

The Big Muskeg

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Illustrations by R.H. Livingstone

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CHAPTER X—Continued.

"That won't do," said Kitty with sudden fierceness. "She may come back."

"She won't. And if she did, and went down on her knees to him, he wouldn't look at her."

"What do you mean?" asked Kitty breathlessly.

Bowyer leaned forward again and whispered in her ear. Kitty was as pale as death. "How'll that do for you?" he asked triumphantly.

Kitty rose, trembling. "I'll stick to my word," she said. "But you're the lowest cur I've ever known, Tom Bowyer, and I hope—I hope somebody flays you—flays the skin off you before you've run your course."

"I'll take my chance of that," grinned Bowyer, as he rose.

Kitty sank back in her chair, her hands over her face. Of a sudden the abyssal depths of sin had opened beneath her. She was tempted to run after him and call him back. But she could not stir. It was some time before she forced herself to rise. She went to the window. She guessed that Bowyer was going to the bank. He would return that way, and she could call him in and tell him that she had changed her mind.

Suddenly she started back behind the curtains. Wilton was passing on the other side of the road. He held his head high, yet he walked like a man who was broken.

Kitty watched him go by. Her heart was full of pity for him, for his quixotic dreams, his foolish faithfulness to Joe. The picture that Bowyer had limned of Molly faded from her mind under the brighter glow that came into it.

Like Wilton, Bowyer had business to transact with Phayre. He went to the bank; it was after hours, but he knew Phayre would be there, awaiting him.

"Carruthers is in town," said the bank president.

"He is, eh?" asked Bowyer, darting a keen glance at him. "When did he get in?"

"Day before yesterday. He was subpoenaed on that case."

"That's so, of course," said Bowyer. "What did they get?"

"Six months apiece."

"No new light on the murder of our friend?"

"Nothing. Quain didn't go into that phase of the affair at all. He'd questioned them, and couldn't prove anything."

Bowyer fell into a brown study for a few moments.

"Carruthers been here yet?" he inquired presently.

"Not yet. He's trying to raise a cool half-million in town. I guess he's been to the last likely place by now. So he'll be here tomorrow to renew the loan."

"You'll renew, of course," said Bowyer. "Excellent wheat lands! Fine investment for your bank, the Missisippi! By the way, you hit it strong with that cartoon!"

They both laughed, first at the cartoon, then at Bowyer's rallery.

"No more trouble with Clark?" asked Bowyer.

"Not at present. I guess that extra two hundred squared him. He's a dangerous customer to handle, though. And absolutely indispensable for a job like we had to handle. A first-class man at his trade, cool as a cucumber, and looking like a gentleman. You'll find it hard to beat that combination. He could have had more than the two hundred he held me up for."

"He's certainly worth it," admitted Bowyer. "What'll you do with him next year?"

"Why, he seems to like the work here," answered Phayre, laughing. "I'll keep him on, under my eye—at a reduced salary."

They both chuckled over that, but Bowyer grew serious quickly. "Well, I've fixed Kitty Bostock," he said. "Lord, it's a cinch handling that type of woman. Once they fancy some particular man, they'll go through hell to get him."

"You've told her you'll buy her shares at par," he said. "You haven't committed yourself irrevocably to that?"

Bowyer threw his head back and admitted one of his short laughs. "Well, I may change my mind," he said. "It isn't in writing."

"Suppose she raises Cain?"

"She can't. She's in too deep. She doesn't know how deep."

Phayre laughed again, but nervously. "I never cared much for this business, Bowyer," he said. "If Joe Bostock hadn't died as he did I'd never have got mixed up with it. But that gave us our chance. It was a very lucky accident. If we weren't committed beyond recovery, I'd pull out even now."

"Pull out?" echoed the other. "How the devil can we pull out? The trick's done."

"You've—"

"I've fixed it about that safe. We had a devil of a job the first time we tried. He's got a deaf-mute there who seems to have eyes like a cat, and sleeps with them open. Carruthers caught Lee Chambers at the window and smashed his nose. And, of course, Chambers' usefulness at the camp is ended. However, I've fixed it now, and a day or two will see us with what we want, and Carruthers with what he doesn't want."

"I suppose there's no doubt those half-breeds did kill Joe Bostock," suggested Phayre, darting a keen look at the other.

"I guess not," answered Bowyer. "Anyway, it's no business of ours how it happened. Quain put everybody through the mill, including me. That shows he's at his wits' end. If a new clue comes to hand he'll jump at it, for the sake of his reputation. By the way, Quain's the man I came in to see you about. You've had a talk with him?"

"I saw him yesterday."

"How did he take it?"

"Fine!" said Phayre, rubbing his hands. "Hook, bait, and sinker. I could see the flash of illumination come into his eye as the seed began to sprout."

