

elors fall heir to. For some reason I never can separate the idea of home and Christmas. You can hang up all the red ribboned wreaths you choose, and you can dress your married friends' trees for your married friends' children, and you can eat your married friends' Christmas dinners; but it isn't really Christmas, because it isn't really home."

Miss Maynard glanced about the room. "Some people would call this a pretty good home; and you seem to have plenty of friends," she added, nodding her head at the long row of photographs on the shelf over the fireplace.

"Those photographs? They're a bluff. You know what I mean, Rita."

"Of course I know what you mean, and I'm glad of it. Sometimes, Harry, I'm only afraid you won't feel that way about things. I know there are a lot of foolish women who make a fuss over you, and I fear sometimes you can't stand it, and that it will make you different. Are all these photographs bluffs?"

Carmichael nodded. "Pretty much. You know how it is. Men affect women so differently. There are some men, generally very fine citizens, whom women fly from, and there are others they want to fly with, and still others they want to have tea with when their husbands are down town and to give their photographs to. I'm in the last class. Then, I suppose, they have heard of my gallery of international beauties, and wish to be represented."

Miss Maynard picked up from the table at her side a large photograph of herself in a silver frame and looked at it quite impersonally. "A bluff?" she asked, holding it up so that Carmichael could see it.

"No," he said, "that is the only picture that I insist must never be moved. It's a permanent quantity,—always been in the same place for years."

"Always in the same place for years?" the girl repeated slowly. "Who changes the others, then, with so much taste, and creates all this mystery in the breasts of your young lady friends?"

"My man does all that," Carmichael answered promptly, "and it's one of his most cherished perquisites. It doesn't cost me anything, and it gives him a great deal of pleasure. He's terribly fickle, though,—he features two or three a week some weeks. And what he sees in some of them I cannot understand, and yet it seems a little familiar for me to ask him. There was a hand painted photograph of a Viennese soubrette that he was crazy about. He set her up against my ink well first, and when I threw her into the waste paper basket he fished her out and leaned her against the lamp on the table there. It lit her up like a spotlight. I hid her behind books and in closets and in every out of the way corner in the place; but the next day there she would be with her tinted beauty presiding over the dining room or the bath room or any old place, till I had to cremate her in the grate."

"It's little wonder then," said Miss Maynard, "that no one has ever been able to find the real one."

Carmichael smiled and clasped his hands about his knees. "Ah!" he repeated, "the real one, eh?"

The girl sat up straight in her chair, and in imitation of her host clasped her hands about her knees and then looked him fairly in the eyes. "Yes, tell me, please, Harry; I'm such an old friend. Which is *the* one?"

Carmichael smiled up at the girl, and then slowly pulled himself to his feet. "You don't mind if I smoke, do you?"

Miss Maynard shook her head, and the young man crossed the room to find a cigar, and then returned to his place at the fire. He took a match box from his pocket, and as he slowly lit his cigar the red light from the hearth fell full on his face.

"After all, Rita," he said, "what's the use?"

The girl impulsively put out her hand and laid it on his arm. "Why, Harry," she whispered, "I'm so sorry! I didn't understand. You know we've seen so little of each other lately. I thought they were all—you know—just bluffs." The girl tossed her head toward the pictures over the fireplace.

"Well," he said, "so they are; *the* one is the only one that isn't here. Don't you believe, Rita, that every man who writes knows one story he never writes, and every painter one picture that he would rather starve than put on canvas? I do."

"But she used to be here," he went on. "There was a little picture of her on the table over there, and another on the top of the desk, and one on the mantel, and there was a big one on the piano. Wherever you looked you could see her. She was everywhere; at least, so it seemed to me. And there was another one of her on my bureau. She looked particularly bright in that one, and sort of piquant and very cheery, and every morning when I got up I used to say good morning to her."

Miss Maynard leaned forward, resting her elbows

on her knees and holding her chin between the palms of her hands. "You knew her very well," she asked, "and for a long time?"

Carmichael nodded. "Yes, for quite a long time—too long, I suppose."

"What—what was she like, Harry? Do you mind?"

Carmichael stared at the fire and shook his head. "No, of course I don't mind," he said; "that is, to you. I like to talk about her."

For some moments he hesitated, and then went on again. "It's hard, in a way, because it's so difficult to give one an idea of personality, and that's about all that really counts, isn't it? She was very pretty too, in a way,—her expression was always changing; it seemed as if it reflected every shade of every thought and idea she had, and she certainly had wonderful thoughts and ideas. I think she had the clearest, cleanest grasp of things and the broadest and most sane philosophy of life of any woman or man I have ever known. I suppose it was because she had had a rather hard time of it, and experience had taught her much that many girls never know. She had what the artist folk call temperament too, and with her intelligence ought to have made the greatest actress of our day."

"She was on the stage?" Miss Maynard asked.

"Yes, still is."

"Isn't she clever—I mean on the stage?"

Carmichael shook his head. "No, and never will be, I imagine. With all her intelligence and good looks, she lacks the one essential thing,—the trick the actors call getting it over the footlights."

"Then why—"

"Why," interrupted Carmichael,— "why? Oh,

of their moral point of view, because I knew from everything about her that she couldn't possibly share it. And then afterward I talked to her about it, and her knowledge was just as much greater than mine as her charity was. Why, Rita, she saw people just as we would see things through that magnifying glass over there on the table. For a long time after that she used to come here in the afternoon and sit at the tea table and drink tea, and I would drink Scotch and smoke and listen to her. It was wonderful how she accepted her share of life always with a smile on her lips."

"Still," said the girl, "her share was more or less what she made it. After all, her lot might have been different; that is, if I understand you—I mean how much you cared."

"Yes, it might have been different," Carmichael said; "but she chose her failure on the stage and the hall bed room and the one dress and the one hat. I tell you, Rita, the hall bed room and the one dress have had almost as much effect on some girls' lives in this town as mothers' prayers. What do you think?"

For answer Miss Maynard sat back in the deep chair and, looking at Carmichael, slowly shook her head. "I think," she said, "there must have been some other reason. Admitting that she had the highest motives in the world, it is difficult to understand why she should have chosen the hall bed room instead of all this." The girl glanced about the room and then back at Carmichael. "Of course, Harry, if you were an ogre, it would have been different; but you are not an ogre. In fact, I understand all mothers and most daughters call you eligible. It really seems as if she might have brought herself to care a little."

"Perhaps," said Carmichael, slowly weighing his words, "she cared too much. She had an absurd idea of the world that you, for instance, belong to; probably because she knew so little of it. I think you represented to her everything that a woman ought to be,—at least the type of woman I ought to marry."

"I?"

"Yes, you. I had talked to her a lot about you, and—"

"And the one photograph," Miss Maynard interrupted, "that was never moved?"

Carmichael nodded. "I suppose so. She said that her visits here were nothing but a bundle of faded letters tied with a ribbon and hid away in the bureau drawer at the actors' boarding house,—the kind of letters that a woman marks 'Burn without opening,' and reads only when her husband is down town and she is discouraged and wants to bring on a good cry."

"And what was the end of all this? There's always an end."

"The end was that she was very ill, and I did everything that a man who had a certain amount of brains and a good deal of money could do for a woman. The fact that she was sick made it possible, where it wasn't possible before."

"And then?" the girl said.

"And then I found out, just as every man finds out when a woman he cares for is really ill. It's the only perfectly sure test I know. And when she was quite well and at work again, and her pride had come back, I asked her to tea. After tea, I told her my discovery. It was a very important one to me; but not to her, it seemed. Then I collected all her photographs, and we sat here just as you and I are sitting here to-night, and one by one I tore the photographs in two and put them in the fire and they burned up. I told her that I was a strong man, and liked a fight; but I knew when I was beaten. It was a case of marrying me, or saying good by. That evening I went out to my cottage at Rye, where I made the caretaker cook for a friend and me for two days. For those two days I did exactly what I had always read about men doing in novels and what I had seen them do on the stage. I tramped up and down and talked and raved about her to the man whom I had brought along for the purpose, and he was just as sympathetic as I knew he was going to be. At the end of two days I had exhausted myself and my friend, and I came back here to the blank spaces where her photographs used to be and to the wicker chair where she used to sit."

"That is all a year ago, and since those two days until to-night I have never spoken to anyone about her; but the blank spaces are still blank spaces, and the spirit of home which she brought here in those days is just as lacking to me as if the rooms were stripped and the packing boxes were standing in the hall."

"And you've never seen her since?"

"Yes. Several times on the stage, and once, just the other day, I met her in the street."

"Did you speak to her?"

"No; but I wanted to take her in my arms and carry her away—anywhere. There was such a tired look in her eyes, and her face was so peaked, and she seemed terribly worn and poor."

"And you didn't speak to her?"

"No; she would have preferred it that way. I know her so well, Rita."

"Perhaps—one never knows. Women have been known to change."

Carmichael looked up and smilingly shook his head. "Not this woman," he said.

"Is she playing here now?" Miss Maynard asked.

"I suppose it's absurdly curious of me; but I should

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Then He Understood and Held Out His Arms.

just because she is independent and doesn't want to admit failure. I don't think the stage meant anything to her but her rent and board; but she liked to pay for those herself, and I think the success of other women, with only half her talents, annoyed her and hurt her pride, and she had a great deal of that."

For some moments there was silence, while Carmichael twisted his cigar slowly between his lips and the girl still sat looking into the fire with her chin resting between her hands. It was she who broke the silence.

"Who were her friends?"

"I don't know. I don't know that she had any real friends. The first time I met her was at a sort of Bohemian supper, and I couldn't understand exactly why she was there at all. She worried me a good deal for a time; that is, until I got to know her. I thought at first that she must be ignorant