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ally. "I have a letter from mother to-day, telling me to invite you home for Christmas; I wrote her about you, and she—"

"It's a godsend, Keith," Jack interrupted joyously. "I have been dreading facing a Christmas alone. I have been as nearly homesick as a fellow cares to be. Tell your mother that I am delighted to accept her invitation. At Christmas one misses one's folks, you know. I never appreciated father and mother as I do now when the ocean separates us."

"And your sister; surely you miss her?" Keith questioned.

"My sister; oh, yes, Madge," Jack stammered, quite confused.

"Of course I'd give a great deal to see her."

The day before Christmas they arrived at Keith's home.

Jack was delighted with Keith's mother. She was such a loving, comfortable, sunshiny woman, that no one could feel lonely in her presence. The rest of the family were out shopping, she informed her son, then she bade him take his friend to his room.

When they had removed all traces of their journey, Keith conducted Jack downstairs to the den, saying, "They'll all be home by dinner time, any way, so we can amuse ourselves till then. Hello, there's someone, now we are not going to be long alone. Then they heard a merry voice asking, "Where's Keith, mother?"

"My youngest sister," he explained as they heard her coming towards them. Keith went forward to meet her, and

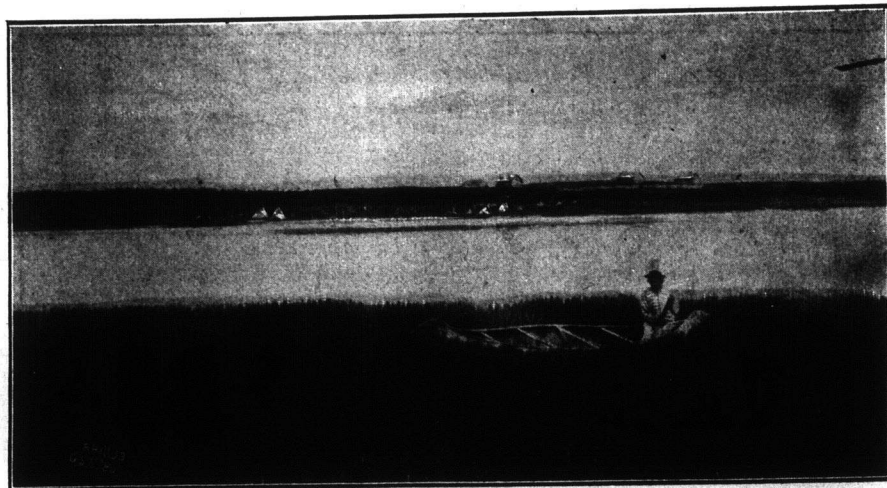
that it was meant for me. I had to lie considerably about it, but the joy I had was worth it. And to think of your listening to me, and seeing her photo there all the time—how in the world could you keep silent?"

"Well, I did feel angry and indignant that first night I went to your room and saw her photo there. Tom told me in an undertone that she was your sister, that you did not like remarks, and to keep 'mum.' He saw my look, I suppose. I felt like catching you by the throat and demanding an explanation there and then. Then I thought that possibly you had met Madge, and for her sake concluded that discretion and patience was my wisest plan. At length when I got over my feeling about it, I sought your society, determined to solve the matter. You know with what results."

"Then you invited me here simply to bring your investigations to a climax," Jack broke in hoarsely.

"No, Jack," explained Keith earnestly.

"I grew to like you immensely, old fellow, even though I could not understand things. The more I grew to like you, the more indignant I became with Madge. I felt sure you must have met and become quite intimate. I often mentioned your name in my letters to her and wondered why she was so secretive over the affair, for she is a most ingenious girl. Then I conjectured that you and she had quarreled, and that's why you called her your sister and why she was silent. I wondered why you did not confide in me. My wonder reached a climax when you accepted my invitation with such alacrity. In short, I have been in a series of wonders ever



View of Oxford House.

Jack watched him enviously as he bent his tall form to kiss her. He rose to wait an introduction. As Keith stepped back and Jack caught sight of her face, his own flushed with confusion and his self-possession was temporarily lost in embarrassment, while he murmured something incoherently indistinct.

She smiled piquantly up at him, and gave him a pleasant greeting, for he was her brother's friend. But she could not understand the burning glow in his eyes as they met hers, nor the close carressing, lingering hand-clasp. She remained only a few minutes, then excused herself to make ready for dinner. His eyes followed her as she left the room. He was unconscious of the hunger of possession and longing that deepened in them till he felt Keith's scrutinizing look fixed on him. Then pulling himself up he said with a tense voice, "You must think me a cad."

"No; not that," Keith smiled. "But I wish you would solve the riddle how is it that your sister and mine look so much alike? I see that you have never met."

Jack laughed mirthlessly as he explained, "The photo was stuck behind one of my dresser drawers; I jerked the drawer out and the photo came with it."

"Don't look so lugubrious, Jack," said Keith, laughing. "I see it all now. My brother Harry boarded in the same house last year, and must have had your room. That's how the photo got there."

"I always wanted a sister," Jack continued in a mechanical way, unheeding the explanation, "and so I appropriated yours it seems. On the back of the photo was written, 'With love from sister Madge.' So I just made believe

since I saw her photo in your room, so I determined to invite you here, and, if possible, settle the matter. If Madge were to blame, I intended standing by you and giving her some sound brotherly advice and admonition."

The anger in Jack's face was replaced by the reflection of a merry light that twinkled in his eyes. Then, catching an answering gleam of merriment in Keith's, they burst into a roar of laughter that reached Madge upstairs where she was hiding some Christmas gifts. "I like his laugh," she remarked to herself, while she smiled in sympathy. "I like his looks, too, and I believe I am going to like him some, too. Keith wrote so much about him that I seem to know him. I wonder why he looked at me so?"

When their laughter had subsided, Jack asked pleadingly, "You'll keep my secret, Keith, and give me a chance, for I cannot give Madge up without doing all in my power to win her; there is no one else, is there," he added, in a jealous afterthought.

Keith noted the omission of the word "sister." He laughed suggestively, as he answered "She is worth winning; there's nothing superficial about Madge. I'd pity the other fellow, if there were one, for I remember your savage threat of shooting anyone that would try to take 'sister' Madge' from you."

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