

The Canadianizing of Sam MacPhail

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By ROBERT WATSON

Author of 'My Brave and Gallant Gentleman,' 'The Girl of O. K. Valley.'

No. 6—SAM GOES TO A CANADIAN PICNIC.

One evening, on passing through the hallway, I noticed on the rack the usual Old Country letter, in girlish handwriting, waiting for Sam.

"Another from Maggie," I thought, as I continued upstairs.

Shortly afterwards, Sam came in, whistling cheerfully. He took down his mail, bounded upstairs three at a time and bundled into his room, slamming the door behind him.

An hour later, as I was going out again, I passed Sam on the landing. I gave him the usual merry greeting, but he did not seem to hear me. I looked at him. He turned away his head, but not quickly enough to hide the solemn face he had and the big tears that were rolling down his cheeks.

"I hope you haven't received bad news, Sam," I said sympathetically.

"Oh, no!" he replied, without any attempt to enlighten me. I wished him 'good evening' and went out.

For days after that, Sam went about without saying a word to any of us. He just brooded by himself in his bedroom and went out in the evenings for long, solitary walks.

We knew it could not be business that was worrying him, for he had been making quicker progress that way than we had expected. He had got a start some time previously as extra help in a wholesale warehouse in the grocery trade and lately he had been taken on to the permanent staff.

After finding out that the photograph of the young lady that had stood on Sam's bureau was no longer there, Jim, by dint of much investigation, discovered that when Sam had been at home there had been a rival in the game for the affections of this lass. When Sam left for Canada, it had become the old story, 'Out of sight, out of mind,' and the rival had won out.

"Say," remarked Jim to me, "we've just got to get Sam out of those doldrums. It's going to queer him completely. It'll interfere with his work before long. He mopes and broods in that bedroom like a lovesick Romeo. He is living in the past,—in Auchtertory. He's got to be made quit it,—that's all."

I agreed with Jim; but the trouble was to find a way of getting Sam to quit it.

The following Saturday afternoon brought the remedy, quite unexpectedly.

We were sitting on the sands at the Bay. We had had a swim and a frolic and were lazily enjoying the kaleidoscopic view of mixed-bathers and sunshine-baskers who were moving in health and gaiety around us.

Three young ladies, in bathing costumes,—acquaintances of ours,—came over and sat down beside us.

"Say, boys," said one of them, "there is a holiday Monday week. We are having a good old launch party up the Sound and we would like you to come. All the crowd is coming along. It is on the usual terms, the boys pay the hire of the launch and we bring the grub. Can you come?"

"You bet we can," replied Jim, "if only you will allow me to bring my cousin. He has never been on an excursion of this kind and needs drawing out."

"Sure! Bring him along. We'll be tickled to.... I mean, we'll be delighted," laughingly answered Edna Craney, a bright, vivacious little lady,—Canadian born and prairie bred; the consternation of all the love-sick young men in the coterie of which she was an important part.

We had great difficulty in persuading Sam to accompany us and we had still greater difficulty in inducing him to don a white sweater, white canvas shoes and a white, felt hat. In fact, when we were half way toward the tram-car, which was to take us to the wharf, he ran back to the house, threw the white felt hat into a corner and returned to us wearing his broad checked cap; a most incongruous combination, but one from which wild horses could not have torn him.

At the wharf there were merriment and badinage. Sam was introduced all round, but, as we expected, the impression he made generally was decidedly unfavourable.

To a great extent, he had himself to blame; for, on account of his inborn bashfulness, he made no attempt to be agreeable or communicative.

Some of the girls glanced at him on the sly, then tittered. The boys made no bones about asking us where we resurrected him from and how much he cost wholesale.

Jim and I were glad when we got him safely aboard, for we had been dreading Sam would stampede and run off home at any moment.

Little Edna Craney sat down beside him on the deck and tried to draw him. His answers were in monosyllables. We could see that he was in an agony of ill-ease.

As the launch throbbed its way through the Narrows, along the North Shore, past Point Atkinson and up the Sound, Edna renewed her endeavours again and again. With her persistence she achieved astonishing results. Sam actually smiled several times. He even returned her look once, although he turned his head away again quickly and blushed at his daring.

Several of Edna's admirers, anxious to bask in the brightness of her smiles, tried to create a conversation around her, but she would have none of it.

In the happiness aboard, in the pleasure of the trip and in the fascination of the chatter in which I became involved, I forgot Sam, until we were nearing our destination; when his merry, unrestrained laugh caused me to look in surprise in his direction.

There he was,—apparently at his ease, lost to his surroundings and listening in genuine amusement at the humours of the vivacious Edna. I touched Jim with my foot and he nudged me in return, winking and wagging his head in Sam's direction, as if to say:

"Doesn't that beat all?"

Going up the landing stage, toward the orchard where we had arranged to have our lunch, Sam carried Edna's basket as gingerly as if he were carrying her silver purse by its delicate chain.

In the preparation of the lunch, Sam unpacked the dishes, Sam gathered the kindling wood, Sam tended the fire. He worked so hard and so conscientiously that it was with difficulty any of the rest of us could find anything to do.

When he was busy at it, Jim and I got into conversation with Edna.

"Say, Edna," put in Jim, "you're just a peach. It's the de-centest thing I've ever seen, your making up to Sam this way. Not one girl in a dozen would be so thoughtful and considerate. It's Sam's first outing, you know, and he's a bit awkward."

She turned on us; a momentary fire in her eyes.

"Look here, mister man,—don't you think for a second that I am making up to him because no one else is or because I'm sorry for him. Let me tell you this,—he's the pick of