

The Big Muskeg

By
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CHAPTER IX—Continued.

Now Wilton had succeeded. Big Muskeg was conquered, and on the east shore the vanguard of the line was driving the cleared way forward and pegging out the way for the metals. Soon grading would begin. Wilton's camp would shrink, and the engines would be moved ahead, and—he would have time to think.

He dreaded that. He had not seen Molly or the factor since that night of the subsidence. He knew that Bowyer had paid more than one visit to the store, but he shrugged his shoulders and put it out of his mind. The workmen, after their months of arduous labor, had begun to grow slack. There was restiveness in the camp. Once or twice Wilton had seen signs of liquor. He detected it in the slowing up of work; he had smelled it in the bunkhouses—the penetrating odor of cheap alcohol, with its suggestion of gasoline.

Andersen, forestalling him, came to him about the time of this discovery. "They're getting that rot-gut again, Mr. Carruthers," he said. "I don't know where. I'm keeping my eyes peeled, but I ain't said nothing."

"The best policy," said Wilton. "The men have worked hard. When this job's finished we'll let them slack up for a day or two. Then we'll get down to business on this proposition. But if you find out anything let me know at once."

A few days later came the spanning of the swamp. On the same afternoon a summons came from the court, together with a letter from Quain. The police had at last picked up Papillon and Passetout, and had recovered the rifle and transit compass. Wilton was wanted in Clayton to give evidence against the men.

The call was opportune. Wilton had already determined to put into execution a plan that he had formed. It was now October, and little more than two months remained before the loan would be called. That would give Bowyer the control of the Mississippi. Driven by the ironical realization that he was working for Bowyer, Wilton had resolved to go to Clayton as soon as the restling was completed, and try to raise the money to pay Phayre, who, he knew, would not renew the note.

Big Muskeg was spanned. And, on the strength of that, Wilton believed the time had come to give Joe's secret to the world. He would publish far and wide the secret of the wheat lands. He would establish sufficient confidence in the line to make the raising of a loan a possibility.

Before leaving he placed a night guard on duty over the office, and arranged with Andersen to have three or four reliable men on watch in the event of the laborers attempting to cross the portage. He went to Clayton and laid his statement before a directors' meeting. They heard him in frigid silence.

"That's an old story," said Curtis, the vice-president, when he had finished.

An angry wrangle followed, which led nowhere. They flatly refused to spend any money on advertising. All the while, Phayre, leaning back in his chair, looked on and took no part in the proceedings.

"It comes to this," said Curtis finally, thumping the table energetically.



"That's an Old Story," said Curtis, the Vice-President, when He Had Finished.

"We'll have to increase our capital. The delay has eaten into our reserves. We'll have to push straight toward our objective, the Transcontinental. Then we'll have the monopoly of a steady freight business."

He could not get them to listen to the story of the wheat lands. Wilton wanted to advertise it widely, to open it up to homesteaders. He had plans for elevators. But the directors, who resented Kitty's control, were dead

against him, and he got no thanks for what he had done.

The following morning the Sentinel—Phayre's paper—came out with a cartoon showing a widow dropping her mite into a bottomless pail marked "Mississippi," which boiled over a slow fire of wheat stalks.

Somebody had betrayed the secret, thus forewarning Bowyer and enabling him to open his campaign to deride it. But Wilton would not open his mind to suspicion.

He took counsel with Jim Betts. The old man was frankly pessimistic. "It looks to me," he ruminated, "as if them two snakes'll get the line. Joe must have been mad, or mighty hard put, when he hypothesized them shares." He turned to Wilton. "What d'ye want to worry about it for, anyway?" he asked. "If Joe took a chance like that, he couldn't have felt too strong about it."

He laid his hand on Wilton's shoulder. "Whisky's good," he said in his odd way. "So's ginger pop. But the mixture's h—ll. So's women and business, boy. I'd help ye with that loan if I could see my way. But I can't. I've been stung too bad already, and I've got a grandson to look after. Ye'd better make terms with Phayre."

This was one of the worst blows that had fallen. If Betts had lost faith, who would have kept it? He understood the allusion to Kitty. Betts thought he was in love with her. Then so must other people.

He was due at the court that day, and gave his evidence. The half-breeds received each six months in the penitentiary—a light sentence, on the jury's recommendation. Afterward Wilton had a talk with Quain.

The two men had sullenly refused to give any reason for their flight. If the outlaw Hackett had advised them, they did not put in that plea.

The jury had believed that one of them had accidentally shot Joe, and that this had been the cause of their disappearance. So did Quain, apparently.

"I'm afraid, Will, that we can't hope for anything fresh upon that subject," he said.

This business done, Wilton went to see Kitty, swallowing his pride. After all, it was for Joe that he was pleading. Kitty received him in the old friendly manner, with a touch of reserve that should have put him on his guard. But he began eagerly.

"Kitty," he said, "you know we've crossed the Muskeg."

Then Kitty showed her claws. "I was so glad when I heard of it, Will," she said. "You've been trying to do that all the summer, haven't you?"

"Why—yes, of course," said Wilton, looking at her in astonishment.

She put her hand on his arm with a caressing gesture. "Do tell me what a muskeg is, Will," she said. "I've heard you speak of it so often, and I can never remember the meaning of those words."

And with that the last of Wilton's illusions fell from him, leaving him face to face with stark reality. He faced Kitty very gently.

"Kitty, listen to me now," he said. "I've been in this game for Joe—and for you. When Joe died I saw that we'd have to fight hard to keep the line. I saw a lot of money in it, later, and meanwhile you'd have enough to live on, so that we could use your capital and your control to carry out Joe's plans."

"Yes, Will," said Kitty, with the air of one who listens wearily to a lesson.

"Joe's borrowing on those shares has changed everything. The loan has to be repaid before the year is out. If it isn't, you lose the line. They'll wreck it, and they'll wreck your fortune, and that of the other investors. Then they'll reconstruct. When the line has ceased to have any value at all, Bowyer and Phayre will have a new line of their own. Do you understand?"

"I'm trying to, Will," said Kitty.

"But what do you want me to do?"

"I'm proposing this for your sake, Kitty. If you sell your property in Winnipeg you can raise three or four hundred thousand. I believe I could borrow the rest. That will meet Phayre's loan, and you'll hold the line. It's the only way, because no bank would lend you money on the rest of your shares now, after Bowyer's campaign against us. And he's made the most of the subsidence. It's speculative—what I'm suggesting. But Joe would have done it. And in a few years it'll mean millions."

"Are you sure, Will?" asked Kitty, eagerly.

"Not sure, Kitty, but nearly sure."

"Will, you are Joe's executor. Do you advise me to take that risk?"

"No!" said Wilton sharply.

"But you just said—"

"As Joe's executor, I can't. It's not sound business. An executor dares not advise throwing away a certainty for a speculation. As Joe's executor—no!"

"Then why did you advise me to?" asked Kitty innocently.

"Because I thought you cared for the line, Kitty. Because I thought you shared Joe's dream for the future

of the Mississippi. I thought that, even if you lost, you'd have your house here, and your forty thousand, and you'd feel—that you'd done what Joe would have wanted. As your executor I say, sell out to Phayre before it's too late. At least—at least—"

He could get no further. Kitty looked up into his face. "Will, I know how you feel," she said softly. "I'm so sorry. I've done what you wanted, Will. But I haven't done it for Joe. I've done it for you. Will, you've made your own obstacles. You've never understood me. It's you I want to help; it's you I want my money for, Will."

Afterward Wilton could not imagine how he had found strength to resist her. With Molly lost, Jim Betts himself counseling surrender, and Kitty caring nothing for the line, why did he not let it go? In that black hour the temptation of her presence, the human love that was his for the taking, screamed their weak counsel in his ears.

It may have been the fiber of Puritan ancestors, or simply the inborn instinct to fight to the end, that gave him his strength. But he did not know how he left her till he found himself in the street.

He went to the bank, the last place, and the last, hopeless effort, foredoomed to failure. He went into Phayre's office.

"Good morning, Mr. Carruthers," said the president. "What can I do for you?"

"Big Muskeg's bridged," said Wilton. "That should send up the value of the shares. I suggest that you renew Mr. Bostock's loan when it falls due."

"My dear Mr. Carruthers, that's a queer proposition to make to me!" said Phayre. "You're not a simpleton. Need I say anything more?"

"You know the collateral is good."

"Good? It's splendid! I only wish all our paper was as reliable."

"Well? Other banks may think the same—"

"But they won't," said Phayre, smiling. "In ten years, when those wheat lands are in bearing, this will be the newest granary of Canada. Only, they don't know it."

"How do you know it, then?"

Phayre chuckled and began to drum his fingers on the desk.

"You pledged your word to the directors," he answered. "Of course, there were rumors of it before. But your word is good enough for me, Mr. Carruthers. I'm a booster for Clayton. I believe in those wheat fields—and I'm going to have them. Better throw up your job, Carruthers, and take one with us. What do you say?"

"I'm going back to work for you and Mr. Bowyer right away," said Wilton. "At least I guess it looks like coming to that. But I've got my job to finish—and I'm going to do it."

CHAPTER X

The Abyssal Depths.

Molly did not see Bowyer for two months after Kitty's departure. His next visit was as unexpected as all of his. It was in the afternoon, and the girl came back from a walk along the shore to see him seated in the store, sleek, red, and self-satisfied, and her father standing beside him, with that look of awful fear on his face. She had a momentary impression as if the factor stood up like a well man; but, as she entered, the right leg went dragging under him, and the arm fell limp at his side.

"How d'ye do, Miss McDonald!" called Bowyer. "I just dropped in to have a chat with the factor in passing. Big things happening here, eh? The Mississippi's mighty slow in crossing Big Muskeg."

Molly flamed at the insult to Wilton. She looked at her father, and the expression on his face went to her heart. She turned swiftly to Bowyer.

"I don't want you to come here again," she said.

He started up, spluttering. "We don't want you," she continued. "And we won't be persecuted by you. There's law in this country."

He burst into mocking laughter. "You never spoke a truer word, Miss McDonald!" he cried. "I came here as a friend."

"You can go as an enemy!" she retorted. "And you can go now. And remember—there are men about here who can use a whip!"

He glared at her, but went without a word, and Molly ran to the factor. "He's torturing you!" she sobbed. "I don't know what his power over you is, but he mustn't come here again!"

A few days later Bowyer went in to Clayton and, by chance, his visit coincided with Wilton's.

When Wilton left her house, Kitty sank down into a chair, clasping and unclasping her fingers nervously. The first time when Wilton had repulsed her, she had been too humiliated and conscience-stricken to bear him resentment. Her visit to Molly had been a sudden evil impulse, which, when done, she had attempted to justify.

She had, of course, succeeded. Gradually she had begun to look upon herself as a deeply wronged woman. When a woman loves, love is its own justification for acts done in its name.

On the second occasion of her ad-

vances to Wilton she saw by instinct that she had almost conquered. She saw, too, that, having lost, she had lost forever. She might win Wilton yet, but never in that way.

Now she would go to any lengths to oust Molly. Molly had never written to her since her departure, and she did not even know if her scheme had succeeded in estranging her from Wilton. But she inferred success from Wilton's bearing. He had not looked like a successful lover.

Bitterly she reflected on her marriage with Joe. She had never loved Joe, but neither had she hated him. She had loved Wilton, and, bound by tradition and social circumstances, she had concealed it. Then—Joe had died. Everything had seemed possible. And Wilton had engaged himself to another—to her best friend. Kitty was not a bad woman, but she meant to fight for her own. She would win Wilton, cost what it might.

When, therefore, late on the day after he had called on her, the maid announced Tom Bowyer, who had never been in her house before, she sent down word that she would receive him.

Neither Wilton nor Bowyer was aware that the other was in Clayton when Bowyer called, nor did they meet.

Kitty came downstairs, to find Bowyer standing in the parlor, twirling his hat in his hands. There was a singularly vulpine look on the red



Kitty Came Downstairs, to Find Bowyer in the Parlor.

face. For an instant Kitty shuddered inwardly. Her passion for Wilton was taking her into unrelieved companionships.

She asked him to sit down. "I'm pleased to see you, Mr. Bowyer," she said. "It was very good of you to call."

Bowyer uttered a short laugh. "I'm not a calling man, Mrs. Bostock," he said, "and the ladies don't like me. They know too much about me."

"That's very poor taste on their part," said Kitty.

"That's as may be. I came here on business."

"I'm glad to see you on business, then," said Kitty.

Bowyer looked at her in admiration. "I see we understand each other," he said. "That's what I like. You ought to have been a man. Not but what you'd have been spoiled if you had been," he added, with a clumsy effort at a compliment.

Kitty laughed outright. "Now I know you have come to get something," she said.

"Not exactly. We've fixed things so that you'll be able to pull out about Christmas with your full investment. But suppose Carruthers makes trouble? Remember, you've done what you did for his sake as well as your own. You want to help him go into a more remunerative investment. You know that little affair of his is off?"

She started violently, and Bowyer did not need to await her answer.

"That's what I came to tell you," he went on. "So I know we can count on you to smooth things over if Carruthers begins to wonder. You're stanch, then?"

"You can count on me, Mr. Bowyer," answered Kitty, loathing herself and him. "But how about yourself? I understand from you that you were going slow. I hope you're not going too slow?"

"I'm going to speed things up soon," he answered, frowning. "What's happened helps things along. I don't know what the trouble was. I thought at first it was one of those lover's quarrels. But it's lasted. His face grew red. 'I went there,' he said thickly. 'She wouldn't have anything to say to me. Ordered me off the place.'"

Bowyer leaned forward confidentially. "See here, Mrs. Bostock," he said. "If I get her out of the way—if I guarantee that Will Carruthers and she won't meet again, how'll that suit you?"

"You've changed your mind about marrying?"

"Maybe yes. Maybe no. I'm not a marrying man. Nobody is. It's generally an accident—or a trap. But I can promise you there'll be no trouble from that quarter. Also, that she'll be out of the district before winter."

(TO BE CONTINUED.)

Foresight.
Mrs. Wisely (to maid)—Hurry, Lizzie! Hurry! Take the parrot into another room. Mr. Wisely has just lost his collar button.

IN FALL FASHIONS

Wide Choice of Color and Range of Fabrics on the Card.

One-Piece Dress, Either in Crepe or Georgette, is the First Love of the Season.

The question of a new wardrobe is a welcome one, since the fall model offers a choice of silhouettes, a wide choice of color and a range of fabrics which is far wider than midday has known for several years.

The first love of the season, asserts a fashion authority, is the one-piece dress either in crepe or georgette; in either of these fabrics the long flowing lines prevail, draperies form uneven hemlines and hems now come well to the ankles. Draperies touch the floor on some of the afternoon and many of the evening gowns. The drapes are caught by huge bejeweled cabochons on one-side effects. These vagaries brought the surprise, which comes in for a great deal of attention. Some have declared it is an unbecoming line to most women, but the bouffant skirt returns it to its honored place in things sartorial.

There's straight silhouette low waisted and long skirted; the 1850 type which means a bouffant skirt and tight bodice and the flared type which partakes of circular effect; skirts flare out smartly from knee to hem. In suits, the Balkan blouse coat brings the low waist to the outer garment. It stands high in favor. This type is popular in the coat dress and three-piece suit.

Crepes are plaited in beads; small beads, iridescent beads, all blended to the color of the fabric, are seen on the models from some of the best designers, although some authorities disclaim the rumor that beads will continue in their high vogue. The old-fashioned passementerie is now used to a striking advantage with black gowns.

Another word about the low waistline that marks the straight silhouette, low it is and often belted with what appears to be a "life saver," a braided or a twisted girdle as thick as one's wrist. This "life saver" type of a girdle is brought around the hips about six or eight inches below the normal waistline. Very often the girdles are thick braids of the fabric of the gown; crepes plait to an advantage and silks roll admirably. It goes without saying the "life saver" girdle is for the slender.

One-piece dresses of navy blue picture conservatively trimmed in braids, are chiefly interesting on account of the sleeves, which are long, much trimmed and often have the deep armhole that assures swinging lines. The sleeve that drips panels we still have with us, as well as the sleeve which is nothing more nor less than an extension of the shoulder cape of the frock.

