

"K"

By Mary Roberts Rinehart

(Continued from last week.)

Doctor Ed had sent for Sidney. She thought it was another operation, and her spirit was just a little weary.

The night watchman was in the hall. He was fond of Sidney; she always smiled at him; and, on his morning rounds at six o'clock to waken the nurses, her voice was always amiable.

"Get it down."

So she finished it, not without anxiety that she might be needed. But daddy's attentions were few, and not to be lightly received.

"Can you stand a piece of bad news?"

Strangely, her first thought was of K.

"There has been an accident. Doctor Wilson—"

"Which one?"

"Doctor Max—has been hurt. It ain't much, but I guess you'd like to know it."

"Where is he?"

"Downstairs, in seventeen."

So she went down alone to the room where Doctor Ed sat in a chair with his unsteady bag beside him on the floor, and his eyes fixed on a straight figure on the bed. When he saw Sidney, he got up and put his arms around her.

His eyes told her the truth before he told her anything. She hardly listened to what he said. The fact was all that concerned her—for suddenly Sidney's small world, which had always sedately revolved in one direction, began to move the other way.

The door opened, and the staff came in. But where before they had moved heavily, with drooped heads, now they came quickly, as men with a purpose.

There was a tall man in a white coat with them. He ordered them about like children, and they listened to do his will. The heaviness of inactivity lifted. The room buzzed. The nurses stood by, while the staff did nurses' work.

It was the Lamb, after all, who brought the news to Sidney. The new activity had caught Doctor Ed, and she was alone now, her face buried against the back of a chair.

"There'll be something doing now, Miss Page," he offered.

"What are they going to do?"

"Going after the bullet. Do you know who's going to do it?"

His voice echoed the subdued excitement of the room—excitement and new hope.

"Did you ever hear of Edwardes, the surgeon?—the Edwardes operation, you know. Well, he's here. It sounds like a miracle. They found him sitting on a bench in the hall downstairs."

Sidney raised her head, but she could not see the miraculously found Edwardes. She could see the familiar faces of the staff, and that other face on the pillow, and—she gave a little cry. There was K!—He like him to be there, to be wherever anyone was in trouble! Tears came to her eyes—the first tears she had shed.

As if her eyes had called him, he looked up and saw her. He came toward her at once. The staff stood back to let him pass, and gazed after him. The wonder of what had happened was growing on them.

K stood beside Sidney, and looked down at her. Just at first it seemed as if he found nothing to say. Then: "There's just a chance, Sidney, dear. Don't count too much on it. If you will wait somewhere near, I'll see that you have immediate word."

"I am going to the operating room."

"Not to the operating room. Somewhere near."

His steady voice controlled her hysteria. But she resented it. She was not herself, of course, what with strain and weariness.

"I shall ask Doctor Edwardes."

He was puzzled for a moment. Then he understood. After all, it was as well. The thing that really mattered was that he must try to save Wilson for her. If he failed, she might hate him the rest of her life—not for himself but for his failure. Whichever way things went, he must lose.

"Doctor Edwardes says you are to stay away from the operation, but to remain near. He—he promises to call you if—things go wrong."

She had to be content with that. Nothing about that night was real to Sidney. She sat in the anesthetizing room, and after a time she knew that she was not alone. There was somebody else. She realized only that Carlotta was there, too, pacing up and down the little room. She was never sure, for instance, whether she imag-

ined it, or whether Carlotta really stopped before her and surveyed her with burning eyes.

"So you thought he was going to marry you?" said Carlotta—the dream. "Well, you see he isn't."

Sidney tried to answer, and failed—or that was the way the dream went.

"If you had enough character, I'd think you did it. How do I know you didn't follow us, and shoot him as he left the room?"

It must have been reality after all; for Sidney's numbed mind grasped the essential fact here, and held on to it. He had been out with Carlotta. He had promised—sworn that this should not happen. It had happened. It surprised her. It seemed as if nothing more could hurt her.

In the movement to and from the operating room, the door stood open for a moment. A tall figure—how much it looked like K!—straightened and held out something in his hand.

"The bullet!" said Carlotta in a whisper.

Then more waiting, a stir of movement in the room beyond the closed door. Carlotta was standing, her face buried in her hands, against the door. Sidney suddenly felt sorry for her. She cared a great deal. It must be tragic to care like that! She herself was not caring much; she was too numb.

The city still slept, but the torturing night was over. And in the gray dawn the staff, looking gray, too, and elderly and weary, came out through the

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closed door and took their hushed way toward the elevator. They were talking among themselves. Sidney, straining her ears, gathered that they had seen a miracle, and that the wonder was still on them.

Carlotta followed them out.

Almost on their heels came K. He was in the white coat, and more and more he looked like the man who had raised up from his work and held out something in his hand. Sidney's head was aching and confused. The tall man—or was it K?—looked at her, and then reached up and turned off the electric light. When the light was out everything was gray. She could not see. She slid very quietly out of her chair, and lay at his feet in a dead faint.

K carried her to the elevator. He held her as he had held her that day at the park when she fell in the river, very carefully, tenderly, as one holds something infinitely precious. Not until he had placed her on her bed did she open her eyes. But she was conscious before that. She was so tired, and to be carried like that, in strong arms, not knowing where one was going, or caring—

The nurse he had summoned hustled out for aromatic ammonia. Sidney, lying among her pillows, looked up at K.

"How is he?"

"A little better. There's a chance, dear."

"I have been so mixed up. All the time I was sitting waiting, I kept

thinking it was you who were operating! Will he really get well?"

"It looks promising."

"I should like to thank Doctor Edwardes."

The nurse was a long time getting the ammonia. But something had happened to K. That savored of the marvelous. His faith in himself was coming back—not strongly, with a rush, but with all humility. He had been loath to take up the burden; but, now that he had it, he breathed a sort of inarticulate prayer to be able to carry it.

Sidney held out her hand to him.

"What should I do without you, K?" she asked wistfully.

"All you have to do is to want me."

His voice was not too steady, and he took her pulse in a most businesslike way to distract her attention from it. But, as he rose from the chair beside her low bed, she put out her hand to him.

"K."

"Yes, dear."

"He was out with Carlotta. He promised, and he broke his promise."

"There may have been reasons. Suppose we wait until he can explain."

"How can he explain?" And, when he hesitated: "I bring all my troubles to you, as if you had none. Somehow, I can't go to Aunt Harriet, and of course mother—Carlotta cares a great deal for him. She said that I shot him. Does anyone really think that?"

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Advertisement for The Gibraltar of the Home Bank Account, featuring an illustration of a family and the text: 'A Bank Account Is the Gibraltar of the Home. It protects you in time of need. It gives you a feeling of independence. It strengthens you.'

Large directory table of local businesses and merchants in Bellefonte, Pa., organized by neighborhood or district. Includes names like 'Ackerman, F. M., groceries', 'Allison Bros., grain and flour', 'Baker, W. R., groceries', etc.

For the purpose of correcting any errors of appraisal, an appeal will be held at the County Treasurer's office in Bellefonte, Pa., Friday, May 25, 1917, between 9 a. m. and 1 p. m., and those who desire can attend.