

"K"

A thrilling mystery story about a man who lost his courage and the girl who helped him to find it again

By **MARY ROBERTS RINEHART**

Ten Minute Classics

Famous Tales and Legends Told in Brief Form

A Love Story of the Battle-Scarred Land of Champagne

By **J. W. MULLER**

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SIDNEY IS WARNED ABOUT DR. MAX WILSON AND "K" RECEIVES AN APPEAL TO HELP HER

A mysterious stranger, K. LeMoine, takes a room at the Page home, presided over by Sidney, her mother, Anna, and her aunt, Harriet, a fashionable dressmaker. Through the influence of Dr. Max Wilson, a brilliant young surgeon smitten with her charm, Sidney becomes a hospital nurse. K. loves her from a distance; so does erratic Joe Drummond, an old schoolmate. At the hospital Sidney makes the acquaintance of Carlotta Harrison, who has been over-intimate with Dr. Wilson and who is jealous of the innocent newcomer, Sidney's chum, Christine Lorenz, marries Palmer Howe, a society rake, and they take rooms with the Pages. Howe turns traitor to his bride. His arm is broken in a joy-riding accident and Johnny Rosenfeld, his chauffeur, is mortally injured. Doctor Wilson discovers that LeMoine is a famous Doctor Edwardes, living incognito, and keeps the secret. Carlotta Harrison poisons Johnny Rosenfeld, a patient at the hospital, and puts the blame on Sidney who is suspended. When this installment begins, she is at home discussing with K. the advisability of giving up hospital training.

CHAPTER XVI—Continued.

"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 to 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?" Her world was in pieces about her, and she felt alone in a wide and empty place. And, because her nerves were drawn taut until they were ready to snap, Sidney turned on him shrewdly.

"I think you are all afraid I will come back to stay. Nobody really wants me anywhere—in all the world! Not at the hospital, not here, not any place. I am no use."

"When you say that nobody wants you," said K., not very steadily, "I—I think you are making a mistake."

She scanned his face closely, and, reading there something she did not understand, she colored suddenly.

"I believe you mean Joe Drummond."

"No; I do not mean Joe Drummond." If he had found any encouragement in her face, he would have gone on recklessly; but her black eyes warned him.

"If you mean Max Wilson," said Sidney, "you are entirely wrong. He's not in love with me. Anyhow, after this disgrace—"

"There is no disgrace, child."

"He'll think me careless, at the least. And his ideals are so high, K."

"You say he likes to be with you. What about you?"

Sidney had been sitting in a low chair by the fire. She rose with a sudden passionate movement. In the informality of the household, she had visited K. in her dressing gown and slippers; and now she stood before him, a tragic young figure, clutching the folds of her gown across her breast.

"I worship him, K.," she said tragically. "When I see him coming, I want to get down and let him walk on me. When I see him in the operating room, cool and calm while everyone else is flustered and excited, he looks like a god."

Then, half ashamed of her outburst, she turned her back to him and stood gazing at the small coal fire. It was as well for K. that she did not see his face.

"It's real, all this?" he asked after a pause. "You're sure it's not just—glamour, Sidney?"

"It's real—terribly real." Her voice was muffled, and he knew then that she was crying.

She was mightily ashamed of it. Tears, of course, except in the privacy of one's closet, were not ethical on the street.

"Perhaps he cares very much, too." "Give me a handkerchief," said Sidney in a muffled tone, and the little scene was broken into, while K. searched through a bureau drawer. Then K. questioned her, alternately soothing and probing.

"Who else had access to the medicine closet?"

"Carlotta Harrison carried the keys, of course. I was on duty from four to six. When Carlotta left the ward, the probationer would have them."

"Have you reason to think that either one of these girls would wish you harm?"

"None whatever," began Sidney vehemently; and then, checking herself, "unless—but that's rather ridiculous."

"What is ridiculous?"

"The sometimes thought that Carlotta—but I am sure she is perfectly fair with me. Why, K., she wouldn't! It would be murder."

"Murder, of course," said K. "In intention, anyhow. Of course she didn't do it. I'm only trying to find out whose mistake it was."

way and smiled tremulously back at him. "You have done me a lot of good. You almost make me believe in myself."