"You didn't suggest—?"

"No; I'm not quite such a fool as that, Bowyer. I spoke to him about Joe Bostock's investments, and the missing half-million that he had drawn out a day or two before his murder. And I left Quain to draw his own inferences. Don't worry! He'll draw them!"

"Capital!" said Bowyer. "You're a good partner, Phayre, and in a few days our patience will be rewarded."

CHAPTER XI.

The Conflagration.

"I'm going back to work for you, Mr. Phayre," Wilton had said when he left the office. And he had meant it. Without any further hope of keeping the line for Kitty, he resolved, for the work's sake, that the day when the control passed into Bowyer's hands should see the grade across Big Muskeg.

He found the camp in much the same condition as when he had left it. Andersen reported that the men were still getting liquor, and were slacking. Wilton, whose mind had no room for rival propositions at the same time, dismissed the subject. He went straight to bed. But he was aroused by Andersen a little after midnight.

"There's a big blaze a couple of miles north of us," said the foreman. "Sprung up like lightning. And a gale's sweeping up the swamp. The men won't turn out to backfire. They say it's Saturday night—and most of them are drunk."

Wilton put on his clothes quickly, placed Jules in charge of the shack and hurried to the bunkhouses. The workmen obeyed his summons with slow sullenness. They were stupid with drink. Some jeered; some refused to turn out at all.

But some of the engineers and foremen were already hurrying to the



The Fire Was Speeding at a Terrific Rate Toward the Camp.

scene. Wilton collected these and started with them in the direction of the conflagration.

This was soon seen to be serious. Under the high wind the fire was speeding down at a terrific rate toward the camp, filling the air with dense clouds of smoke. The camp, having cleared ways on three sides, had not been fire-guarded. These should have been wide enough to protect it under

ordinary circumstances, and the work that was being pushed had left no time for anything else.

Backfiring was impossible, for the wind came up the cleared road from the muskeg with hurricane force. Wilton posted his men along the near side of the way, to beat out the patches of flame that would spring up from the burning brands carried over it by the wind.

The conflagration came roaring down on them before many minutes had passed. It seemed to gather force as it advanced. The smoke was stifling. They could see one another only dimly in the swirling fog.

The line of fire shot through the crackling ferns and undergrowth before them, and reached the edge of the cleared way. Then the workers found themselves surrounded with a ring of flame. The trees and grass were alight behind them. And along the muskeg edge the conflagration had thrust out gripping tentacles of flame that edged round and in toward the engine-sheds.

Shouting to those nearest him to follow, Wilton ran down toward the swamp. But when the grade came into sight he saw something that caught his cry and killed it on his lips. Of a sudden his veins seemed to run ice for blood. The fire had caught the trebling and was running along the timbers, eating its way toward the east bank.

But what made him catch his breath and clench his fists was this: the fire was moving eastward and yet it could not have started on the west bank, for here the trebling was completely hidden under the foundation, over which the flames could not pass. The fire had started in the middle of the muskeg, and had been started there of design.

It was the end of everything. Big Muskeg would remain unspanned after all, when Bowyer assumed control.

The engine-houses were fire-red ruins, belching up a black, sticky smoke that clogged the fighters' lungs and settled in fine particles of black dust all over them. Drums of oil and gasoline exploded with the salvoes of artillery, shooting up streamers of flame sky-high. Rivulets of fire broke forth and streamed through the camp, spreading the destruction.

The encircling arms of the conflagration had thrust their fingers all about them through the forest, which was ablaze in every direction. But in the open space itself the fire had not stayed, though hardly anything was left except the kitchens and bunk-houses. The sheds and engine-houses had gone up in a few minutes, and now glowed fiercely with an intense heat, but without flame.

The fighters had done all they could do, and that was nothing. They could do nothing more now, except to guard the bunk-houses from the rivers of blazing oil. Wilton found a few men and told them to take spades and throw up mounds along the courses of these torrents, in order to divert them.

The hunkies, mad with drink, gathered in clusters at the doors of the bunk-houses and jeered at the men who fought to save them; and these, too disconsolate to care, having at last secured the remaining structures, flung down their spades and drew out of their way. Everyone knew this was the end.

Out of the smoke came the figure of McGee, the head locomotive engineer. His hair was crisped like a negro's—he was as black, and the tears had furrowed white channels down his cheeks.

"It's all gone!" he shouted. "Nothing but scrap-iron and junk. We'll have a bargain sale!" He recognized Wilton and seized him by the arm.

"Who set that blaze?" he screamed. "Man, there was gasoline, gallons of it, soaking the sheds before ever the fire come there. They were soaked with it. Who did it? