

# The Story of Hunch Badeau.

BY SAMUEL MERWIN.

### CHAPTER I.

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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 mill that had expanded Manitowish 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 two-plank sidewalk.

Hunch Badeau commanded a square-nosed lumber schooner, the Ed. C. Dean, just big enough to support her two masts. He had come in that morning with a picked up cargo of merchandise from Milwaukee, uncrushed and uncracked, and was waiting in charge of the schooner when he returned to 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 rest 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 a mite."

Badeau looked critically at the group and 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, Mamie."

"Her father's boss of the bridge gang on the Pore Marquette," he confided to Badeau, who was leaning down to the group.

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

The girls giggled and one said loudly: "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 Mamie Banks."

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

"Let's go over to the dock before the crowd gets all the seats."

The party moved slowly to the station. Considine walking behind with the freedom of other 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.

"He's a fine fellow," said Badeau. "Best man I ever had. Regular as New Year's."

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 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 will you?"

"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."

"Jess Bartlett's brother told Jess."

Badeau's eyes flashed.

"He's a d—m liar."

"Oh, Oh!" faltered Mamie.

There was a long silence. Then Badeau said: "Excuse me," and looked out over the water with a seared face. The girls, who had played a part in his life, had not objected to profanity. When he gathered enough courage to look again at her there was an expression on her face that puzzled him. In the afternoon Badeau took on a short cargo of hemlock cribbing and worked laboriously out of the sandlocked harbor and through the channel between the breakwaters. He could not afford a tug.

The next day they lay at the dock in Manitowish. They ate their greasy supper in silence, the three of them about the dirty table in the 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."

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"Who's drinking?"

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

"Considine hurried out nervously. From 10 till 2 that night Badeau sat on the rail and scanned the road across the dock. Billy was asleep below. It was a little after 2 when three figures came down the street, arm in arm, singing a song that could never be popular except in a "lumber country." They stood on a dock for a long time hugging one another and shaking hands. Then one stumbled toward the schooner, calling out: "Go, go, night! Go, go, night!"

He came slowly across the dock. 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.

"Go, go, night," said Considine. He skillfully lowered himself to the deck. "Say, ol' man—ain't mad, are you? Don't be

lighted the lamp. Bruce was grinning. After putting about the table he came over to Hunch's bunk and stood looking down at him. Then he laughed out loud and dug his fingers into Hunch's ribs.

"Get out of here!" Hunch growled.

"Say, Hunch, wake up! It's all right. We're going to be married next month."

"Glad to hear it," said Hunch drowsily. Then he rolled over, feeling less enthusiastic than he had expected. Bruce whistled while he was undressing and played catch with one of his shoes. Hunch could hear him chuckling after he got to bed and the light was out.

After that whenever they touched at a city Bruce would hurry up to the pasture and would usually have on his return a perfume letter addressed in a slanting hand. He carried these in his pocket and read them frequently. His spare time was spent in writing replies with a stubby, chewed pencil. Hunch watched him grimly.

Ten days before the wedding they were lying at Manitowish, waiting for a load of salt. Bruce had been growing more restless and absent-minded. The fault grew unchecked because an instinctive business in Hunch held back the proof that would ordinarily have followed slipshod work. But about the time of the Manitowish trip Bruce appeared in a new light. He was growing self-confident and independent. This old weakness was giving place to a certain animal pride.

The last night at Manitowish Bruce went uptown to buy a present for Mamie. He met an old friend on the street and told

him of his luck. This called for congratulations and in the confidence of his new strength Bruce followed his friend through a swinging saloon door. He returned at 11 o'clock. Hunch was in the cabin wrestling with his accounts.

Bruce came slowly down the steps and balanced carefully at the bottom.

"Hello, Hunch," he said shyly.

Badeau looked up. Bruce walked across the cabin and sat on his bunk, holding his head erect and looking straight before him.

"Where you been?"

"See a fren'."

Badeau looked at him. Bruce grew so nervous that he forgot his caution.

"What's matter? What you looking me like that for? You're fren' of mine, Hunch. Shake hands, ol' man, shake—"

Badeau struck him without a word. Bruce showed light and in a moment they were rolling about the floor. Billy, up forward, heard the noise and, tiptoeing along the deck in his underclothes, peered down the open gangway. He saw Bruce, his face red with drink and rage, break away from Badeau and seize a knife from the rack on the bulkhead. Badeau sprang forward. The table was jammed into the stove. Then the light went out. There was a fall, then a silence. Billy groped cautiously down the gangway.

"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 kicked him down the gangway and sat out on the dock 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.

At Manitowish they picked up a load of lumber 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 Manitowish. During this time Bruce slunk about, working hard and drinking water. Badeau himself drank nothing on this trip.

On Saturday they lay ten miles off Manitowish in a hazy canal. 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 grinning, as a man will who has no remorse 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?"

"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?"

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"Course you can."

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"No, I couldn't. You go round there tomorrow, understand?"

"I ain't going to do that, Hunch—"

"You tell me you ain't and I'll break your head," Badeau stood over Bruce, who was fumbling with his knife. "Who's captain of this schooner, you or me? When I say you got to do it it ain't none of your business whether you want to or not, understand?"

Toward noon on Sunday they slid in between the breakwaters and beat across the harbor to the dock. Badeau kept a close watch on Bruce, confining him to the schooner all day. At dusk, dressed in his best, including a rhinestone stud, Bruce started out. Hunch had supervised every detail of the toilet and had forced on Bruce his own red tie, which he preferred to Bruce's checked one. Now he walked stately alone.

Mamie lived in a cottage a short distance from the freight yard. A rod from the gate Bruce rebelled, but Hunch gripped his arm and marched him up the steps. Then he left him and stood outside the fence. Bruce laid his hand on the bell knob, but before ringing looked wildly around and started to tiptoe away. Hunch made a motion and he turned back and rang. The door opened and he disappeared within. Hunch sat on the horse block.

Half an hour later the door opened. Hunch retreated across the street. Bruce and Mamie came out and walked slowly arm in arm toward the lake. Hunch stood after, keeping in the shadows.

They walked across the beach and sat on the sand. Hunch looked over the ground and making sure that they could not get away without his knowledge he went back up the beach to the end of the sidewalk and paced nervously up and down for an hour.

Then he slipped behind the willows and looked again. He saw first a single shadow on the sand, then two people who were lost to all the material and earthly things of this life. They sat in stony silence, her head pillowed on his shoulder, his arm a black stripe across the back of her pink shirtwaist. He looked swiftly back to the schooner.

He was in the bunk pretending to be asleep when Bruce came stamping down the steps into the cabin. He watched Bruce as

he lighted the lamp. Bruce was grinning. After putting about the table he came over to Hunch's bunk and stood looking down at him. Then he laughed out loud and dug his fingers into Hunch's ribs.

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"Say, Hunch, wake up! It's all right. We're going to be married next month."

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