

The Big Muskeg

by VICTOR ROUSSEAU

Illustrations by R.H. Livingstone

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"MOLLY, DEAR!"

SYNOPSIS.—Looking over Big Muskeg, a seemingly impassable swamp in the path of the Missisquoi railroad, Joe Bostock, builder of the line, and Wilton Carruthers, chief of engineers, are considering the difficulties. A rifle shot instantly kills Bostock and breaks Carruthers' arm. Handicapped as he is, Carruthers determines to carry the body to a station of the Hudson's Bay company, where McDonald is the factor. McDonald's daughter, Molly, sees Carruthers struggling in the muskeg and drags him from the swamp, with his burden. Unaccountably, her father objects to her saving Carruthers. Weakened by his wound and exertions, Carruthers is disturbed by the appearance of Tom Bowyer, Bostock's business rival and personal enemy. Bowyer insults Molly, and Carruthers strikes him. After Bowyer leaves, Carruthers declares his love for Molly. She promises to be his wife.

CHAPTER II—Continued.

His eyes were suffused with red and his face twisted with passion. It was evident that he had seen the rescue from his window above and had known what Molly was doing.

He dragged himself past her without a word and looked in at Wilton, lying unconscious on the bed.

"I saw you bring him in, Molly," he mumbled thickly. "Ye can't fool me with tricks like that. It's a trick that ye've thought of between ye. Ye'll cast him out again, ay?"—his voice vibrated with fury—"ye'll cast him out into the snow, or ye're no longer daughter of mine."

Molly caught at her father's arm. "You don't know what you are saying!" she cried. "He has been shot. And Joe Bostock is dead. He's lying dead without. There's blood on his breast. There has been a dreadful accident."

He grasped her fiercely by the wrist. "Joe Bostock dead!" he shouted. "Who killed him?"

"I don't know, Mr. Carruthers was carrying his body and got trapped in the muskeg. I saved him."

"Ay, one can see that," answered McDonald with slow malice. "Ye've brought more trouble on me. The body shall not lie in this house, nor will Carruthers' neither. Mark me, lass! Ye'll put him out in the snow to keep Joe Bostock company, or ye're no daughter of mine."

"You're mad!" flashed Molly indignantly. With a swift impulse she ran to the door and opened it. A gust of wind blew a whirl of snow into the store. To Molly's excited brain it seemed to assume the momentary form of a fantasmal figure as it wreathed itself about the factor. He uttered a cry and staggered back, clutching at the edge of the counter.

"Will you let a dead man lie there, out in the snow?" cried Molly fiercely, stretching out her hand toward Joe's frozen body. "Do you think Wilton Carruthers shall be flung out there to freeze to death beside him? Why, it would be murder—and on your head!"

"Perhaps it was the remembrance of the past that checked the factor in his fury and brought back sanity to his mind. For a moment he stared at Joe's dead face, then raised his eyes to Molly's. And then, mumbling and clutching at the counter edge, he turned and began to drag himself upstairs."

CHAPTER III

Bowyer Comes—and Goes.

Wilton would not remain in bed longer than two days. His hands had not suffered much, but his feet were badly inflamed and swollen, and his arm would take weeks to mend. But he could not rest, and insisted that he must return, although it was clearly evident that he was in no condition to travel.

Molly almost cried with vexation and alarm as she found that his determination was unshakable. By the strongest persuasion she induced him to remain over the Sunday.

As for McDonald, he sulked in his bed and said nothing.

Wilton had recovered consciousness late on the afternoon of his rescue. That same evening his own sleigh had appeared at the portage, with the two halfbreeds. Weak as he was, Wilton insisted on seeing them.

He was convinced that one of the men had fired the shot by accident, and had expected both of them to take fright and vanish with the sleigh into the wilds. He was startled by their protestations of ignorance. They swore that neither of them had left the camp until the afternoon, and persisted in their statement that they had not heard the discharge of the rifle.

Following up their employers, they had discovered bloodstains on the underbrush, according to their story. They had picked up Wilton's tracks

from the lower slopes of the ridge to the edge of Big Muskeg, and had followed them across the portage to the factor's store, where they had learned for the first time what had happened.

Their story staggered Wilton. On the face of it, it seemed an impossibility, for no one else could have fired the shot. Yet, had either of the men done so, it was the least likely thing that he would have returned to brazen out a concocted tale.

