt on his part to fathom it only met with cold silence. That had been her attitude that morn-

ing. "I'll tell you what we'll do," he said. "We won't go to any of the old places. I've found a new roadhouse in the country that's respectable enough to suit anybody. We'll go out to Schwitzer's and get some dinner. I'll promise to get you back early. How's that?"

In the end she gave in. And on the way out he lived up to the letter of their agreement. The situation exhilarated him: Grace with her new air of virtue, her new aloofness; his comfortable car; Johnny Rosenfeld's discreet back and alert ears.

The adventure had all the thrill of a new conquest in it. He treated the girl with deference, did not insist when she refused a cigarette, felt glowingly virtuous and exultant at the same time.

When the car drew up before the Schwitzer place, he slipped a five-dollar bill into Johnny Rosenfeld's not over-clean hand.

"I don't mind the ears," he said. "Just watch your tongue, lad." And Johnny stilled his engine in sheer surprise.

"There's just enough of the Jew in me," said Johnny, "to know how to talk a lot and say nothing, Mr. Howe."

Johnny Rosenfeld at eighteen had developed a philosophy of four words. It took the place of the Golden Rule, the Ten Commandments, and the Catechism. It was: "Mind your own business."

True to his promise, Palmer wakened the sleeping boy before nine o'clock. Grace had eaten little and drunk nothing; but Howe was slightly stimulated.

"Give her the 'once over,'" he told Johnny, "and then go back and crawl into the rugs again. I'll drive in."

Grace sat beside him. Their progress was slow and rough over the country roads, but when they reached the state road Howe threw open the throttle. He drove well. The liquor was in his blood. He took chances and got away with them, laughing at the girl's gasps of dismay.

"Wait until I get beyond Simkinsville," he said, "and I'll let her out. You're going to travel tonight, honey."

The girl sat beside him with her eyes fixed ahead. He had been drinking, and the warmth of the liquor was in his voice. She was determined, on one thing. She was going to make him live up to the letter of his promise to go away at the house door; and more and more she realized that it would be difficult. His mood was reckless, masterful. Instead of laughing when she drew back from a proffered glass, he turned surly. Obstinate lines that she remembered appeared from his nostrils to the corners of his mouth. She was uneasy.

Finally she hit on a plan to make him stop somewhere in her neighborhood and let her get out of the car. She would not come back after that.

There was another car going toward the city. Now it passed them, and as often they passed it. It became a contest of wits. Palmer's car lost on the hills, but gained on the level stretches, which gleamed with a coating of thin ice.

"I wish you'd let them get ahead, Palmer. It's silly and it's reckless."

"I told you we'd travel tonight."

He turned a little glance at her. What the deuce was the matter with women, anyhow? Were none of them cheerful any more? Here was Grace as sober as Christine. He felt outraged, defrauded.

His light car skidded and struck the big car heavily. On a smooth road perhaps nothing more serious than broken mudguards would have been the result. But on the ice the small car slewed around and slid over the edge of the bank. At the bottom of the declivity it turned over.

Grace was flung clear of the wreckage. Howe freed himself and stood erect, with one arm hanging at his side. There was no sound at all from the boy under the tonneau.

The big car had stopped. Down the bank plunged a heavy, gorilla-like figure, long arms pushing aside the frozen branches of trees. When he reached the car, O'Hara found Grace sitting unhurt on the ground. In the wreck of the car the lamps had not been extinguished, and by their light he made out Howe, swaying dizzily.

"Anybody underneath?"

"The chauffeur. He's dead, I think. He doesn't answer."

The other members of O'Hara's party had crawled down the bank by that time. With the aid of a jack, they got the car up. Johnny Rosenfeld lay doubled on his face underneath. When he came to and opened his eyes, Grace almost shrieked her relief.

"I'm all right," said Johnny Rosenfeld. And, when they offered him whiskey: "Away with the fire-water. I am no drinker. I—I—" A spasm of pain twisted his face. "I guess I'll get up." With his arms he lifted himself to a sitting position, and fell back again.

"Huh!" he said. "I can't move my legs."

(Continued next week.)

Good Authority.

A school-mistress asked her class to explain the word "bachelor," and was very much amused when a little girl answered: "A bachelor is a very happy man."

"Where did you learn that? asked the mistress.

"Father told me," the little girl replied.—Tit-Bits.

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