



K

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Ms Rinehart is considered the American Agatha Christie. She is the author of the phrase "the butler did it." Rinehart has written hundreds of short stories, plays, travelogues and special interest articles. K is a romance set in the industrial Victorian era. When Sidney takes in a border with the initial K her life becomes entwined with the mystery surrounding K. Lies and intrigue surround Sidney.

K Details

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From Reader Review K for online ebook

Judy says

Good story -- K is living a "second" life, trying to escape from a tragedy. The life and loves of people who live on the Street encompass him and he becomes part and parcel of their lives, while he loves Sidney and she loves another. He is almost too good to be true, helping everyone with money and advice. But, it's a simple time and a good and uplifting tale.

Bill Rogers says

Sidney is a lovely young woman. She is good and pure in that over the top way you might expect in a melodrama from 1915. She is dedicated to public service. She always expects the best from people, in a way so naive I was wishing I could reach through the pages of the book to get at her for a couple of gentle swats with the cluestick. She spends a lot of time praying.

Her family needs money, so she does two things to bring in the cash. First, she brings K into the house as a lodger. Second, she goes to work as a probationer, and then a nurse, at the town hospital.

K is the second main character. He is a mysterious stranger on the run from something in his past. It might be a spoiler to say that, but not much of one, since the first thing the author Ms. Rinehart does with him is give us one of his internal monologues about how he has renounced life and how he must never forget the false name he is answering to now.

K tells himself he really should create a name to go with that initial. He never does. He is literally the Man with No Name, no personal name anyway. He never does get around to deciding what his name should be. For some reason nobody else in the book ever notices this, or if they do they don't think it odd.

This story seemed to be a combination of a romance (of sorts) and the Horatio Alger kind of tale current in those days, where if you spend enough time Working Real Hard and Praying, God will send you financial success; on the other hand, any serious moral flaw will find you out, and you'll end up poor. (Nobody ever remarks in these things how the virtuous rags-to-riches heroes and heroines always start out poor, so therefore by the logic of the story they must have been loose and evil indeed in the years before the story started. Perhaps they even tasted gin, played cards, and listened to ragtime music.) It is touching, in a way, the 1915 economic Calvinism that riches are always evidence of virtue.

It wasn't until almost the end of the book that it finally became clear it really was a mystery story too.

The story is well-written. The characters do grow and change. Good people may be too perfect, but the evil ones, even the villains of the piece, do have a chance to change and redeem themselves. The unrealistic, naive uberwholesomeness of heroes and heroines not allowed to have any flaws at all (except for one who habitually slams doors, as another character notes affectionately) and the blind faith that money comes from virtue were actually entertaining, as a window into the thoughts and literary conventions of the day.

The book is available free online in several places. The edition I read was from Project Gutenberg. Some free e-books are full of typographical errors, perhaps from bad optical character recognition, but this Gutenberg

copy was remarkably clean.

Kathy says

This romantic drama is saved by interesting characters that one comes to truly care for. The hero is rather larger than life; the heroine is sweeter than sweet. But even they have their flaws, and the antagonists have their good qualities. This story is pretty strong on the moral that "No happiness is built on a foundation of wrong." Nevertheless, all is not lost, even for the wayward. In some ways, this is a story of redemption.

cheryl menzies says

Refreshing read.

Lovely old fashioned love story. With some mystery of just who K really is. What is he hiding? Will she really marry Dr. Max? All in all enjoyable.

Marci says

I read this book about 40 years ago and reread it last week. It's something of a romantic melodrama. Set before the First World War, it concerns a young woman who decides for economic reasons to go to a hospital training school to become a nurse. Her mother and aunt have taken in a boarder at the heroine's instigation, and he, with a mystery about his past, becomes the hero of the piece.

The hero at first did not seem to have any flaws, except myopia in the romance department. However, by the end you realize he has that myopia about people in general, a tendency to see too much good in the very self-centered. In this shortcoming, he is joined by the heroine, who can't see what's wrong until the problems are under her nose.

Ultimately, this is a redemption story that allows every character, flawed or not, to undergo a level or two of redemption from the past, and the heroine certainly grows up and learns a thing or two.

The writing is good. Mary Roberts Rinehart truly understood people and described them timelessly. However, the setting is a trip back in time to when streets were cobblestones just being torn up to be paved for the first time; when a sprinkler wagon wetting the street on a hot August day was cause for almost childish happiness; when houses had no fans (let alone air conditioning), but all the doors had a transom at the top; when men's shirts had no collars and collars came highly starched; when young women wore white dresses and were all presumed innocent; when automobiles were still a little bit unusual; when a doctor did not have to go to an expensive school to practice general medicine and didn't always believe in new-fangled sterilization procedures; and when a dress designer still thought of a Paris Poiret gown [ca. 1895-1913] as all the rage.

