

Carmichael's Christmas Spirit

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Drawings by T. K. Hanna

THE bachelor apartments of Henry Carmichael long had been mildly celebrated among the many young women who counted themselves his friends. It was not the unusual luxury of the rooms, although there was quite enough of that, even for a young man with a carefully invested fortune and no real responsibilities; but Carmichael had in many ways strongly impressed upon the place his own personality. During his thirty years of life he had traveled far and in many different directions, and had met many people. Inherited wealth and position, to which he had added geography, had supplied him with numberless chance acquaintances and a few friends, and long since he had adopted the excellent practice never to keep a letter or destroy a photograph.

Thus the story of his life—it so pleased his young women friends to believe—was somewhere to be found carefully framed, and more or less carefully autographed, about the little study wherein he read the morning papers and wrote and accepted invitations to dinners. The only difficulty was to find the photograph among the many, and the variety of the subjects and their constant kaleidoscopic change from ostentatious conspicuousness to almost total eclipse added no little zest to the game. The gallery of feminine beauty covered the walls, interfered with the face of the clock on the mantel over the fireplace, cramped his writing desk, and suffocated the big center table.

There were heavily framed photographs of women in flowered brocades that looked like mezzotints, women who ruled modern society in New York and London and Paris; little photographs of young girls in simple dinner dresses or short duck skirts and sailor hats, who would rule too some day in their mothers' places; pictures of women of the Paris stage and the café concerts, signed with the most sincere expressions of regard and undying affection; little and big photographs of every kind of the present day Broadway favorites, from skittish soubrettes and smiling ingénues to hollow eyed leading women and ponderous dramatic sopranos from the Metropolitan. Mixed with this incongruous collection was here and there a picture of a handsome Englishwoman, who from her signature of one name and her coronet could easily be detected as a person of title; and the gallery even boasted of one woman who would some day, if she lived, wear a real crown.

On this particular Christmas eve Carmichael came into his study and smilingly glanced about at the array of photographic friends, and then, assuming a more serious aspect, went into the dining room and looked over the carefully arranged table. His knowing eye traveled quickly over the snow white damask, the thin tall glasses with their tapering stems, the heavy silver, and the great bunch of American beauties rising above a massive loving cup, which he himself had won at golf. With a smile of content the young man returned once more to the study, lit a cigarette, and waited.

He did not have long to wait; for as the clock chimed eight Miss Rita Maynard was shown in, and Carmichael greeted her with the effusion of a very old and admiring friend.

"Am I the very first?" she asked.

Carmichael paid no heed to her question; but took one of her hands in each of his, and, spreading them apart, looked with undisguised admiration at the broad clear brow, the crisp curling hair, the slanting eyes, the pink cheeks with their wonderful contour, the full rounded throat, and the ivory shoulders.

"Rita, you know," he said at last, dropping her hands, "it isn't right to look like that. I saw you the other night some place, and thought then that you'd hung up an entirely new record for beauty; but—really you know if I looked in my glass and saw something like that I should feel just as much pleased as if I had written a great novel or composed a national anthem."

"How about the dressmaker?" and Miss Maynard glanced with a little smile of pride down at the straight filmy white dress.

"Beautiful!" he said. "And of course that all helps; but really you oughtn't to go to a bachelor apartment looking like that; it's not safe."

Miss Maynard crossed over to the fireplace and,



"No, I Don't Mind Talking to You About Her," He Said.

resting both hands on the mantel shelf, looked at the long row of photographs.

"I'm not afraid," she said. "Indeed, Harry, I don't know any place where one feels so well chaperoned as here.—dowagers and duchesses all about one, and simple innocent little girls who ought to be in short frocks instead of ball dresses; and then all these stage ladies who would fight for you if you looked at another woman,—that is, if you are willing to believe half they write on their photographs. What became of the girl you used to have here in front of the clock? She was a very impressive blonde as I remember her; looked like a young matron. The present one seems to have rather dark hair and an angel child smirk. Who is she?"

Carmichael went over to the fireplace and took up the photograph and, looking at it carefully, drew his lips in a straight line. "That's a very nice girl," he said. "The features of the blonde matron got harder and harder every day. I don't know whether it was leaning against those jangling chimes, or just married life; but I had to sky her." He waved his hand in the direction of the panel over the doorway. "There she is between Mettie Carlisle, the lady in the bathing suit, and Lady Margaret Donald, the British personage with her hair in a mop. And she'll stay there too. Anybody that has to be hung with a stepladder has reached her final niche in my gallery. She never can be a headliner again."