Wilton was too weak to cross-question them; he resolved, however, that the matter should be probed to the bottom, and meanwhile decided to abstain from arousing their suspicions of his doubts.

It was on the Sunday afternoon that, lying on his bed, on which Molly had insisted, he saw through the window a sleigh approaching the store. He recognized the two men who walked with the driver as Tom Bowyer and Lee Chambers, the latter a constructional engineer who had once been employed by Joe Bostock, but had left him for the New Northern.

He wondered what Tom Bowyer's errand was. He suspected that, learning of their journey, Bowyer had come to spy out the progress of the Missisquoi.

He was in no mood to welcome either him or Chambers, who was suspected of having betrayed a good many of the Missisquoi secrets to the New Northern.

He decided to stay where he was, unless Bowyer showed signs of remaining. But suddenly an exclamation of anger from Molly brought him sharply to his feet and into the store.

Bowyer had his arm round her and was trying to draw her toward him. Chambers, at his side, a small man with a sharp, hawk-like face, was sniggering at the scene. Wilton's advent was like a thunderclap to the pair.

In his flannel shirt and trousers, with his left arm slung to his neck, Wilton yet looked so menacing that Bowyer released Molly at once and put himself into an instinctive attitude of self-defence.

He was a man of about five and forty, red-faced, with red, thinning hair, gray over the temples, and the bold, staring gaze that falsely passes for candor, which some rogues acquire in place of the furtiveness of weaker souls—such as Lee Chambers.

Bowyer stared, and suddenly he recognized his man.

"Why, it's Will Carruthers!" he exclaimed with an affectation of joviality. "How'd you hurt your arm, Will?"

Molly came quickly between the two men.

"You'll—you'll perhaps realize that this isn't Winnipeg!" stuttered Wilton inaptly enough. He was quicker with his fists than with his tongue.

"By George, it isn't!" cried Bowyer in cordial agreement. "I seem to have put my foot in it as usual. Your pardon, Miss Molly. That'll meet the bill, Will?" he continued, keeping up his pretense of jolliness.

Wilton gulped. Tom's eyes moved swiftly from his face to the girl's.

"We're just in to have a look around," continued Bowyer. "Not much construction being done this weather. I suppose you might think I've come to spy out the Missisquoi land. Well, you'd be right if you did, Will. What's this story about coal deposits on your property? But perhaps that's what the lawyers call a leading question, eh?"

All the while that he joked he fixed Wilton with his staring gaze. And Wilton found himself wondering how much Tom Bowyer knew.

The man was as sly as a fox, for all his effrontery, and that was his strength. He gave the impression of being one kind of rogue, whereas he was quite another, as many had discovered to their cost. There were few more resourceful and cold-blooded men, even in the Prairie city.

"I heard you and Joe had come up," continued Bowyer. "So I dropped in to have a chat with him, though it's taken me fifteen miles off my road. Planned to ask him to sell out his valuable holdings, maybe."

Molly, who was standing behind Bowyer, looked earnestly at Wilton. He dared not signal to her, but he caught the answering message in her eyes, as if telepathically conveyed. "I won't tell him," she meant to say. Wilton's heart went out in intense gratitude. It would have been unbearable to have had to tell Bowyer that Joe was lying behind that thin partition of pine. It would have been blasphemy to have let Bowyer's gloating eyes fix themselves upon poor Joe's body.

"You've had a long drive for nothing, then," said Wilton curtly. "Mr. Bostock isn't here."

"I'll say good-morning to the factor, anyway."

"No, you won't," answered Wilton. "Mr. McDonald is too ill to be seen."

"My father has had a stroke," said Molly, taking Wilton's cue.

Bowyer stared at her and, as she spoke, they heard the factor's voice above, raised in irritable inquiry.

"Mr. McDonald's mind is affected," said Wilton. "He cannot see you. I am sorry, Mr. Bowyer. I am speaking for Miss McDonald."

Bowyer grinned viciously. "Well, Lee, I guess we'd better have the dogs harnessed," he said.

Lee Chambers went out. Wilton wondered whether the two suspected Joe's presence in the building. A moment later Bowyer turned to him.

"You're next to Joe Bostock, Will," he said in his smooth voice. "So, as Joe isn't here, apparently, I'd like to have a word or two with you. You'll pass it on to him, eh?"

