

The Big Muskeg

by VICTOR ROUSSEAU

Illustrations by R.H. Livingstone

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"I LOVE YOU!"

SYNOPSIS.—Looking over Big Muskeg, a seemingly impassable swamp in the path of the Missatibi 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, and Carruthers strikes him. 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 Missatibi from him. Molly goes with him. They are delayed by a storm. Attacked by his dogs, Carruthers' life is saved by Molly, who is forced to kill the animals. "The snow, the snow!" They set out on foot for Clayton, reaching it with Carruthers in an almost dying condition. He is in time to foil Bostock's enemies and keep control of the line for Mrs. Bostock. He finds enemies at work at Big Muskeg. Bowyer persecutes Molly with attentions. Lee Chambers asks Carruthers for work, saying he has broken with Bowyer. Carruthers takes him on. Kitty Bostock, deeply in love with Carruthers, comes to live at the Big Muskeg.

CHAPTER VII—Continued.

But she went on without heeding him, until she stood almost at the end of the shaking structure. It was a dangerous place. The wind blew strongly, sending her skirts flying about her, and tumbling her hair upon her shoulders.

"Come back, Kitty!" called Wilton, making his way across the planks until he reached her side. He put out his hand to steady her. Then he saw that the tears were streaming down her cheeks.

"Why, Kitty, what is it?" he begged. "I didn't hurt you?"

She shook her hand from her arm with a violent gesture, leaning back; and suddenly she lost her stance and toppled from the edge of the trestle into the river below.

A plunge into that viscous water was more dangerous than a fall. Wilton realized it instinctively. He leaped feet first and found himself struggling in the grey swamp, half mud, half water. Kitty, who had fallen into the center of the stream, appeared half a dozen feet away, her white face upturned, her hands catching for support as the shallow current carried her toward the lake.

Fighting madly, Wilton detached his limbs from the sucking mud and managed to grasp her skirt as she drifted past him. With a desperate effort he drew her to him and struggled through the yielding muskeg until he was able to catch an upright of the trestle-work.

He glanced at Kitty as he halted to catch his breath. She lay passive in his arms, her eyes closed; she seemed to have fainted, but she breathed easily, though quickly. Her dripping clothes clung to her tightly, and her fair hair streamed over her arms.

Then, plodding through the yielding swamp, he struggled on until he reached the shore. Kitty opened her eyes and fixed them upon his.

"Thank God, we're all right now!" said Wilton. "It was a near thing in that muskeg. You lie quiet and rest a little, and then we'll hurry back, and you must change your things quickly."

There was a quick catch of Kitty's breath. "Oh, Will, you are so blind!" she whispered. "Couldn't you see? Are you going to make me tell you that I love you?"

She put her arms about his neck, and her face on his shoulder. Wilton, dumfounded, hardly stirred; he did not know what to do.

"I'll tell you because I see it must," she whispered. "I've always loved you, Will. And I never cared for Joe."

"Kitty!"

The cry that broke from his lips held all the anguish of his disillusionment. His face grew scarlet. He tried to free himself, but she clung tightly to him.

"You've made me tell you, Will, and you must hear me now," she said. "I never cared for Joe—not in that way. He wanted me, and I thought I could learn to love him. I was happy with him, but what could he expect? He would have been old enough to have been my father. What right had he to marry me, ignorant as I was of love and of the world? I was happy with him—till I met you."

"I always loved you, Will, and it was my right to love you. It was you built up in my mind all that about my loyalty to Joe. I cared for Joe in a way, but that was all. If you imagined all that you did, was I to blame for it? Sometimes you nearly drove me crazy with your talk about Joe, about his work, about my loyalty to him, when I was hungry for your love."

"I'm ashamed—Gee! knows how I'm ashamed to tell you this. You made me, Will. While Joe lived I was true to him. I'm free, and you are free, and love cannot be bound. And I don't care a snap of my fingers for the Missatibi. I care for you, but you should have seen—you should have known. What right had you to drone out your refrain of Joe, Joe, all the day to me, when my heart was crying out for you, and you would not hear it? I want your love, Will! I want you to love me, and to take me away from Manitoba, where I'll never hear of the Missatibi again—or Joe!"