"That's because I believe in you." With a quick movement that was one of her charms, Sidney suddenly closed the door and slipped back into the room. K., hearing the door close, thought she had gone, and dropped heavily into a chair.

"My best friend in all the world!" said Sidney suddenly from behind him, and, bending over, she kissed him on the cheek.

The next instant the door had closed behind her, and K. was left alone to such wretchedness and bliss as the evening brought him.

Joe Drummond came to see Sidney the next day. She would have avoided him if she could, but Mimi had ushered him up to the sewing-room boudoir before she had time to escape. She had not seen the boy for two months, and the change in him startled her. He was thinner, rather hectic, scrupulously well dressed.

"Why, Joe!" she said, and then: "Won't you sit down?"

He was still rather theatrical. He dramatized himself, as he had that night the June before when he had asked Sidney to marry him. He stood

loose. He was thin; his neck showed. "I'm just eating my heart out for you, and that's the truth. And it isn't only that. Everywhere I go, people say, 'There's the fellow Sidney Page turned down when she went into the hospital.' I've got so I keep off the Street as much as I can."

Sidney was half alarmed, half irritated. This wild, excited boy was not the doggedly faithful youth she had always known. It seemed to her that underneath his quiet manner and carefully-repressed voice there lurked something irrational, something she could not cope with. She looked up at him helplessly.

"But what do you want me to do? You—you almost frighten me." "You're going back?"

"Absolutely." "Because you love the hospital, or because you love somebody connected with the hospital?"

Sidney was thoroughly angry by this time, angry and reckless. She had come through so much that every nerve was crying in passionate protest.

"If it will make you understand things any better," she cried, "I am going back for both reasons!"

She was sorry the next moment. But her words seemed, surprisingly enough, to steady him. For the first time, he sat down.

"Then, as far as I am concerned, it's all over, is it?" "Yes, Joe. I told you that long ago."

He seemed hardly to be listening. His thoughts had ranged far ahead. Suddenly—

"You think Christine has her hands full with Palmer, don't you? Well, if you take Max Wilson, you're going to have more trouble than Christine ever dreamed of. I can tell you some things about him now that will make you think twice."

But Sidney had reached her limit. She went over and fang open the door.

"Every word that you say shows me how right I am in not marrying you, Joe," she said. "Real men do not say those things about each other under any circumstances. You're behaving like a bad boy. I don't want you to come back until you have grown up."

He was very white, but he picked up his hat and went to the door. "I guess I am crazy," he said. "I've been wanting to go away, but mother raises such a fuss—I'll not annoy you any more."

He left her standing there and ran down the stairs and out into the street. At the foot of the steps he almost collided with Doctor Ed.

"Back to see Sidney?" said Doctor Ed genially. "That's fine, Joe. I'm glad you've made it up."

The boy went blindly down the street.

CHAPTER XVII.

Winter relaxed its clutch slowly that year. March was bitterly cold; even April found the roads still frozen and the hedgerows clustered with ice. But at midday there was spring in the air. In the courtyard of the hospital, convalescents sat on the benches and watched for robins. The fountain, which had frozen out, was being repaired. Here and there on ward window sills tulips opened their gaudy petals to the sun.

Harriet had gone abroad for a flying trip in March, and came back laden with new ideas, model gowns, and fresh enthusiasm. Grace Irving, having made good during the white sales, had been sent to the spring cottages. She began to walk with her head higher. The day she sold Sidney material for a simple white gown, she was very happy. On Sidney, on K., and on Christine the winter had left its mark heavily. Christine, readjusting her life to new conditions, was graver, more thoughtful. She was alone most of the time now. Under K.'s guidance, she had given up the "Duchess" and was reading real books. She was thinking real thoughts, too, for the first time in her life.

Sidney, as tender as ever, had lost a little of the radiance from her eyes; her voice had deepened. Where she had been a pretty girl, she was now lovely. She was back in the hospital again, this time in the children's ward. K., going in one day to take Johnny Rosenfeld a basket of fruit, saw her there with a child in her arms, and a light in her eyes that he had never seen before. It hurt him, rather—things being as they were with him. When he came out he looked straight ahead.

K. had fallen into the habit, after his long walks, of dropping into Christine's little parlor for a chat before he went upstairs. Those early spring days found Harriet Kennedy busy late in the evenings, and, save for Christine and K., the house was practically deserted.

The breach between Palmer and Christine was steadily widening. She was too proud to ask him to spend more of his evenings with her. On those occasions when he reluctantly

stayed at home with her, he was so discontented that he drove her almost to distraction. Although she was convinced that he was seeing nothing of the girl who had been with him the night of the accident, she did not trust him. Not that girl, perhaps, but there were others. There would always be others.

Into Christine's little parlor, then, K. turned, one spring evening. She was reading by the lamp, and the door into the hall stood open. The little room always cheered K. Its warmth and light appealed to his esthetic sense; after the bareness of his bedroom, it spelled luxury. And perhaps, to be entirely frank, her evident pleasure in his society gratified him. Christine's small coquetry were not lost on him. The evenings with her did something to restate him in his own self-esteem. It was subtle, psychological, but also it was very human.

"Come and sit down," said Christine. "Here's a chair, and here are cigarettes and there are matches. Now!"

Behind him, Christine stood watching his head in the light of the desk lamp. "What a strong, quiet face it is," she thought. Why did she get the impression of such a tremendous reserve power in this man who was a clerk, and a clerk only? Behind him she made a quick, unconscious gesture of appeal, both hands out for an instant. She dropped them guiltily as K. turned to her.

"I wonder if you know, K.," she said, "what a lucky woman the woman will be who marries you?"

He laughed good-humoredly. "I wonder how long I could hypnotize her into thinking that."

"I've had time to do a little thinking lately," she said, without bitterness. "Palmer is away so much now, I've been looking back, wondering if I ever thought that about him. I don't believe I ever did. I wonder—"

She checked herself abruptly and sat down. After a moment: "Has it ever occurred to you how terribly mixed up things are? Take this Street, for instance. Can you think of anybody on it that—that things have gone entirely right with?"

"It's a little world of its own, of course," said K., "and it has plenty of contact points with life. But wherever one finds people, many or few, one finds all the elements that make up life—joy and sorrow, birth and death, and even tragedy. That's rather trite, isn't it?"

Christine was still pursuing her thoughts. "Men are different," she said. "To a certain extent they make their own fates. But when you think of the women on the Street—Harriet Kennedy, Sidney Page, myself, even Mrs. Rosenfeld back in the alley—somebody else molds things for us, and all we can do is to sit back and suffer. I am beginning to think the world is a terrible place, K. Why do people so often marry the wrong people? Why can't a man care for one woman and only one all his life? Why—why is it all so complicated?"

"There are men who care for only one woman all their lives." "You're that sort, aren't you?"

"I don't want to put myself on any pinnacle. If I cared enough for a woman to marry her, I'd hope to— But we are being very tragic, Christine."

"I feel tragic. There's going to be another mistake, K., unless you stop it."

He tried to lighten the conversation with a little fun. "If you're going to ask me to interfere between Mrs. McKee and the deaf-and-dumb book and insurance agent, I shall do nothing of the sort. She can both speak and hear enough for both of them."

"I mean Sidney and Max Wilson. She's mad about her, K.; and, because she's the sort she is, he'll probably be mad about her all his life, even if he marries her. But he'll not be true to her; I know the type now."

K. leaned back with a flicker of pain in his eyes. "What can I do about it?"

Astute as he was, he did not suspect that Christine was using this method to fathom his feeling for Sidney. Perhaps she hardly knew it herself.

"You might marry her yourself, K." But he had himself in hand by this time, and she learned nothing from either his voice or his eyes.

"On twenty dollars a week? And without so much as asking her consent?" He dropped his light tone. "I'm not in a position to marry anybody. Even if Sidney cared for me, which she doesn't, of course—"

"Then you don't intend to interfere? You're going to let the Street see another failure?"

Do you believe there is moral danger for the participants in the growing intimacy of the friendship between Christine and K.? Would Christine be justified in the circumstances in seeking love or its imitation elsewhere?