Without waiting for Wilton's reply, he walked toward the room at the back of the store.

"I want the Missisquoi, Carruthers," he began, entering, and turning round and facing Wilton. "I guess I made a mistake in letting that bill through the legislature. I'm looking ahead. Some day—not in our time, maybe, but some day—these branch lines will have a value. I always meant to have it."

"It hurts my reputation to have this dinky concern of Joe's hanging on to me. But I guessed Joe couldn't raise the money, and that I'd get it cheap some day."

"Well, I was right. You can't cross Big Muskeg, and you haven't the money to loop it. Tell Joe I'm open to terms. And say I'm going to have them. Tell him he won't live forever—heaps of men forget that—and ask him who in thunder will go ahead on the Missisquoi when Joe Bostock's gone!"

He could not have flicked Wilton on the raw more surely if he had known Joe was dead. The reference was like a new stab in his wound. And Wilton had the momentary impression that Bowyer did know of Joe's death and was playing with him.

"You be d—d!" he shouted, unleashing his suppressed anger. "That's my message to you, and that's Joe Bostock's. You'll never get your fingers in the Missisquoi. No! That's all—just that—no!"

An ugly sneer flitted across Bowyer's face. "Seems to me you're speaking for a good many people today, Carruthers!" he shouted angrily, shaking his fist in Wilton's face. "First it was for Miss McDonald, and now it's for Joe Bostock. Though, maybe, you have the right to speak for both of them, judging from appearances." And he added a foul insult, half viciously, half jocosely.

He got no further, for Wilton's fist shot out and landed fairly on



He Got No Further, for Wilton's Fist Shot Out and Landed Fairly on Bowyer's Mouth.

Bowyer's mouth. Wilton put all the strength he could muster into the blow. Tom Bowyer, taken by surprise, stumbled and fell. For a moment he sat upon the floor, looking up at Wilton in stupefaction. Then he leaped to his feet and ran at him, his fists whirling. But before he could strike him Molly came running in, followed by Lee Chambers. She sprang between them.

"You coward!" she cried. "Are you going to strike Mr. Carruthers in that condition? You coward, Tom Bowyer!"

"He struck me," yelled Bowyer in fury. "He's the coward, not I. Wait till he gets well! Just wait! I'll fix you, Carruthers!"

He glared about him in an evil rage, and then, without a word, pushed past Molly and strode from the store, with Chambers at his heels. A few minutes later the sleigh was whirling back along the southward road toward Cold Junction, the nearest point of the New Northern.

Wilton groaned with pain in his broken arm, caused by the twist of his instant as he delivered the blow. For an instant the room swam about him. Then the scene cleared, and Molly was holding him.

Her eyes, fixed on his, were filled with pity, and a maternal yearning over him that touched him unexpectably. Her face was very near his own. Wilton realized of a sudden what he had known in a dim way even before his fourth arrival at the portage—that Molly McDonald was the one girl in the world for him.

He drew her to him and bent his lips to hers. Then, because he was not very well versed in many things of the world, in spite of his thirty

years, he looked as if he had committed an unpardonable insult. But Molly opened her shut lids, and the eyes that smiled into Wilton's did not show signs of anger, nor even of surprise.

"This isn't Winnipeg, Will," she said, with a little happy catch in her voice.

The marvel of their love transfigured them in each other's sight. They were hardly aware of Bowyer's departure. It was not until Molly realized that there was the supper to prepare that she became practical once more.

"Why must you go tomorrow?" she asked, wistfully. "A message could be sent to Kitty—"

"It's more than that, Molly," said Wilton. "It's the line itself—Joe's work—that is at stake, and I've got to be at the shareholders' meeting on Monday morning. You see, it's this way," he went on to explain.

"We laid out our route to cross Big Muskeg at this point, and miles have been completed. But our surveyors were either too optimistic or had been bought by Bowyer. We found, when it was too late to change our plans, that Big Muskeg was a harder proposition than anyone had suspected. There's forty feet and more of quick-mud where we believed bed-rock to exist a few feet down. The records lied. And you can't lay a permanent way upon mud."

"The shareholders are frightened, and Phayre, of the Bank of New North Manitoba, who is an influential one, and represents Bowyer, has had the tip from him to make trouble. Bowyer didn't want the line till the transcontinental route was shifted northward. Now he does, partly because we shall ultimately link up with it and become a valuable property. And I think he suspects that there's something in our territory worth the developing."