Afterward it seemed to Wilton like a dreadful dream. Gently he put her arms from his neck, and rose to his feet. And, because the nature of the man was of that simplicity that instinctively understands, it was not anger, but a deep pity that filled his heart.

"I'm sorry, Kitty," he said. "What you have told me makes an end of much that I have planned and dreamed of. It takes the zest out of things. It was my fault. Let us go back."

She looked at him with white face, set lips and blazing eyes. She rose without a word, declining his hand, and without a word they went back along the cleared road in the twilight. He left her at her door.

He went to his shack and sat at his desk for a whole hour, his head resting heavily in his hands. All that had given his life to seemed broken, his ideals outraged; his love for Molly was the lodestone of his life, but even love is not all a man has to live for.

After a long time he was aware of a low tapping at his door. He rose and opened it. Kitty stood there in the gathering darkness. She came a few steps into the office, and stopped.

"Will," she said in a low voice, "I want to ask you to forget. It was true what I told you—partly true. But I was overwrought and weak."

The heavy cloud that hung about him partly lifted. Wilton grasped at the hope she gave him as a man, convinced against his will, turns again to his accustomed habits of thought, and will not see.

"Kitty," he said, "I should have known. I was blind. I looked for perfection. I was to blame. Let us forget it all."

She answered in the same strained, monotonous voice, "I did love Joe," she said. "In a way, I did. As much as women mostly love their husbands."

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CHAPTER VIII

Treachery.

When Kitty left the shack she went slowly toward her house. At the door

she hesitated and then, as if with a sudden resolution, she made her way quickly in the direction of the portage.

There was a rig with two horses before the factor's door. Inside the door Tom Bowyer was standing, and Molly faced him, white to the lips, and rigid.

"I've given you your answer many times," said Molly.

Bowyer smiled. "No decision that was ever made can't be changed," he retorted. "Is it a crime to love you—to want to make you my wife?"

"No; but it is a crime to persecute me when you know you have no right to ask me at all."

Tom Bowyer, who had cultivated his rages until they had mastered him, could never refrain from falling into the bully's pose when he met opposition. He slammed his fist down fiercely on the counter.

"I'll change your answer, Molly!" he cried. "Before I leave this store tonight, I'll have you at my feet, for all your pride. D—n it! It's your pride I want as much as you. I want to humble you, because there's never been man or woman I couldn't tame sooner or later. I'm making you an honorable proposal. Your father's a dying man. Anyone can see that. I want you, and I want to take care of him for your sake, the rest of his days. I ask you to be my wife, to come to Cold Junction with me and marry me. D'you suppose he could hold his job here another day if the company knew he's paralyzed? I'll drive him from the portage unless you marry me and let him take his pension and live with us."

"I tell you 'no' again!" cried Molly. "How many times am I to answer you? Will you go now?"

He caught her by the wrists, thrusting his face forward into hers.

She screamed in fear, and they heard the dragging footsteps of the factor in his room above. The old man felt his way slowly down the stairs and edged along the counter. There was fear in his sunken eyes; but it was anger made him tremble.

"Ye go too far, Mr. Bowyer!" he quavered. "Ye canna insult my girl in my own house!"

"Get back to bed, you old fool!" sneered Bowyer. "Didn't you do your own love-making?"

"If she winna have ye I winna sell her! Leave the house and do your worst!"

"If I do," answered Bowyer, "I'll do it. D'you mean that? Answer me, McDonald!"

The factor sank back against the counter and glared at him with haggard eyes, his gray beard brushing his breast. Bowyer smiled triumphantly.

"Speak for me, McDonald," he jeered. "Tell her why she'd better change her mind."

