

"K"

By Mary Roberts Rinehart

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SYNOPSIS.

CHAPTER I—At her home in the Street Sidney Edgemoor 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.

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 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.

CHAPTER XII—Palmer and Christine move into rooms in Sidney's home. Sidney's mother dies. Palmer neglects Christine.

CHAPTER XIII—On a joy ride with Grace, a young girl, Palmer is hurt and Johnny, the chauffeur, seriously injured.

CHAPTER XIV—Sidney nurses Johnny Carlotta changes the medicine that Sidney is to give him.

CHAPTER XV.

At something after two o'clock that night, K. put down his pipe and listened. He had not been able to sleep since midnight. In his dressing gown he had sat by the small fire, thinking the content of his first few months on the Street was rapidly giving way to unrest. He who had meant to cut himself off from life found himself again in close touch with it; his eddy was deep with it.

And there was a new element. He had thought, at first, that he could fight down this love for Sidney. But it was increasingly hard. The innocent touch of her hand on his arm, the moment when he had held her in his arms after her mother's death, the thousand small contacts of her returns to the little house—all these set his blood on fire. And it was fighting blood.

Under his quiet exterior K. fought many conflicts those winter days—over his desk and ledger at the office, in his room alone, with Harriet planning fresh triumphs beyond the partition, even by Christine's fire, with Christine just across, sitting in silence and watching his grave profile and steady eyes.

He had a little picture of Sidney—a snap-shot that he had taken himself—her hair blowing about her, eyes looking out, tender lips smiling. When she was not at home, it sat on K.'s dresser, propped against his collar-box. When she was in the house, it lay under the pin-cushion.

Two o'clock in the morning, then, and K. in his dressing gown, with the picture propped, not against the collar-box, but against his lamp, where he could see it.

He sat forward in his chair, his hands folded around his knee, and looked at it. He was trying to picture the Sidney of the photograph in his old life—trying to find a place for her. But it was difficult. There had been few women in his old life. His mother had died many years before. There had been women who had cared for him, but he put them impatiently out of his mind.

Then the bell rang. Christine was moving about below. He could hear her quick steps. Almost before he had heaved his long legs out of the chair, she was tapping at his door outside.

"It's Mrs. Rosenfeld. She says she wants to see you."

He went down the stairs. Mrs. Rosenfeld was standing in the lower hall, a shawl about her shoulders. Her face was white and drawn above it.

"I've had word to go to the hospital," she said. "I thought maybe you'd go with me. It seems as if I can't stand it alone. Oh, Johnny, Johnny!"

"Where's Palmer?" K. demanded of Christine.

"He's not in yet."

"Are you afraid to stay in the house alone?"

"No; please go."

He ran up the staircase to his room

and flung on some clothing. In the lower hall, Mrs. Rosenfeld's sobs had become low moans. Christine stood helplessly over her.

"I am terribly sorry," she said—"terribly sorry! When I think whose fault all this is!"

Mrs. Rosenfeld put out a work-hardened hand and caught Christine's fingers. "Never mind that," she said. "You didn't do it. I guess you and I understand each other. Only pray God you never have a child."

K. never forgot the scene in the small emergency ward to which Johnny had been taken. Under the white lights his boyish figure looked strangely long. There was a group around the bed—Max Wilson, two or three internes, the night nurse on duty, and the Head.

Sitting just inside the door on a straight chair was Sidney—such a Sidney as he never had seen before—her face colorless, her eyes wide and unseeing, her hands clenched in her lap. When he stood beside her, she did not move or look up. The group around the bed had parted to admit Mrs. Rosenfeld, and closed again. Only Sidney and K. remained by the door, isolated, alone.

"You must not take it like that, dear. It's sad, of course. But, after all, in that condition—"

It was her first knowledge that he was there. But she did not turn. "They say I poisoned him." Her voice was dreary, inflectionless.

"You—what?"

"They say I gave him the wrong medicine; that he's dying; that I murdered him." She shivered.

K. touched her hands. They were ice-cold.

"Tell me about it."

"There is nothing to tell. I came on duty at six o'clock and gave the medicines. When the night nurse came on

at seven, everything was all right. The medicine tray was just as it should be. Johnny was asleep. I went to say good-night to him and he—he was asleep. I didn't give him anything but what was on the tray," she finished piteously. "I looked at the label; I always look."

By a shifting of the group around the bed, K.'s eyes looked for a moment directly into Carlotta's. Just for a moment; then the crowd closed up again. It was well for Carlotta that it did. She looked as if she had seen a ghost—closed her eyes, even reeled.

