

The Big Muskeg

by VICTOR ROUSSEAU
Illustrations by R.H. Livingstone

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"JOE'S DEAD!"

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. Carruthers tries to carry the body to a post 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. Carruthers declares his love for Molly. She promises to be his wife. Carruthers has to reach the town of Clayton to attend a meeting at which Bostock's enemies plan to wrest control of the Missisquoi from him. Molly goes with him. They are delayed by a storm. Attacked by his dogs, Carruthers is saved by Molly, who is forced to kill the animals. "The snow, the snow!"

CHAPTER V—Continued.

"I'm going on to Clayton. I'm feeling better. No, listen, Molly! I didn't tell you, but my arm was swollen from the bandages. They had tightened and stopped the circulation. I'm better without them, I'm feeling stronger—and the pain's less. We can go on. We've got to go on."

"Walk, Will?"

"We'll walk," said Wilton, rising with great effort. The dying animals had ceased to whimper, and stared at him out of their glazing eyes. Outside the snow was drifting down through the leafless branches, but the wind was dying away. It was late in the afternoon, though no sign of the sun came through the heavy, lowering cloud.

"We'll go on," said Wilton.

And, going out of the shack, he unfasted the cord of the sleigh that held Joe's body, and took it in his wounded hand.

"Will, it's impossible!"

"It may be. But I'll try. I can't face Kitty otherwise."

Over the new snow the journeying was not so difficult in their snowshoes, but the drag of the sleigh-ropes up the hills and across the corduroys proved almost impossible. Their progress was infinitesimally slow. The night came down and shut them in. And the nightmare of delirium clouded Wilton's brain, peopling the world with phantoms. He lived over again scenes of the past, and always Joe was of them. It was a night of unmitigated horror to Molly.

At every cache, at each shack, they would stop, feeling the sheer impossibility of going on, and sit huddled in their blankets under the lee, with the drifting snow about them.

Yet always they went on again; until at last the never-ending night lifted. The snow ceased to fall; the dun horizon was streaked with fire. And slowly Wilton came back to full consciousness.

They had toiled up their highest hill, and as they reached the summit they saw the sweetest sight that they had ever seen. For far away was Clayton, over the plain, with its ugly streets and bare, new houses, and the gaunt station buildings, roundhouses and locomotive shops.

They were white as shrouded bodies, besmeared with grime, and Wilton was caked with the blood that had oozed from his wounds and frozen.

"One last try, Molly," he said, "and then they can do what they like with me. But it's you who pulled that trick, girl of mine!"

But as he spoke he slipped to the ground and leaned his shoulders against the sleigh.

"Seven miles yet, and the meeting's at nine," he said. "I can't make it, Molly. I've tried. I've fallen short—just short. A little later, Molly, I'll try again. I'm going to sleep in the sunshine."

Molly stooped over him, and it was a harder thing than she had ever done to try to drive the driven man further. But she knew that, having staked all, Wilton would be content with no less than the sacrifice of all.

"Remember Joe, dear," she said, "and Kitty."

He tried to rise to his feet, but could not. Wilton's mind was quite clear, but his body, driven by his will, had collapsed suddenly like a worn-out horse.

Three horsemen were riding over the plain toward them. They watched them in a dull apathy. Even Molly hardly cared any more, except for Wilton. And he had done all that a man could do.

As the men came nearer it could be seen that they were of the Mounted

Police. In the foremost Molly recognized Quain, the inspector who was in command of the detachment at Clayton.

The three trotted their horses up to them, and, catching sight of the coffin upon the sleigh, the inspector dismounted. He looked hard at Wilton, and suddenly he recognized him.

"It's Will Carruthers!" he exclaimed, staring into his face in bewilderment.

Wilton got up with an effort. "Morning, Jack," he said wearily. "Yes, it's I. And here's Miss McDonald. You know her, I think?"

The inspector turned his puzzled glance on the girl. Mechanically his hand went up to his cap in salute. Then he looked at the sleigh again.

