

***SAMUEL
MERWIN***



***HIS LITTLE
WORLD***

Samuel Merwin

His Little World

The Story of Hunch Badeau

EAN 8596547326755

DigiCat, 2022

Contact: DigiCat@okpublishing.info



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CHAPTER I—THE MEETING

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THE life-saving crew were giving an exhibition drill. A number of people, mostly women and children, were scattered about the beach (for since the failure of the lumber and salt, that had expanded Liddington into a city with four paved streets, the only important events were band concerts and crew drills). Four girls in white-and-pink dresses, which did not agree with their piled-up hats and fringed parasols, stood on the sand.

Hunch Badeau commanded a square-nosed lumber schooner, the *Ed. C. Dean*, which was just big enough to carry her two masts. He had come in that morning with a picked-up cargo of merchandise from Milwaukee, unloaded it, and now leaving Billy, the boy, in charge of the schooner, was lounging up the beach with Bruce Considine, who made up the rest of the crew. Hunch had been christened John, after a long line of John, and, earlier, Jean Badeau, the first of whom had probably appeared on the Lakes in a birch canoe. Hunch showed few traces of his ancestry, excepting his black hair and an easily aroused flash in his eyes. He was big, and he stooped a little, as if doorways and cabin ceilings were too low for him.

"There she is," said Bruce, pointing toward the white-and-pink group. "That's her—the little one. She ain't bigger 'n a minute."

Badeau looked critically at the group, then walked toward them.

"Hold on a minute, Hunch."

"What for? Come along. I ain't seen a girl in weeks."

"Don't go over yet. I ain't told her about you."

"That's nothing. I guess she knows who I am."

They stood near the girls, but fixed their eyes on the drill. After a moment, Bruce glanced around at the little girl. She threw him a smile, and he said, "Hello, Marne."

"Her father's boss of the bridge gang on the Pere Marquette," he confided to Badeau, who was edging closer to the group.

"Wonder if they're going to do the upset drill," Badeau said, in a loud voice.

The girls giggled, and one said boldly, "Won't it be fun if they upset the boat?" After this sign of favor they blushed, Then for several minutes each party carried on a conversation intended for the ears of the other, meanwhile drawing nearer. At length Considine found himself at Mamie's side. Her elbow brushed against his.

"Who's your friend?" she asked. Considine stepped back, thus including Badeau in the group.

"Hunch Badeau," he said, "shake hands with Marne Banks."

Mamie introduced them to the other girls, who were still giggling. Then Badeau said to Mamie:

"Let's get over to the pier before the crowd gets all the good places."

The party moved slowly toward the life-saving station, Considine walking behind with the other three girls, and trying to show his freedom from jealousy by jostling them playfully off the sidewalk.

It took Badeau and Mamie some time to get into a conversation. Then they talked about Considine.



IT TOOK SOME TIME TO GET INTO A CONVERSATION

"He's a fine fellow," said Badeau. "Best man I ever had. Reg'lar as New Years." This was not entirely true, but it seemed a nice thing to say. He saw that it pleased her, so he went on, with a wink, "You like him pretty well, don't you?"

"Oh, I don't know's I do."

"Well, I guess he likes you, anyhow."

"Oh, no, he don't."

"How do you know he don't?"

"'Cause I don't care one way or t' other."

"You don't, eh?"

"No, I don't."

"Well, I guess there's lots of girls that does."

"Oh, I s'pose he's all right."

After a silence Mamie glanced shyly up at him.

"Say, you're a friend of his, ain't you? You won't tell him what I say?"

"Should say not!" said Badeau, feeling in advance a little embarrassed. Mamie poked at the sand with her parasol as they walked.

"Well—folks say he drinks."

"Who says so?"

"Jess Bartlett's brother told Jess." Badeau's eyes flashed.

"He's a dam' liar!"

"O—oh," faltered Mamie.

There was a long silence. Then Badeau said, "Excuse me," and looked out over the water with a scared face. The girls who had played a part in his life had not objected to profanity. When he had gathered enough courage to look again at her, there was an expression on her face that

puzzled him. He did not know that he had pleased as well as startled her. Soon they were at the pier and were talking more easily. To sit by her, and to watch her bright eyes and her fresh coloring, pleased Hunch in a way that he did not try to understand. He had such a good time that he forgot Bruce, who was struggling to make conversation with the other girls. When at last he went back to the schooner, he was thoughtful. She seemed too good for Bruce.

In the afternoon Badeau took on a short cargo of hemlock cribbing, and worked laboriously out of the sand-locked harbor and through the channel between the long breakwaters. He could not afford a tug.

The next morning they lay at the wharf in Manitowoc. They ate their supper in silence, the three of them about the table in the dirty cabin. When they had finished, and Billy was cleaning up the dishes, Badeau lighted his pipe and stretched out in his bunk. Considine was changing his clothes.

"Where're you going?"

"There's a dance up at the hall."

"You going?"

"Thought I might."

"Say, Bruce, you got to quit drinking."

"Who's drinking?"

"That's all right, you got to quit, right now. If you come back to-night with a drop aboard, I'll knock it out of you."

Considine hurried out nervously.

From ten till two that night Badeau sat on the rail and scanned the road across the wharf. Billy was below asleep. It was a little after two when three figures came down the

street, arm in arm, singing a song that could never be popular except in a lumber region. They stood on the wharf for a long time, hugging one another and shaking hands. Then one stumbled toward the schooner, calling out, "Goo' night! Goo' night!" He came slowly across the wharf. He knew from past experience the probability of a plunge overboard unless he aimed carefully at the schooner.

A dark figure sat on the rail.

"Goo' night," said Considine. He skillfully lowered himself to the deck. "Say, ol' man, ain' mad, are you? Don' be mad." He tried to touch Badeau's shoulder, but missed it. Hunch rose, gripped his arm, and jerked him clear of the deck. Considine fell on his back and looked up vaguely. Then Hunch hammered him until he showed signs of returning to his senses, and finished him off with a bucket of water. At last, Considine, limp and crushed, sat on the cabin roof and breathed remorse.

"That's all right," said Hunch. "Told you I'd knock it out of you, and I'll do it again, too. This is where you quit drinking. Understand?" And he knocked him down the gangway, and sat out on the deck for a long time alone. He was thinking, not of Bruce, but of the girl with the blue eyes, who was startled when he swore.



CHAPTER II—ON THE BEACH

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AT Manitowoc they picked up a load of laths and shingles, consigned to Grand Haven, and from there they went down to St. Joe, so that it was nearly a week before they returned to Liddington. During this time Bruce slunk about, working hard and drinking water.

On Saturday they lay ten miles off Liddington in a hazy calm. Billy, who was usually overworked as a matter of course, stretched out forward and went to sleep on the deck. Badeau sat on the rail by the wheel, grumbling—as a man will who has no resources within himself to turn idle hours to account. Bruce whittled a shingle. After a long time Badeau spoke.

“Look here, Bruce. What you going to do about that girl?”

“I dunno.”

“Don't be a fool. Do you want to marry her?”

“She wouldn't have me.”

“Say, look here. Why don't you ask her?”

“I've been thinking, Hunch—”

“We're going to lie up to-morrow.”

“I can't do it soon as that.”

“‘Course you can.”

Bruce hesitated, and snapped shavings with his thumb.

“Say, Hunch, you know more about girls 'n I do. Don't you s'pose you could kind of—talk to her just a little—”

“No, I couldn't. You go round there to-morrow, understand.”