The factor raised his head. "Molly, lass," he whimpered, "it's a grand opportunity he's offering ye. Have ye no thocht of that? It'll be a bame for ye in my old age, when I canna care for ye."

Molly fixed her eyes in horror upon McDonald. But Bowyer strode between them.

"You're a fine love-maker!" he sneered. "Get out of the way!"

And, inflamed almost to madness, he seized Molly in his arms and pressed his lips to her cheek and throat again and again.

"I guess you're not so coy as you pretend, Molly," he cried. "You women are all alike, after all. I never knew one yet that wasn't in a hurry to get hitched up, however much she pretended to dislike it."

The opening of the door behind him made him start. Kitty stood there, and it was quite clear that she had been a spectator of the scene. With a strangled cry Molly broke from Bowyer's grasp and ran into her room. She dragged her bed against the door and stood behind it, sobbing with terror and anger. The factor leaned against the counter, a look of dull apathy on his face. Bowyer turned sheepishly to Kitty.

"Well, I guess you caught me this time, Mrs. Bostock," he said. "But, being a woman, you'll understand."

Kitty's disgust for Bowyer held her silent. She made the slightest gesture of her head to him and went out of the store. Bowyer followed her.

"What does it mean?" asked Kitty.

"It means that I want Molly McDonald, and I've never wanted any man or woman yet that I didn't get," said Bowyer. "Make the most of it, he blustered. "I've as much right as Carruthers, haven't I?"

"No," said Kitty.

"Why haven't I?"

"Mr. Carruthers was first. They are engaged."

"What's to stop her breaking it?"

As his agitation subsided, Bowyer, a keen judge, noticed that Kitty's poise was unnatural; she seemed laboring under some suppressed emotion. He looked quickly into her eyes and saw that she had been crying. And then he knew.

A slow smile spread over his face. Kitty Bostock had not made Big Muskeg her home so long out of devotion to the memory of Joe.

With a deliberated impulse Bowyer put out his hand and took hers.

"I want two things, Mrs. Bostock," he said. "Molly McDonald, and the Missatibi. How many do you want?"

He looked at her still more keenly. "One?"

Kitty said nothing, but there was the slightest nod of her head in answer.

"It's a shame, Mrs. Bostock, that you should have to lose all Joe's money in that ten-cent line," said Bowyer. He was quite at his ease now, feeling himself in his accustomed element of intrigue. "Even if it could be built, it wouldn't pay. And if it did pay I'd take it myself. I want it, anyway. Not that I'd hurt you, if I could help it. Mrs. Bostock; but I've got my interests to look out for."

"Well?" asked Kitty, breathing quickly.

"By the end of the year your share will be worth nothing. You'll be ruined. It will be impossible to raise the capital to keep the line, either. It's a shame that Carruthers should waste his time and strength trying to carry out an impossible dream. If you could sell your shares at par when the note falls due, you could pull out, and you and he could make a sensible investment. He'd soon get over the disappointment. You could see to that."

He could not hide the flicker of a smile. Kitty saw it, and loathed Bowyer the more. She knew he was playing on her hopes, and yet the sudden vision made her heart beat furiously.

"I'm going to marry Molly," he continued. "I swear that I possess the power to make her my wife. But I want the line in return. I want to see some of Joe's papers. They're yours, and you can let me see them without doing wrong, and you'll be helping Carruthers indirectly. They're in his safe. You know the combination."

"I'll marry her this fall. You can trust me, Mrs. Bostock, because you oversaw just how I feel about her."

Kitty tapped softly at the door of Molly's room. "He's gone, dear," she whispered. "Let me come in to you."

The bedstead was dragged back. Molly stood before her, white-faced



Kitty Drew Her Down Beside Her.

and tense. Kitty put her arm round her and sat down on the bed beside her.

"Tom Bowyer's a beast, Molly," she said. "But most men are. If you give them the least bit of encouragement—"

"I never encouraged him!" cried Molly, sobbing violently. "I've always hated the sight of him. He has some power over father."

"He seems very fond of you," suggested Kitty.

"Do you call that fondness? I hate him. I hate the sight of him."

Kitty stroked her cheek softly. "You haven't met very many men, dear. Love doesn't amount to very much. And it doesn't last very long. I was quite happy with Joe, after the first month or two."

Molly looked at her in wonder. "Why, I thought you and Joe loved each other!" she exclaimed.

"I admired Joe and respected him. And then, there was not the dreadful specter of poverty with him. Joe was a man like Will Carruthers, he'd keep his word, no matter at what cost."

Molly sprang to her feet. "What are you hinting at?" she cried hysterically. "What word is Will keeping? Do you mean his promise to me?"

"Kitty drew her down beside her. "Can't you see, Molly, dear—Heaven knows how I hate hurting you, but I'm thinking of your happiness as well as Will's—can't you see that it was only a passing episode to him, this engagement?"

Molly sat perfectly silent, fixing her eyes on Kitty's face.

"If he had meant it, wouldn't he have written oftener from Clayton?"

"How long was he ill, then?" cried Molly.

"He was in bed a few days after you left. Of course, he couldn't resume his work till his arm had healed, but he wasn't what you could call ill. At least, he went to the directors' office every day to work on the plans."

Her blue eyes, tranquil as a child's, looked into Molly's gray ones. Presently Molly laughed.

"To think I didn't know!" she said. "I have been blind, haven't I? And I thought that it was you who had ceased to love me."

"I, Molly, dear? Well—it was pretty hard, coming here with Will Carruthers and feeling you ought to know, and not daring to speak. But please don't take my word about the man you're engaged to. I feel like a mischief-maker. But I love you, dear, and I like Will, and I do feel he isn't to blame. That's why I came to you. And I've no doubt he's honorable enough to say nothing at all, if you want to—"

"Kitty!" Molly sprang to her feet, quivering with indignation.

"Two-thirds of the trestlework had disappeared, including a great stretch of the foundation."

(TO BE CONTINUED.)

Before the Police Came.

One Man to Another—There's something about you that I don't like. I believe it is your face!

IN FALL CLOTHES

Extensive Use of Bead Girdles Feature of New Garments.

Jet Attractively Combined With Bright Blue and Red in the More Practical Numbers.

Dropped waists and longer skirts are being held responsible for many fall features, not least of which is the extensive use of bead girdles. The last Paris arrivals show girdles in truly beaded style and in narrower development than we have known them in the past. Large bead balls are used in carrying out the sash effects of many numbers, and these ornaments seem to be a typical note in advance showings.

The latest imports being displayed include many unusual tassels, that join hexagon jet beads with the plain match sticks to produce an irregular and very decorative trimming. One trimming that offers a novel feature is a beaded banding in scalloped effect that comes several inches deep. This banding is formed of prominent nail-head ornaments woven in latticed effect with smaller beads. One of the bead girdles that is at the moment receiving considerable attention in Paris, is a jet linked chain number of large dimensions.

Many tiny jet beads are so worked as to form a large link and many of these are joined in chain fashion to form the girdle. So real is the aspect of this model that one looks for an anchor finish instead of which deep jet tassels are used.

Instead of nailheads one finds the extensive use of whole beads being made in many of the new belts and girdles. Jet is invariably combined with bright blue and red in the more practical numbers. Many of these belts have been created solely for use with cloth dresses of a tailored nature, while iridescent jet beads are employed in making many more intricate girdles, suitable for evening wear.

Crystal, jet and gold are all combined in one distinctive belt that ends in sash effect with a long pendant

LATE CREATION FOR KIDDIES



This is a frock of silk of dark colors, brightened with touches of brilliant colored embroidery. It is quite the smart and practical thing for the wee kiddie.

MORE DAINTY EACH SEASON

Chiffon Negligees, Dear to Milady's Heart, Add Interesting Touch to the Wardrobe.

It is a relief to refresh one's wardrobe with dainty garments, such as evening wraps, tea gowns and negligees. Summer interpretations of these have such a different character from the winter models. Then there are always the brides, who help to create a demand for these dainty things, and designers display new and lovelier garments each season.

All lace coats are smart for the bride's lounging robe, made with softly crushed ribbon collar and sometimes worn over a slip of silver cloth. This gives a pleasing variation from the former slip of plain color.

Lace is equally smart used as trimming on filmy chiffon, and need not form the entire coat. It appears somewhat in panel treatment, a lovely yellow chiffon model using a deep inset panel of margot chiffon down the entire front length, while two panels float from the shoulders in the back and trail along the floor. Another uses inset lace to form a yoke which extends down over the shoulders in points. Silver lace also appears, forming corsage and short sleeves above a chiffon skirt and topped by a jaunty chiffon coat.

All chiffon models are visions of loveliness. They usually exploit the uneven line, and many show crushed ribbon girdles which pass through slits in the upper layer of chiffon. Others pose the top chiffon layer over a foundation of charmeuse.

THE COMELY EVENING GOWN



Soft satin crepe or wondrous orchid, dignified by silver lace and deftly combined into long, graceful lines, makes this comely evening gown a work of art. An ornament of rhinestones tends to give brilliant effect.

drop that is fringed on the edge. The belt proper is made of crystal strings that hold alternating oblong and square ornaments in proper place. A bizarre effect is then produced by the presence of gold beads which form the center of the black ornaments. One of the odd jet tassels introduced by these imports ends in pyriad beads of spear shape that are sharp and bright enough to look like tiny darts.

PARTY DRESS FOR TINY GIRL

Pale Pink Taffeta With Overslip of White Georgette Affords Most Winsome Outfit.

The tiny girl must have her party frock. One charming little dress seen recently had a foundation of palest pink taffeta, with overslip of white georgette caught on the shoulders with knots of pink ribbon flowers. The overslip was slashed to form panels, and each panel was edged with the soft lace. Another party frock was of yellow organdie, much ruffled about the skirt and with bloomers ruffle trimmed. A self-fabric sash was tied at the back in a flaring bow.

Tiny girls, as well as boys, usually wear short socks that match their dresses or suits, or else white socks banded in color.

CRINOLINE IN RED BROWN

Flowers or Ribbon Ruching Are Used on This Type of Headgear by Paris Women.

Of the hats seen in smart places nowadays, writes a Paris correspondent, none is more a favorite than the crinoline in red-brown. Flowers or ribbon ruching are used on this type of hat, the shade of which is so accommodating that it can be and is worn with almost any color. Another type of hat is made entirely from black varnished lace, tightly stretched on wire. Sometimes the black lace that is trimmed with nothing more than a narrow band of black satin ribbon with a bit of silver above it. Small hats in crepe de chine are usually in the same color as the costume.

COLORS FOR THE SWEATERS

Beautiful Greens and Yellows are Included in the Charming Array Now Being Offered.

The silk sweater—which, after all is said and done, is the expression of the de luxe sweater that retains its championship title after all others have gone down under the count—appears in an array of delightful colors and patternings this season.

A special feature was made of these sweaters in an exceptionally charming collection of colors and patternings. Practically every color is admitted into the assemblage, although the exceedingly bright tones are passed over. Beautiful greens and yellows are included in the array, both in pale and more intense degrees of the colors.

One of the loveliest numbers was done in a deep buff color, with wide stripes in which were introduced a stitch producing a concave drop in the silken surface and forming a Sphinx-shaped motif.

Little Girl's Hat.

Gingham hats for the very little girl are exceedingly attractive. They are made quite simple, with perhaps an organdie bow or a little wool embroidery as their only trimming. They are usually made up in a medium-sized check.

Lace-Lined Parasols. Lace-lined parasols are a novelty from Paris. All the framework is concealed beneath very beautiful real lace. They are effectively used with black satin sunshades as well as delicately toned taffeta ones.