"And this is—was Joe Bostock," said Wilton; and all at once, in the reaction from the nervous tension, he felt the tears streaming down his face, and could hardly keep his lips steady.

"My God!" muttered Quain. "An accident, Will?"

"Shot!" shouted Wilton. "Some sneaking dastard's bullet in the bush. Shot at my side! The bullet broke my heart, and his blood and mine were mixed together. It didn't need that for me to know that I'll hound the murderer if it takes me to my dying day!"

"Joe—Joe dead!" whispered Inspector Quain, half unable to realize it. Joe had been a very living personality in Clayton. "And murdered!" he added. Then:

"Where are your breeds?"

"Gone! But they didn't shoot Joe, either by design or accident. That's a story you can learn from Andersen, at the half-way cache."

"That's where we're bound for," said Quain. "We're looking for—"

"And by the way," said Wilton with a mirthless laugh, as the relative unimportance of the fact struck him. "I'm under arrest for having murdered Joe."

Quain looked at him keenly, and then turned his glance upon Molly in inquiry. It was plain that he thought Wilton was raving.

"That's true," said Molly. "A sergeant and a constable from the Pas followed us up to Andersen's and placed Wilton under arrest yesterday morning."

The inspector rubbed his nose in perplexity. "If Will had told me that I wouldn't have believed him, Miss McDonald," he said. "Describe those policemen to me, please."

"The constable was short and dark, stocky in build. The sergeant was fair, with a long mustache—"

"Bit of a squint?"

"A cast in his left eye. His name is Peters. The other one is named Myers. You know them, then?"

"I do," said Quain softly. "Peters is Jim Hackett, and Myers is Tonyquay, a half-Frenchman, from the eastern townships. They were discharged last year after a short time of service, as soon as their records became known, and they got away, taking their uniforms and equipment with them. They're wanted for a cattle-stealing job and impersonating members of the force. So that ends that trouble, Will."

Quain nodded to his men to dismount. "Get the sleigh in to barracks as quickly as you can," he said, "and notify the coroner. I guess a half-day's extra leeway won't do that precious pair much good. Miss McDonald—Will, old man, you can manage to ride in, can't you?"

Wilton, staggering to his feet, set his face in a ghastly grin. "I've held on," he muttered. "I guess I can hold on for two hours more. There's a bigger thing behind this than you—or I—know just now. I'm going on ahead. I'm all right, and you won't stop me, Jack?"

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Austin Phayre, the president of the Bank of New North Manitoba, stood at the table. He was a man of about fifty, with a gray, waxed mustache, and gold-rimmed glasses. His manner was pompous, and he was immaculate in his black cutaway, with the expanse of white cuff and tall collar.

"Mr. Chairman," he said, "some of us shareholders have requested that the meeting be called in order that we may obtain certain information from those best qualified to impart it, as to the prospects of the Missisquoi line, concerning which disquieting rumors are afloat."

"You have before you a statement of our financial position. It is not the most satisfactory one that could be imagined. Of a total capital of five million dollars, nearly one-half has already been disbursed. The estimate before you provides for nearly two millions more to be distributed over grading, track-laying, water-tanks, telegraph line, bridging and ballasting. Meanwhile, unexpected difficulties have

arisen. They tell us that the entire route will have to be resurveyed; that the swamps are impassable."

He glanced with affected investigation about the table.

"It seems hardly worth while to put these questions under present circumstances," he said. "But we should like to be informed why the surveyors' reports were not properly checked. We should like to know whether it is going to pay us to build a line out into this unsettled wilderness, and in how many years? Finally, we wish to elicit the opinion, whether our interests are in the best possible hands."

"What did your bank invest for, if you feel that way?" shouted an old, roughly dressed man across the table.

