

evening in his room. The affair was worrying him greatly, and he could form no reason for its cause. "I did nothing to him; hang it all I wish I knew what is the matter with him."

He looked up and the laughing face of the photo caused an answering smile to some to his own. "Well, sister Madge, what would you do in a case like this?" Jack often talked to the photo. "Laugh at him and torment him half to death; that's what you would do. No one could frown long in your presence you mischievous saucy sprite."

A knock at his door interrupted his soliloquy. He was surprised on opening it to find Keith Howard smilingly awaiting admittance. Jack invited him in, wondering greatly why he had come and what had wrought the change.

"I thought I heard you talking," Howard observed, as he entered the room and sat down in the chair Jack had drawn forward for him.

"Yes, I was talking to my sister." "Your sister!" looking round the room evidently wondering where she had hidden herself.

Jack laughed at his look of bewilderment, and explained, "To my sister's photo, I should have said," looking towards it. "We hold many one-sided conversations. It helps me, too; when I feel gloomy she always laughs at me."

"Is she your only sister?"

"Yes," Jack, answered in a tone that plainly evinced that he did not wish to continue this subject.

Apparently oblivious of the note in Jack's voice, Howard questioned again, "Is she married?"

"No."

happen if she were here," Keith rejoined with a laugh.

"Sister Madge isn't a scold; she's just splendid at undersanding a fellow. The very best kind of sister a brother could have," Jack championed hotly.

"The right kind of sister is a fine thing to have," Keith answered thoughtfully.

"She will round off one's crudities, break one in, so to speak, for the matrimonial harness. My eldest sister is married; I—"

"I'd feel like shooting a fellow that would take my sister Madge from me," Jack interrupted, savagely, while his eyes glowed with a tender light as they rested upon the photo.

"It's inevitable, though; judging from her looks," Keith replied in a matter-of-fact way. "Most fellows like to see their sisters married to good men, but you seem to be a very exceptional exception."

"And I mean to remain so," Jack answered, rather shortly.

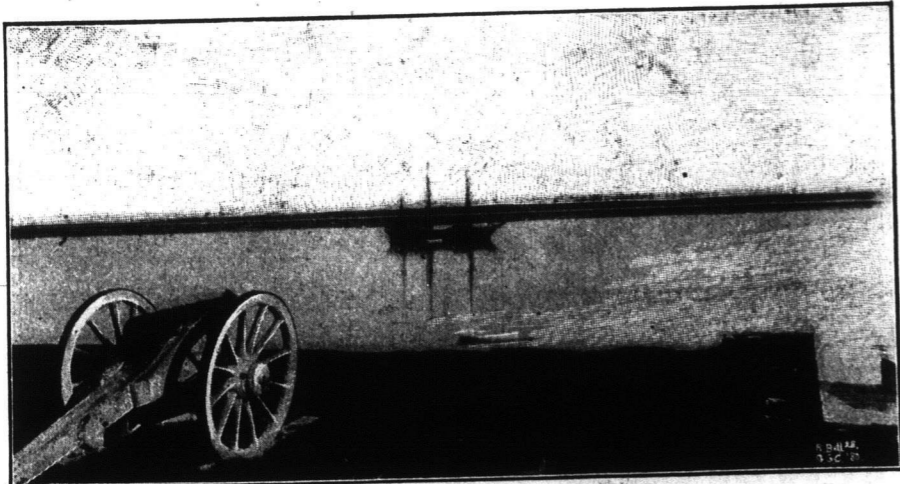
"But suppose you met some girl that you like better than your sister, what then?" Keith questioned.

"But I have no intention of doing so; Madge is first yet," Jack answered, with a finality in his voice that allowed no room for further supposing.

"Well your case is rare. Now, I am very fond of my sisters, especially the younger one; but I certainly hope to meet a girl that I will love in a dearer way than I do even her."

"I hope you may," was all Jack said in answer. And neither that evening nor on any subsequent evening could Keith lead him to speak again about his sister.

Tom and Archie sometimes talked



Hudson Bay Barque in river at York Factory.

"Is she tall like you, or small?"

"Rather tall and slight."

"Are her eyes like yours?"

"No; hers are dark brown."

"Have you any brothers?"

"No."

"I have three brothers and two sisters; so I am richer than you in family relations anyway," Howard laughed. Then continued his questions.

"Where is your home?"

"About one hundred miles from here; my parents are in Europe at present."

"Is your sister with them?"

"My sister?" Jack repeated with a start. Then, bringing himself together, he replied carelessly, "Oh, Madge; yes, of course."

"Having a sort of superficial finish to her education, I suppose," Keith Howard remarked drily, watching Jack closely.

"Superficial!" Jack echoed, indignantly. "There is nothing superficial about Madge; she goes right to the heart of things."

"Her trip will be very beneficial to her then. Is she a very good observer?"

"Excellent," Jack returned, emphatically. "Can you imagine any one with eyes like those missing anything?"

"Well, no, hardly," Keith admitted. Then added, "You seem to be very proud of her."

"You're right, I am. I would not part with that picture for a fortune."

"The picture!" queried Keith. "I'm talking about your sister."

"Oh, well, it's all the same. Her picture is an inspiration when I cannot see her. I tell her all my woes and troubles; she listens and never talks back."

"That's probably more than would

to themselves about her; but never even a hint of their talk reached Jack. The photo still remained in its first position. In fact, Tom declared that he would feel quite lonely were it removed, for it seemed as if he were meeting an old friend every time he went into Jack's room. He still persisted in his first surmise that sister Madge was some girl that Jack had fallen deeply in love with, and to prove the correctness of his surmise, said that Jack would not so much as look the second time at any other girl, whereas he used to be quite an admirer of female beauty.

Archie declared that he still was judging from the photo, advised Tom to give up surmising about it, adding philosophically, that his own love affairs were all that he could manage, and that all girls were puzzles, more or less.

As Christmas drew near, Jack became rather more lonely. He still whistled, but in a dreary, comfortless way. He often talked to Madge, confiding all his lonely feelings to her.

"He misses sister Madge," Keith Howard observed to himself, after spending the evening with Jack, and finding him very dull and quiet. "I believe I'll do it, and sift this thing to the bottom: yes, I will let the consequences be what they may."

A few evenings after this decision he sauntered into Jack's room. It had grown habitual for him now to do so. After a short time of desultory conversation, he asked quite abruptly, "Have you made any engagements for Christmas, Lennox?"

"No," Jack answered, unconsciously betraying his loneliness in his voice.

"Then I'm glad," Keith returned genially.

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