Though the social mores and physical details have dated this novel, the characters are so fresh as to be worth revisiting.

Julia says

Masterfully-spun tale about the world of human experience -- romance, mystery, service, selfishness, shame, redemption, and the rest -- to be found in one small neighborhood. Rinehart is an expert at slow-burning suspense, and even though you feel sure things must all come out right in the end, enough goes badly wrong to make you doubt it, after all.

John says

In a small town somewhere in the USA, there is the Street -- which forms a community of mainly impoverished middle class people who struggle to make their way in the world. Into this community comes the enigmatic K. Le Moyne; we know this is a *nom de guerre* of some kind because, early on, Rinehart tells us he still hasn't decided what the "K." should stand for. He takes lodgings in the home of ineffectual seamstress Anna Page, her far more ambitious and efficient sister Harriet, and her daughter Sidney, with whom K. falls immediately in love even while realizing she will never look at him as more than a true and trusted friend. (So, you've already guessed the ending of *that* particular plot strand, haven't you?)

We soon learn that K. was previously an internationally renowned surgeon, called Edwardes. At the local hospital, where labors the highly regarded surgeon Max Wilson -- a friend of K.'s in his former life -- they still talk of the "Edwardes method" for certain tricky life-saving operations. Also working at the hospital is the pretty but spiteful nurse Carlotta Harrison, another who knew K. in his former life; she's been having an affair with Max. However, when Sidney joins the hospital staff as a trainee nurse, Max falls for her as much as this philanderer possibly could, and she likewise for him.

Just to complicate matters for K., another lodger at the Page house is newlywed Christine Howe. When, within weeks of their marriage, her wastrel husband Palmer reverts to his former wicked ways -- drinkin', gamblin', wenchin', doncha know? -- she comes to rely more and more on the sympathy and shoulder of good old Mr. K. from upstairs . . . and soon finds herself madly in love with him.

There are other plot strands -- plenty of them -- in this novel. I especially liked the one involving plain Tillie who, approaching 40 far too fast, decides to take the plunge and live in sin with the man who loves her, Mr. Schwitter, even though he's married; his wife lost her mind years ago and has been hospitalized ever since. Tillie and Schwitter start up a civilized little inn in the midst of the country; when, losing money hand over fist, Schwitter realizes that to stay in business he must start to compete with the other hostelrys in the area -- get a decent bar, open up bedrooms and not look too closely at the marital status of the couples who rent them -- there's a nice moment of irony when Tillie, appalled at the immorality, moves out to live in the barn.

According to Wikipedia, *K.* is a crime novel. Certainly there are crimes in it -- there's an attempted murder and what one might call an attempted manslaughter, plus (as is finally revealed) some manslaughters in the past, yet the only mystery element, the matter of K.'s identity, is explained early on. Really the novel is more of a soap opera than anything else.

And, as such, it's very entertaining. Rinehart is not a writer who produces memorable turns of phrase (apparently "the butler did it" was a Rinehart creation, but that's not exactly "To be or not to be"), but her

prose serves its purpose. Characterization is not her forte either, to judge by this novel (embarrassingly I can't recall if I've read anything by Rinehart before, although I've now loaded up the device thanks to Project Gutenberg!): we get a fair idea of the character of K., because we're in his head so much, but as to the others it's very much a matter of heeding Rinehart's oft-repeated descriptions; for example, we know Christine is self-centered because we're told this frequently, not because she ever behaves in a particularly self-centered way. This paucity of characterization actually works quite well for Sidney; at least for male chauvs such as *moi*, she becomes in the imagination the epitome of every hopelessly unattainable woman encountered in my youth. (Hm. Like just about *all* of them.)

K. was filmed as *K -- The Unknown* (1924), a movie that I must obviously try to track down for coverage on my *Noirish* site.

Recommended? I'm not sure, to be honest. I enjoyed reading while never being dragged entirely into its world. I admired Rinehart's progressive thinking and her willingness to portray people as they really are rather than as 1915 sensibility, still recovering from Victorian values, might have insisted they should be. (Her conclusion that Tillie and Schwitter were quite correct to take their chance at love and live together without benefit of matrimony might still be condemned by the narrow-minded today.) I'm glad I read the book; that's as much as I can say.