"That is exactly what I am trying to find out," retorted Austin Phayre blandly. "If Mr. Betts will permit me—"

"I'll tell ye why ye did it!" yelled the old man, rising to his feet and shaking his fist vigorously. "Ye want to get control for Tom Bowyer, so as he'll have another line to bankrupt. Ye know what we all know, that old Joe Bostock never went back on his friends yet. If he says the line's a-going to pay, it's a-going to pay. Ye know Joe and Will Carruthers went up to look the line over. Give 'em a chance!"

Jim Betts, a familiar figure in many western towns since he made a lucky strike in the Cobalt region a few years before, had been one of Joe Bostock's staunchest friends. He had brought in a good many of the investors. Yet now he stood almost alone in championship of his friend.

"If the line ain't no good, what does Tom Bowyer want it for?" yelled the exasperated old man. "Did ye ever know Bowyer want anything that wouldn't pay? Wait for Joe, boys! Ye won't condemn a man when he ain't here to speak for himself? Ye all know Joe!"

"D—n Joe! I want my money!" shrieked an infuriated investor.

Austin Phayre waited calmly until the hubbub had subsided. "I move, Mr. Chairman, that the question of the Missisquoi route be submitted to a commission of engineers, to be appointed by the directors," he said.

"I oppose ye!" shouted Jim Betts. "I'll fight ye to the end on that. Ain't ye bought every engineer in Manitoba, except Will Carruthers?"

"I beg to second the motion," said Frank Clark, one of the small investors, and manager of the bank.

Jim Betts threw up his arms dramatically. "Well, Joe Bostock, ye'd best hurry," he remarked in a tone of confidential communication. "Where are ye, boy?"

A noise outside; the door was flung violently open, and Wilton stood in



A Noise Outside; the Door was Flung Violently Open, and Wilton Stood in the Room.

the room. And at the sight of him a sudden, dead silence succeeded the uproar.

He was mud and blood from head to foot. His face, covered with a bristly growth of beard, was white as a specter's, and the skin, drawn tight as parchment over the cheeks, revealed the contour of the bones beneath.

Wilton strode to the table and flung down a paper. "Mr. Bostock's power of attorney, authorizing me to represent his vote," he said.

He turned to the shareholders, but his eyes sought and held only Austin Phayre's.

"We've been to Big Muskeg!" he cried. "We've seen it. It can and shall be ballasted and crossed. No loop about it, and no change of route. Only rock, and more rock, till you shall have a permanent way as stable as the New Northern's. I pledge my word—and Joe's. I ask for your vote of confidence."

Austin Phayre, who had sat down, sprang to his feet again. The ringing cheers which greeted Wilton's outburst told him to make a virtue of necessity. Wilton had swayed the meeting. The spirit of success flamed in his flashing eyes and carried conviction in his manner.

"Mr. Chairman," he said in his suavest tones, "in view of Mr. Carruthers' positive statement that no change of route will be necessary, of course I will substitute a vote of confidence in the present management of the Missisquoi company. And, gentlemen"—he glanced about him and smiled—"in order to inspire the public confidence, I ask that it be unanimous."

"I second that!" shouted Jim Betts, rising enthusiastically.

Half a minute later the motion was declared carried unanimously, and the shareholders clustered about Wilton. His eyes were fixed upon the door, and he was listening for something.

"Where's Joe?" everyone was demanding.

Then the door opened quietly, and a girl stood in the entrance. She looked hardly more than a child. She was dressed in black; her fair hair was tumbled about her neck, and her blue eyes were reddened and tear-stained. She glanced uncertainly about her, saw Wilton, and ran to him.

"Joe's dead!" she cried. "Will—oh, Will!"

A loud cry broke from Phayre. His face was transformed; his lips were working with rage.

"You heard that?" he shouted convulsively. "You heard it? Joe Bostock's dead! Joe Bostock's dead! It's a put-up scheme! We've been tricked into voting confidence in him, and he's dead! It's a fraud and a lie! How can a dead man vote?"

The shareholders stared at him. His face was purple, and he seemed near apoplexy.

"Joe Bostock's dead!" he raved, "and until letters of administration of his estate have been granted, his power of attorney is worth no more than waste paper!"