"Miss Harrison is worn out," Doctor Wilson said brusquely. "Get someone to take her place."

But Carlotta rallied. After all, the presence of this man in this room at such a time meant nothing. He was Sidney's friend, that was all.

But her nerve was shaken. The thing had gone beyond her. She had not meant to kill. It was the boy's weakened condition that was turning her revenge into tragedy.

"I am all right," she pleaded across the bed to the Head. "Let me stay, please. He's from my ward. I—I am responsible."

Wilson was at his wits' end. He had done everything he knew without result. The boy, rousing for an instant, would lapse again into stupor. With a healthy man they could have tried more vigorous measures—could have forced him to his feet and walked him about, could have beaten him with knotted towels dipped in ice water. But the wrecked body on the bed could stand no such heroic treatment.

It was Le Moyne, after all, who saved Johnny Rosenfeld's life. For, when staff and nurses had exhausted all their resources, he stepped forward with a quiet word that brought the internes to their feet astonished.

There was a new treatment for such cases—it had been tried abroad. He looked at Max.

Max had never heard of it. He threw out his hands.

"Try it, for heaven's sake," he said. "I'm all in."

The apparatus was not in the house—must be extemporized, indeed, at last, of odds and ends from the operating room. K. did the work, his long fingers deft and skillful—while Mrs. Rosenfeld knelt by the bed with her face buried; while Sidney sat, dazed and bewildered, on her little chair inside the door; while night nurses tiptoed along the corridor, and the night watchman stared incredulous from outside the door.

"They Say I Gave Him the Wrong Medicine."

When the two great rectangles that were the emergency ward windows had turned from mirrors reflecting the room to gray rectangles in the morning light, Johnny Rosenfeld opened his eyes and spoke the first words that marked his return from the dark valley.

"Gee, this is the life!" he said, and smiled into K.'s watchful face.

When it was clear that the boy would live, K. rose stiffly from the bedside and went over to Sidney's chair.

"He's all right now," he said—"as all right as he can be, poor lad!"

"You did it—you! How strange that you should know such a thing. How am I to thank you?"

The internes, talking among themselves, had wandered down to the dining room for early coffee. Wilson was giving a few last instructions as to the boy's care. Quite unexpectedly, Sidney caught K.'s hand and held it to her lips. The iron repression of the night, of months indeed, fell away before her simple caress.

"My dear, my dear," he said huskily. "Anything I can do—for you—at any time—"

It was after Sidney had crept like a broken thing to her room that Carlotta Harrison and K. came face to face. Johnny was quite conscious by that time, a little blue around the lips, but valiantly cheerful.

"More things can happen to a fellow than I ever knew there was!" he said to his mother, and submitted rather sheepishly to her tears and caresses.

"You were always a good boy, Johnny," she said. "Just you get well enough to come home. I'll take care of you the rest of my life. We will get you a wheel-chair when you can be about, and I can take you out in the park when I come from work."

"I'll be passenger and you'll be chauffeur, ma."

"Mr. Le Moyne is going to get your father sent up again. With sixty-five cents a day and what I make, we'll get along."

"You bet we will!"

"Oh, Johnny, if I could see you coming in the door again and yelling 'mother and 'supper in one breath!'"

The meeting between Carlotta and Le Moyne was very quiet. She had been making a sort of subconscious impression on the retina of his mind during all the night. It would be difficult to tell when he actually knew her.

When the preparations for moving Johnny back to the big ward had been made, the other nurses left the room, and Carlotta and the boy were together. K. stopped her on her way to the door.

"Miss Harrison!"

"Yes, Doctor Edwardes."

"I am not Doctor Edwardes here; my name is Le Moyne."

"Ah!"

"I have not seen you since you left St. John's."

"No; I—I rested for a few months."

"I suppose they do not know that you were—that you have had any previous hospital experience."

"No. Are you going to tell them?"

"I shall not tell them, of course."

And thus, by simple mutual consent, it was arranged that each should respect the other's confidence.

Carlotta staggered to her room. There had been a time, just before dawn, when she had had one of those swift revelations that sometimes come at the end of a long night. She had seen herself as she was. The boy was very low, hardly breathing. Her past stretched before her, a series of small revenges and passionate outbursts, swift yieldings, slow remorse. She dared not look ahead. She would have given every hope she had in the world, just then, for Sidney's stainless past.

She hated herself with that deadly loathing that comes with complete self-revelation.