"The plan is to refer the situation to a commission of engineers who, of course, would be largely in Bowyer's pay, and who would report that the present route is not feasible. That would mean increasing our capital, and the issue of new stock would give Bowyer and Phayre the controlling interest. As things stand, Joe controls the company, although he hasn't actually a majority of the shares."

"Joe would take most chances, but he wouldn't gamble with the fortunes of those who trusted him, even to fight Bowyer. He wanted to have reasonable hopes that the line could be pushed through. He gave me his power of attorney to vote for him, in case of accident. And I have it here. That's why I must be at the meeting, Molly. Otherwise that motion for an engineers' commission goes through. And Bowyer told me that he means to have the line. But Kitty'll fight him. Joe made no mistake when he took her for a partner."

"She was as true as steel to Joe," said Molly. "Kitty and Joe were very good to me when I was in Winnipeg last winter. But what do you think Mr. Bowyer meant by his suggestion about coal on your lands?"

"There is no coal," said Wilton. "Molly, dear, I'll tell you what our secret is. I was pledged to Joe—but the secret's mine now, and I can tell you. It isn't coal—it's clay."

MORE EVERYDAY DISHES

The following one-dish dinner will be found most satisfying:

"Clay, Wilton!"

"Clay. It's more valuable than coal or gold. It's clay land that the wheat grows on, or rather in the rich topsoil of loam, with the clay subsoil to seal and preserve the rainfall, yet easily drained with a little labor."

"I discovered it when I was prospecting up this way four years ago. It's probably an extension of the New Ontario clay belt, and, if so, it runs for hundreds of miles through this part of northern Manitoba. It means that the wheat area of Canada will be increased by thousands of square miles. It means homes and prosperity for thousands who are now struggling for a bare living in our cities."

"That appeared to Joe. He was a man, if I ever there was one. He saw the money in it, and the value of the line, but he saw further than that. He was looking ahead, years after he was gone. He wanted to do good in his own way. He'd had a hard time when he was a young man. And because people believed in Joe, though he dared not tell them his secret, they lent him the capital, and took up his shares. That was Joe's dream—and it's mine, Molly."

She listened breathlessly as he revealed his dream to her, and yet, perhaps, womanlike, she was happy rather in the revelation of himself than in the altruism of the dead man.

"That's what the Missisquoi meant to Joe," said Wilton. "That's why we mean to fight to keep it out of Bowyer's hands. Molly, dear, when I realized that Joe was dead everything seemed ended for the line. I couldn't see how we were going to carry on without him. It's only now—now that I have found something as well as lost everything—that I can begin to pick up my courage."

She laughed and put her face down on his shoulder.

"Evening, Mr. Carruthers," said the sergeant briskly. "I'm Sergeant Peters and this is Constable Myers."

(TO BE CONTINUED.)

American Architects.

The Roman found among the Greeks superior workmen and he imported them, hired them, and permitted them to decorate his monuments, according to their own taste, but recognizing the artist only as a workman. We find many of our artists among naturalized foreigners, or men of foreign birth or descent.—"The Condition of Modern Architecture," by Leslie W. Devereaux, in Architecture for February.

The Kitchen Cabinet

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The business man, lawyer, physician, priest or poet who earnestly tries to serve his neighbors will earn both money and real happiness. But the man who works for money alone gets that for which he works—nothing else.

THE WHOLESOME APPLE

"An apple a day keeps the doctor away," says the old saw. The following recipes are all worth keeping for future use:

Apple Sauce Cake.—Take one cupful of brown sugar, one-half cupful of butter or lard, one cupful of unsweetened apple sauce prepared from sour cooking apples and put through a sieve, one cupful of chopped raisins, two teaspoonfuls of cocoa, two cupfuls of flour sifted with two teaspoonfuls of baking powder. Bake one-half hour in a shallow dripping pan. Serve with hot sauce if for dessert. Sauce—Boil two cupfuls of granulated sugar, one cupful of water until a sirup is formed, add a tablespoonful of butter and a grating of lemon rind for flavoring.

Whole Wheat Pudding.—Take two cupfuls of whole wheat flour, half a cupful of molasses, one chopped apple, one-half of a teaspoonful of salt, and one-half teaspoonful of soda, steam two and one-half hours. Serve with a plain sauce made with one cupful of sugar, two tablespoonfuls of corn starch, a bit of salt, one cupful of boiling water; cook until smooth, add two tablespoonfuls of butter and lemon juice and rind to flavor.

Apple Whip.—Cook five apples into apple sauce, adding as little water as possible. When well cooked press through a colander and add one-half cupful of sugar. To this add the unbeaten whites of two eggs. Whip with a Dover egg beater until the mixture is light and stiff. Add a bit of vanilla or orange or lemon flavoring. Serve in sherbet cups topped with a maraschino cherry.

Apple Pudding.—Cut a few apples to cover the bottom of a baking dish; cook in a little boiling water until the apples are partly done. Drop over the top a soft drop batter and bake in a quick oven. Sugar and lemon rind may be added to the apples just before putting on the batter. Serve with a lemon sauce, using a tablespoonful of sugar, one of flour, a half cupful of butter, one-half cupful of water and enough lemon juice to flavor. If the rind is not used in the apples as flavoring add it to the sauce. Serve all hot.

The heart of man is a small world in which awhile the soul must dwell, and in this earthly habitat create a future heaven or hell.

Prepare a rich biscuit dough; line a deep pie plate with the mixture, rolling it about one-half inch thick. Put in a layer of good fresh steak cut in dice, season with salt and pepper, add a layer of onions and potatoes and put on the top crust, leaving a vent for the steam to escape. There will be no need for moisture as the vegetables contain plenty. Bake an hour in a moderate oven; longer will not injure it. When the food seems well cooked, remove from the heat, wrap in a cloth and steam in a cool place for ten minutes; this softens the crust and makes the dish more palatable. Serve hot in pie shaped pieces.

With this dish a dish of dandelion greens washed and crisped in water and served with hot bacon fat and vinegar, makes a well balanced meal, sufficiently nourishing to sustain a working man. With this meal a dessert of apple sauce and dark whole wheat bread, and a cup of tea or coffee will be all that is needed for dessert.

Liver en Casserole.—Take a pound or more of liver, cut in slices and simmer for ten to fifteen minutes in salted water; drain and chop fine, mixing well with salt and pepper to season. Add one tablespoonful of onion also chopped. In the bottom of a well greased casserole place one-half cupful of washed rice, one carrot chopped and spread over the rice; over this spread the liver and the liquor, two cupfuls, in which the liver was cooked. Spread two tablespoonfuls of butter over this dish and bake in the oven for an hour. Add one-half cupful of rich milk or cream and remove the cover; let cook for a few minutes, sprinkle with parsley and serve.

If cottage cheese needs to be increased in quantity add a stiffly beaten egg white with some cream.

Apple Sandwich.—Spread whole wheat bread with butter, then add chopped apple mixed with chopped nuts.

San Francisco Pralines.—Take two cupfuls of brown sugar, three-fourths of a cupful each of roasted almonds and pecans, one cupful of water. Boil the sugar and water to the soft ball stage, stir in the nuts and pour into patty tins, well greased, to mold.

Objection to Scrapping.—Mermaid—What is that sign you put up? Neptune—Visitors are forbidden to throw ships in the water.

Important to Mothers.—Examine carefully every bottle of CASTORIA, that famous old remedy for infants and children, and see that it bears the Signature of *Dr. J.C. Fletcher*. In Use for Over 30 Years. Children Cry for Fletcher's Castoria.

A Foghorn Conclusion.—Mr. Beach (at his seashore cottage)—My dear, please tell our daughter to sing something less doleful. Mrs. Beach—That's not Helen; that's the foghorn.—Boston Transcript.

Cuticura Comforts Baby's Skin.—When red, rough and itching, by hot baths of Cuticura Soap and touches of Cuticura Ointment. Also make use now and then of that exquisitely scented dusting powder, Cuticura Talcum. One of the indispensable Cuticura Toilet Trio.—Advertisement.

Different.—"Do you think we ought to finance foreign enterprises?" "Perhaps," replied Mr. Dustin Stax; "but that's different from calling in foreign enterprise to dictate how we shall spend our money."

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To a Nicety.—"This is splendid material for a bathing suit," said the clerk, for besides being fast color, it is guaranteed not to shrink." "In that case," replied the sweet young thing, who should have blushed but didn't, "I'll take a yard and a half less."—New York Sun.

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