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This is my contribution to Rich Westwood's 1915 Book Sign-Up at his Past Offences blog.

Amanda says

Mysterious, but not a mystery

At the start, you aren't sure if you've picked a mystery or a romance. While there are questions, this is not a novel of mystery. It is a romance - and in a broad, over arching way, we know the end from the beginning.

The sub plots, however, are many. The book is engaging enough to read without being tiresome, but its easy to put down & return to later. The story plods along, much like life. Most characters make bad choices & feel the burden of those consequences.

While it has philosophical and moments of moral questioning it does not become too deep and is not stuffy.

The loose ends are tied up neatly at the end of the story, and, for some, we imagine a happily ever after.

A nice, average story.

Alana Cash says

This books was written in 1916 and it's part romance, part mystery and kept my interest throughout. It painted a picture of a "street" in an unnamed city in which there exists a cast of characters - all of them with real problems and all generally in love with the wrong person. Women are working, cars are being hired,

altho the local doctor drives a horse and buggy. There is a lot of conflict and the characters are interesting as is the time period. I don't normally read genre books, and I recommend this one. You can read it free online at publicbookshelf.com

Marla Knaack says

Wonderful story.

Here is a mystery, but not a common mystery about crime. But about a man's life. He's so mysterious, his name is just a letter. We get to take a tour of the "street", with all its faults, and all its considerations. We learn about all the people, and their thoughts and feelings, and then, we get to see them all intertwine, like lace. With K and Sidney, and Max and Dr Ed, Aunt Harriet and Sidney's mother, and how their lives all touch. And then the mystery is solved, and it's astounding and happy. I love a happy ending.

Millie Chidester says

To my recollection, this is the first book I have read by Mary Roberts Rinehart. If her other books live up to this one, I'll happily read them all. This one has mystery, pathos, humor, and a thoroughly satisfying ending.

Brynna says

Yes, it is pretty sappy on occasion, but, man, this book has great characters as well as a real vision of the role of the collective in the decisions of the individual.

There are two things that I really love about this book: the characters (generally speaking) actually talk and act like real people, and goodness is not portrayed as boring.

Leah says

A bildungsroman evocative of the works of Edna Ferber, "K" is the tale of a middle-class city neighborhood and its residents, an urban version of Grover's Corners.

We meet Sidney, a young woman who wants to be a nurse, and her family, neighbors and lodgers, among them her Aunt Harriet, who yearns to be more than a simple dressmaker; Joe, the boy who loves her; Dr. Ed, the selfless G.P. across the street, and his younger brother, Max, a handsome, philandering surgeon; her friend Christine, about to marry a wild Society youth; Tillie, the 40ish boardinghouse waitress who's sorely tempted by a life of sin; and the mysterious K., the shabby tenant who is more than he seems.

Intricate and engrossing, the novel holds one's attention to the very end.

Steve says

On The Street in a nameless town, stranger K Le Moyne takes a boarding room in the Page home. Sidney Page, the daughter of the owner, is at the cusp of becoming a woman. K is a new name for a man seeking to distance himself from his past. Sidney is striving to strike out on her own, to become a nurse of the kindest spirit. Published in 1915, it drew my attention for having been written by a mystery writer. This reflects the times, but is not really the mystery some descriptions spoke of. The mystery here is a tame one: who is K and what happened in his past?

That answer emerges slowly, in its own good time, with hints along the way. But at its heart, this is really Sidney's book, and her developing bonds with K as she embarks on a nursing career are mostly the focus. She has other romantic interests, and real life difficulties and opportunities happen for a number of characters. The two primary characters are wonderfully made, and others, Sidney's family, neighbors, peers, and romantic interests are the notably good part of the story. The writing is quite nice. My one small bit of discomfort came at the end, when K's past is fully fleshed out and a part of which didn't sit comfortably with me. All in all, a very good read, and my first taste of Rinehart has inspired me to already pick up one of her mysteries in anticipation of liking it well.

Hannah says

Well, I started in on this one thinking it was going to be a mystery, since Rinehart was best known for writing mysteries. But no...it's a small-town drama, with neighbors along the Street; the mysterious K. le Moyne, who comes as a boarder; starry-eyed young Sidney, just passing from girlhood to womanhood; a hospital and its staff; and a whole host of other many-faceted characters. It's worth the read for the characterization alone.

Not recommended for very young readers because of some frank views on marriage, fidelity, and the lack of both. It does have a strong moral message to tell.