Playwrights, authors and poets find a deep fount of inspiration and story in the troubadour literature of the middle ages. Most famous of these tales are the French tales of the thirteenth century, and from one of them is taken the story presented today. It deals with that part of the Champagne from Soissons to Reims, where today a long line is held desperately by French and Germans, who are face to face, and in some parts almost within touch of each other.

Messire William was a loyal knight of Champagne who was honored by all men who prized truth and nobility. His fortune, however, did not equal his merit. He possessed a castle, it is true; but the only income that he had was obtained painfully in tournaments, out of the ransoms of his overthrown adversaries.

He owned only one thing that was valuable. It was his horse. Gray it was, flower-bright of coat. Never had men seen another such steed, so proud, so impetuous and yet so dainty of foot. Men near and far coveted it and offered him wealth for it, but he would not listen. Between these two, knight and horse, there was a great love as between brothers.

Poor as he was, Messire William set his heart on the daughter of the richest lord in all the Champagne. She was as good as she was beautiful, which is no scanty praise, since the minstrels all sang that she was in truth part and parcel of the loveliness of her land.

She gave her heart to the tall, splendid knight, but never could they meet. Her father kept her close, never permitting her to pass from the battlements and walled gardens. Still the knight rode to her castle every day, and every day they saw each other and talked love, though they could do it only through a gap in the masonry of a great wall.

Although he well knew the futility of it, Messire William ventured at last to ask her father for her hand. "Think you I am so besotted as to give my child to a knight who lives by play?" roared the old man. "She shall marry no beggar! I have not yet found the man, from Soissons to Reims, and from Reims to Chalons, or from the Lorraine to Germany, who is rich enough to match me! This fruit is too high for your seeking!"

"Cursed be your father's wealth!" said the knight when he saw his sweetheart again.

"I would go with you gladly, and be a beggar!" said she. "But my father is old, and prayers will not move him, for age and youth cannot understand each other. Yet I would counsel you. Have you not an uncle, fully as rich as my father? And do these two not greatly honor each other? Why do you not ride to him and ask for his intercession?"

The knight took courage and rode to his aged relative, who not only agreed to help him, but started at once, telling the knight to return to his own castle and wait for word from him.

It was an evil word that reached him after a week of anxious waiting. A friend brought him the news that his uncle had wooed indeed, but not for his nephew. He had wooed and won for himself, and the girl, locked safely within the castle, could do nothing but wring her hands.

Scarcely had the news reached the poor knight before one of the nobleman's varlets arrived to ask him for his steed. "My lord prays you," was the message, "to lead your beautiful horse to carry his daughter in honor and state to the church on her wedding morn."

"May heaven bless my wicked uncle never for this foul, treasonable deed!" lamented the knight. "He has killed me! Cain wrought no redder wrong! Yet I will send my horse gladly to her who gave me her dear love. It is the last service I can do her. Never shall I hear her sweet voice again or see her come to meet me, dainty-fair! Saddle the horse with my best gear and lead it to the most tender of maidens!"

That night the wedding company in the rich man's castle feasted and made so merry that when the warders sounded their trumpets at dawn to awaken all for the wedding journey to the church, city guests and guards were alike sleepy and before they had ridden far they were nodding in their saddles.

Even those who were detailed to guard the bride rode with closed eyes. Soon there was none to guide the bride's horse, for she rode weeping with thoughts far away, and the reins lay idle on the animal's neck.

When the procession entered a devilous forest trail, the horse, being left to itself, turned off on his own account and entered a hidden woodland path that led to Messire William's home.

The weeping bride became aware at last that she was alone; but as the horse ambled on with great gentleness, and she did not know which way to go, she permitted it to take her whither it would. Soon it stopped before a

warder ran to the knight, who was wan and broken from long hours of unavailing grief. "Oh, sir!" cried the man. "There is before the draw-bridge a most wondrous lovely woman, clad richly in scarlet and gold. Never have we seen any so slim, so dainty, so sweet! And, lord, she rides on your horse!"

The knight bounded down the stairs and through the portal. He lifted down the bride, kissing her a hundred times and more. Then he sent for a chaplain and led her to the chapel of his house where they were married forthwith.