And she carried to her room the knowledge that the night's struggle had been in vain—that, although Johnny Rosenfeld would live, she had gained nothing by what he had suffered. The whole night had shown her the hopelessness of any stratagem to win Wilson from his new allegiance. She had surprised him in the hallway, watching Sidney's slender figure as she made her way upstairs to her room. Never, in all his past overtures to her, had she seen that look in his eyes.

CHAPTER XVI.

To Harriet Kennedy, Sidney's sentence of thirty days' suspension came as a blow. K. broke the news to her that evening before the time for Sidney's arrival.

The little household was sharing in Harriet's prosperity. Katie had a helper now, a little Austrian girl named Miml. And Harriet had established on the street the innovation of after-dinner coffee. It was over the after-dinner coffee that K. made his announcement.

"What do you mean by saying she is coming home for thirty days? Is the child ill?"

"Not ill, although she is not quite well. There was a mistake about the medicine, and she was blamed; that's all."

"She'd better come home and stay home," said Harriet shortly. "I hope it doesn't get in the papers. This dressmaking business is a funny sort of thing. One word against you or any of your family, and the crowd's off somewhere else."

"There's nothing against Sidney," K. reminded her. "Nothing in the world. I saw the superintendent myself this afternoon. It seems it's a mere matter of discipline. Somebody made a mistake, and they cannot let such a thing go by. But he believes, as I do, that it was not Sidney."

However Harriet had hardened herself against the girl's arrival, all she had meant to say fled when she saw

Sidney's circled eyes and pathetic mouth.

"You child!" she said. "You poor little girl!" And took her to her corseted bosom.

For the time at least, Sidney's world had gone to pieces about her. All her brave vaunt of service faded before her disgrace.

When Christine would have seen her, she kept her door locked and asked for just that one evening alone. But after Harriet had retired, Sidney unbolted her door and listened in the little upper hall. Harriet, her head in a towel, her face carefully cold-creamed, had gone to bed; but K.'s light, as usual, was shining over the transom. Sidney tiptoed to the door.

"K!"

Almost immediately he opened the door.

"May I come in and talk to you?"

He turned, took a quick survey of the room, and held the door wide. Sidney came in and sat down by the fire.

"I've been thinking things over," she said. "It seems to me I'd better not go back."

He had left the door carefully open. Men are always more conventional than women.

"That would be foolish, wouldn't it, when you have done so well? And, besides, since you are not guilty, Sidney—"

"I didn't do it!" she cried passionately. "But I can't keep on; that's all there is to it, I keep saying 'myself.' 'You didn't do it, you didn't do

it,' and all the time something inside of me is saying, 'Not now, perhaps; but sometime you may.'" She looked up at him forlornly. "I am just not brave enough, K."

"Wouldn't it be braver to keep on? Aren't you giving up very easily?" (Continued next week.)

Highest Rank in the Army.

There is now no active lieutenant-general in the United States Army, that rank, says the Brooklyn Standard-Union, being only held by two of the general officers on the retired list—Gen. Nelson A. Miles, who was retired in 1903, and Gen. Samuel B. M. Young, who was retired the succeeding year. Even in Civil War days there was no lieutenant-general until the rank was revived for Gen. U. S. Grant in 1864. In July, 1866, the grade of general was created and he was promoted to it. The highest previous rank in our army was that of lieutenant-general, created for Washington, and also held by Scott before Grant. It was later held by Sherman and Sheridan, who also reached the rank of general, which has been held by no one since the death of Sheridan in 1888.

It was in 1885, shortly before Grant's death and after he had become involved in financial misfortunes, from which he was extricating himself by writing his delightful "Personal Memories," that Congress created the rank of general on the retired list for the ex-President, who had resigned from the army to take office. It was similar to the honorable title of admiral given to Rear-Admiral Dewey after the battle of Manila, and in Civil War days to Admiral Farragut. There are now seven major-generals of the line—the lamented Funston having been one of the number—and Quartermaster-General Sharpe and Surgeon-General Gorgas are also major-generals, a rank whose pay is \$8,000 a year.

There are 32 retired major-generals who draw \$6,000 a year each. The pay of a lieutenant-general is \$11,000, the retired pay being \$8,250. Maj.-Gen. Leonard Wood is the ranking army officer, having been commissioned in 1903. Major-Generals Pershing and Sharp were commissioned last September. General Funston had been a major-general since November 17, 1914. He commanded the Southern department, with headquarters at Fort Sam, Houston, Texas, where Major-General Pershing succeeds him.

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