All skirts are long; eight inches from the floor for suits, four and six inches for dresses is the edict which is at last obeyed.

A famous designer gives this formula to women who resent the coming of the long skirt. For many women honestly regret the passing of the short skirt.

"In the privacy of your own boudoir let down one of your skirts to the very instep, choose a soft fabric that drapes in long intriguing folds. Move about before a full-length mirror and note the grace of line. Wrap a cape-like garment about your shoulders and put on a large hat. The charm of the femininity of this garb will conquer any woman's prejudice against the long skirt. Give plenty of time to the experiment, and you will go forth a champion of the new mode."

"Short skirts will look passe to your newly educated vision. A long skirt, the earmark of fall mode, will gladden, not sadden, your eye. You, too, will wear a long skirt."

FROCK FOR THE LITTLE GIRL

Wearers of Garments to Have Liberty of Determining What Style They Shall Adopt.



Flesh crepe de chine is employed in this dainty frock for the little miss. Matching colored ribbons serve as trimming.

White Fox Furs.

A number of white fox furs are making their appearance this season. They are usually worn with white or black. The girl who wears one should be sure of her complexion. Such a fur is very trying.

GOWN FOR AFTERNOON WEAR



This is an interesting afternoon gown of black satin, featuring side panels. The front fastens from neck to hem with fancy buttons. The dainty lace and embroidery collar offers a finishing touch.

HOW TO DARN THE STOCKINGS

Hair and Ravelings Drawn From Old Hose Best to Use in Making Repairs.

Darning wool is so different in quality from the silk used in silk stockings that it shows clearly when it is used to darn stockings. For the same reason silk thread will not do. The best things to use, writes a correspondent, are hair and ravelings drawn from an old silk stocking. The longest raveling that can be drawn from the wool of a stocking is only eight or nine inches long, so if there is much work to do you will probably have to rethread the needle a good many times.

If the run is in the leg of the stocking, place it over a piece of glazed paper or rather thin cardboard. When you darn hold the section in place without stretching or pulling it; or tack it in place without stretching or pulling it; or tack it in place with a few stitches. If the run is in the foot, use a darning egg.

To darn a narrow run turn the stocking wrong side out, thread a fine, long needle with a suitable raveling, moisten your fingers, pass them along the raveling to straighten it and then catch up all the several loops before they can ravel further. Then put in the number of warp threads that are missing; if necessary use one or two extra ones so as to cover the space well. Make the rows straight and keep the spaces even. When you have put in all the warp threads turn the stocking right side out and thread the needle again. This time use a hair, with the end passed through the eye of a needle. Darn in the wool threads and run the wool darning half an inch above and half an inch below the edges of the run. Since the hair will break if it is drawn too tight and the raveling will shrink, anyway, leave both of them loose at the turnings, but draw them smooth everywhere else.

When one missing warp thread has formed a run turn the stocking wrong side out, place the edges of the run together and join them with a row of machine stitching. This will take up the broken part. Then turn the stocking right side out and with a raveling or a hair sew to it the extra material turned in so that only a flat seam remains. It will show, but it will be strong and neat.

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ELASTIC AT THE WAISTLINE

Wearers of Garments to Have Liberty of Determining What Style They Shall Adopt.

One of the best-known American style authorities recently declared, when asked about the waist line for fall and winter of 1922-23, that nearly all frocks would have elastic run in so that the individual woman could determine the all important question of where her waist line should be, according to her own fancy and her figure. Generally speaking, there is a trend toward the normal waist line, but women have long declined to submit to ironclad style rules, and the chances are no one style will predominate.

Incidentally, for street frocks of the tailored type and for suits and wraps, a vogue for rather striking plaids is predicted. Vividly striped wool fabrics are being featured, especially in motor and sports coats.

Painted Skirt Is New.

The hand-painted skirt is creating a sensation in fashion circles. It usually has a white foundation, though black and vivid colors respond to such decoration. The designs are put on with a free hand, sometimes in floral and sometimes in futurist effects. So far their mission has been confined to outdoor wear.

Aluminum Hats.

Aluminum cloth is a new fabric for hats. It is very soft and thin and lends itself admirably to draping. It is just another evidence of the popularity of all metal fabrics.