In the meantime, there was wild trouble among the wedding party. The old lord and the old bridegroom tore their beards and laid lustily with whip and boot on the guards, who made mad clamor, blaming each other. To them at last spurred a rider sent by Messire William with this message:

"Sir, my master sends you assurance of his great friendship. He also charges me to say to his uncle, who betrayed him so shamefully, that he pardons him the more easily for the reason that your daughter has given herself to him as a gift this day."

The old lord listened with wonder and anger. But he took thought to himself, and concluded that since she was married, nothing he could do would undo it. Therefore, presently, all the company rode peacefully to the knight's castle, where the old noble embraced his undesired son-in-law with all courtesy, while the graybeard of a bridegroom who was not a bridegroom tried in vain to discover a few crumbs of comfort that might console him.

Falling in this, he went home and died, which was a favor to Messire William, since all his wealth went to the knight. And there is no troubadour in Champagne who ever has told or sung this story who was not forced to add, in accordance with the truth, that there never was a horse in all the world that was so honored and beloved as the horse that stole the bride and brought her to her bridegroom.

The famous stories of the middle ages were preserved by three agencies—the troubadours, who lived usually among noblemen, and often were poets and originators; the troubadours, who were wandering minstrels and generally recited other men's tales and verses; and the learned monks, who set the more important legends down in writing. One of the latter was a monk of Soissons, Gautier de Coinci, who did a great service by setting down tales in French instead of Latin. Shakespeare, Montaigne, Browning, Anatole France and many others have used these tales to make versions of their own.

SUNSET ON LAKE SUPERIOR

Writer Enthuses Over Beautiful Picture Painted by Old Sol at the Close of the Day.

A sunset on Lake Superior! Match it, in its resplendent beauty on a late November day, if you can. The clouds that had darkened the sun as the Transcontinental Limited sped along the precipitous shores, melted away, leaving narrow streaks, like ribbons of gray floating above the water's rim. Dappled gray clouds in masses hung to the zenith. The slowly setting sun began to paint its own heroic picture. The ribbons of clouds changed from gray to pearl, from pearl to amethyst and then to richest gold. The convoluted masses overhead vividly reflected these changes. The quiet waters of the lake shone like a mirror of polished bronze. The sun was sinking fast. While the passengers were voicing their delight, the last ray of the sun disappeared, and lake and rocky shore sank into the shadows of night. As the train climbed above the lake its waters were left out of the range of vision, but, strangely enough, the lake seemed to appear again in the distance, with low-hilled islands outlined in a faint glow of red. We discovered that what seemed to be islands were floating clouds, and what seemed to be the water in which they rested was an illusion. It was caused by the clear atmosphere lit by the gray light of fast-falling eventide. It was beautiful and impressive, but an illusion that quickly disclosed itself and melted away as the train sped on.—John A. Slicher in Leslie's.

That Settled Him.

The Husband—You're not economical.

The Wife—Well, if you don't call a woman economical who saves her wedding dress for a possible second marriage, I'd like to know what you think economy is.

Similar but Different.

"Did you get out and stretch your legs when the train stopped?" asked the passenger with the long beard.

"Same thing," rejoined the passenger with the red hair.



"I'm Just Eating My Heart Out for You."

just inside the doorway. He offered no conventional greeting whatever; but, after surveying her briefly, her black gown, the lines around her eyes: "You're not going back to that place, of course?"

"I—I haven't decided." He stared at her incredulously. "You don't mean that you are going to stand for this sort of thing? Every time some fool makes a mistake, are they going to blame it on you?"

"Please don't be theatrical. Come in and sit down. I can't talk to you if you explode like a rocket all the time."

Her matter-of-fact tone had its effect. He advanced into the room, but he still scorned a chair.

"I guess you've been wondering why you haven't heard from me," he said. "I've seen you more than you've seen me."

Sidney looked uneasy. The idea of espionage is always repugnant, and to have a rejected lover always in the offing, as it were, was disconcerting.

"I wish you would be just a little bit sensible, Joe. It's so silly of you, really. It's not because you care for me; it's really because you care for yourself."

"You can't look at me and say that, Sid."

He ran his finger around his collar as old practice; but the collar was very