"Well, say, ain't ye forgetting that the vote was unanimous?" grinned Jim Betts belligerently.

"We'll rescind it! We'll take the vote again! Mr. Chairman, I move—"

"Thirty days' notice of that motion under company laws," said Betts. "And I guess we'll have them letters of administration by that time—eh, Will?"

But Wilton, without a word, tumbled at Kitty's feet.

CHAPTER VI
An Unexpected Development.

For weeks thereafter he was only faintly conscious of his surroundings at intervals. Once, roused by some injection, he was aware of making a brief deposition for use at the coroner's inquest, and once Molly's face appeared, wet with tears, out of the shadows, and her lips touched him. But he was desperately ill, and it was February before the crisis was past, and he awakened, intensely weak, but conscious, to realize that he was in Kitty's house, and that Kitty had been nursing him.

Feebly he whispered his gratitude, and asked forgiveness because he had not been able to keep his promise to look after Joe.

"You did all that could be done, Will," she answered. "It was wonderfully plucky, your bringing him to Molly's house as you did. No one could have done more."

He asked for Molly, and learned that she had gone home on the day after he had been brought to the house. Kitty promised to show Wilton Molly's letters when he got better.

"Then you know we are engaged?" asked Wilton.

Kitty smiled a little. "I couldn't help knowing that," she answered. "I'm glad for Molly's sake."

Wilton's mind had been all bewilderment as he racked his brains for a clue to Joe's death. Had he been sure it was murder, he could have gone grimly to work on the solution. But there was always the doubt, the paralyzing doubt, that it had been an accident, and that one of the half-breeds had fired the shot.

Yet Bowyer must have known of it; Bowyer had sent the impostors to arrest him; he became more and more convinced that Bowyer had learned of Joe's death that afternoon at the portage, and had devised the arrest to keep him from the meeting.

Among Wilton's callers was old Jim Betts, to whom he extended his confidence in a large measure.

"Bowyer's guilty as h—l," he declared. "Phayre mightn't have known. I guess he didn't. But Bowyer knew, when he had Phayre bring that motion forward, that Joe wouldn't return. Put that thought in your pipe and smoke it, boy!"

"Jim," said Wilton, "I'm giving up my life to the Missisquoi, because it was Joe's work. And I'm going to hound down his murderer, if it was murder."

"Aye, boy, and go cool about it," counseled Betts. "It was crafty work, but it'll come out. Don't doubt it. And you'll find them two snakes, Bowyer and Phayre, under the brushwood. And maybe Clark, too," he added.

It was the middle of February before Wilton was allowed to leave the house. Nearly two months had been lost, and during that time Bowyer and Phayre, whatever their plans might be, had had a good leeway to develop them.

"Kitty," said Wilton, "you know everything is in your hands now. You control the line. And I know that you'll stand by the line to the last, because it was Joe's big dream."

"Will, you can count on me to the end," said Kitty solemnly. "I've been thinking a great deal about Big Muskeg, and I feel my own responsibility. I want to see the work, Will. I want to know that you are succeeding. And I'm going to live there."

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"—McDonald's angry protest—and then a cry from Molly!"

(TO BE CONTINUED.)

Daily Thoughts.

Any one thing in the creation is sufficient to demonstrate a Providence to an humble and grateful mind.—Epicurus.

FOR THE TOURIST

Pongee and Crepe Are of Service for Summer Wear.

Material Offered in Very Nearly All Colors of the Rainbow; Striped Fabric Favored.

Travel has a lure that will reach many this summer, whether the route lies by steamer, railroad or motor, and for these there have been devised lingerie models that are practical and convenient, models that take the minimum amount of room in packing and require the minimum amount of trouble in laundering.

Pongees are offered as one answer to the problem. These are generally used in natural neutral shade, with a color added as trim by way of contrast. Pongee dyed orchid or rose may make borders of flowered cretonne may lend a summery suggestion. Again, there may be embroidery, a running-stitch floral design or dots suggestive of peasant treatment. These devices add much to the femininity of the garment, and detract not at all from its practicality.