"What an awful fate!" Miss Maynard sighed. "It was very good of you to ask us to-night. Who are 'us'?"

"Well, there are the Jim Hoaglands, and the Arthur Lowrys, and Ledyard and his wife, and the Henrys, and you and I—ten of us."

"My!" said Miss Maynard, "but that crowd does make one feel terribly unmarried! Every time I look about the table I shall feel that I've shirked my responsibilities."

"Not at all; I asked them on purpose. They're all married, and naturally all play bridge. After dinner I'm going to have two tables in the library, and you and I can come out here and talk it over."

"The dinner?" she asked, raising her eyebrows.

"Rita," he said, "if you look like that I'm likely to talk or rave about anything!"

"Ever see, Harry?"

"Even you, Rita, even you."

And then the other guests began to arrive, and for the time being Carmichael saw little of Miss Maynard.

"This dinner," said Carmichael when they were all seated at table, "is the result of a purely selfish idea of mine to bring a little of what is called the

Christmas spirit into a poor bachelor's apartment. I can't call it a home, because any bachelor apartment is a disgrace to the name. I suppose you good married women would have preferred a few unattached young men to chat with you, and you old men would have rather liked to sit between very foolish young girls; but I wanted only old friends and the kind who might leave a little of the aroma of home about the place after you had gone back to your Christmas trees. Rita's presence needs no excuse. She is the only *jeune fille* here; first, because she is my oldest friend, for we played together as children, and second, because she doesn't play bridge now."

"Is this a speech?" asked Hoagland. "Because if it is I should think this would be the psychological moment to drink somebody's health,—Miss Maynard's by all means preferred."

"All right," said Carmichael; "but before I conclude my rhetoric I want to warn you that you bridge players had better fix your points now, because while the dinner is to be short it will be rather rich and conducive to large stakes."

After this Carmichael gave way to the others, and the dinner passed on as happily as small, well appointed dinners among friends are apt to do. Being but a small party, the conversation was general; so that every story, even every new and old joke, had its hearers, and before the end everyone had drunk jokingly to the good health of everyone else; that is, except in the case of the toast to Carmichael. This was proposed by Rita Maynard, and perhaps it was on account of the wonderful beauty of the

girl, as she stood with her uplifted glass, or perhaps it was that in her voice and in her manner there was a certain note of sincerity; but whatever it was, the toast was quite different from the others.

"I propose," she had said, with a certain hesitation in her words, "that we drink to the good health and happiness of our host, and also to his hope that he may find a little of the Christmas spirit to-night, after we have gone. For all the kindly things he has done during his lifetime, I think he deserves it more than anyone I know."

True to the host's word, the dinner was a short one, and it was not much later than nine when the tables had been set for bridge, the game was well under way, and Miss Maynard and Carmichael had returned to the little study.

"Did you ever see the view from these windows on a winter night like this?" Carmichael asked, and pulled back the curtains. The girl crossed the room to his side, and for some moments they stood at the high French windows silently looking out on the park, a great stretch of newly fallen snow, and the trees sheathed in ice, and every twig and branch glistening in the white glare of the electric lights.

"No," she said, "I don't think I ever have. You know this is the first time I have been here this year. It's quite wonderful, isn't it? Harry, we don't see nearly enough of each other in winter."

"I know. It really seems as if we could get together only in summer, doesn't it? But I think that is usually the way with one's real friends. That was a nice little speech you made, Rita, very nice." And he dropped his hand to his side and gave her a gentle pressure. "I suppose," he continued, "if you really wanted to you could get the true Christmas spirit out there in the snow, no? Even now there may be some poor devil freezing in the park yonder, and you wouldn't have to look very far through the tenements over on the West Side to get a chance to make a hit as Santa Claus, would you?"

Miss Maynard walked over to the fire and settled back in a deep easy chair, with the tips of her satin slippers resting on the fender. "Is that your idea of the Christmas spirit?" she asked.

Carmichael still stood looking out at the snow and beating a slow tattoo on the window pane with his knuckles. "Oh, I don't know just what I do mean. I suppose the real significance of the day has all gone, so far as I am concerned; but it's left a sort of general desire to want to do something for somebody for no particular reason." The young man came over and sat on a low stool at the girl's feet, with his back to the fire.

"It's just one of those bugaboos that all we bach-