Cotton crepes have come back again for those who appreciate a garment that can be laundered without being pressed. These crepes this season are offered in very nearly all the colors of the rainbow, and the striped constructions are favored, whether the stripe be a narrow, evenly distributed one, or arranged more in size groups. Added to the basic color is the piping in a contrasting shade, which finishes many of these little crepe sets.

In the opinion of many there is nothing as practical for travel purposes as crepe de chine, and nothing more need be added concerning this material as it has been developed for undergarments. The tailored garments which have been the vogue for some time are infinitely practical from the laundry point of view, and their comfort is not to be questioned.

HOMESPUN DRESS AND COAT



A homespun coat and dress outfit is the joy of the young miss. The one shown is all of blue, worn with a hat of straw and embroidery.

A New Material. A novelty beige silk woven with a crepe stripe is a new material being used for the short jackets that are becoming so popular.

CROSS-OVER BODICE RETURNS

Supple Materials With Plenty of Fullness, the Proper Thing for Garment.

The cross-over bodice with a deep V neck effect has come back again. It is a welcome relief after the plain chemise front that has held sway so long. Supple materials, with plenty of fullness, are the proper thing for the cross-over bodice. The gowns which feature this new-old fashion usually catch the bodice at one side with a little bouquet of silk flowers. Most of these cross-over effects have a rather long waistline, and sometimes a sash that ties at the left side with ends hanging to the hem of the skirt.

The new flecked feather is much in evidence. A fawn crinoline hat had fawn feathers tipped with orange. Other hats are showing brown feathers flecked with gold, fuchsia with silver, gray with light blue. A black and white costume was supplemented with a hat of black plush on which stood up a cluster of white ostrich tips flecked with black.

PRINTED GOODS IS POPULAR

Dresses Accompanied by Hats and Parasols to Match Are the Fashion in Paris.

The Prix de Diane, which opens the racing season at Chantilly each year, holds something of style interest. Printed dresses, occasionally accompanied by hats and parasols to match; lace dresses and capes; tin millinery flowers, and highly decorative sleeves

NEW FALL STREET DRESS



This fashionable street dress is in blouse effect, trimmed with caracul fur and newest style Grecian girdle.

BLOUSE LOOKS LIKE SWEATER

Garment is One of the Fancies of the Season; Russian Influence is Quite Prominent.

The blouse that looks like a sweater is one of fashion's fancies this season. Blouses appear in various colors and color combinations, the most effective by far being those in white with multi-colored embroideries. Worn with white linen or silk skirts, such a blouse would be smart for summer.

Blouses seem to have arrived at a happy medium so far as length is concerned, few of the very long over-blouses being seen now, and those that reach barely to the hips or at most only an inch or two below are in the majority. This length avoids the definite break at the waistline, which is often unbecoming.

The Russian influence is quite prominent in the season's showing of blouses. The Russian peasant sleeve, the round neck with low upstanding collar and the embroidered motifs that trim many of the blouses all carry out this suggestion.

A good deal of attention is being given to blouses in high shades, and certainly such a blouse is smart with a dark colored suit.

The vogue for Paisley prints continues, and crepe de chine printed in small flowers and figures is also being used to make some attractive blouses.

Lovely Lace Gown.

One of the gowns worn by a London debutante for presentation at court has revived a fashion that bids fair to become popular this summer. It is the skirt of graduated ruffles of fine lace. The titled debutante who wore the original with such grace selected point d'esprit net as a foundation. Over this—the gown being all white—the tiny bouffances of lace were arranged in graduated tiers from hem to normal waistline. The bodice was simple, kerchief effect, crossed at the waist. The sash and train were of white satin, with a panel of the point d'esprit down the center.

Caramel Brown Hat.

Caramel brown and similar shades seem popular for the brimmed hat worn with a silk dress in a wide range of shades of reds and blues, with light brown gloves a blending accessory.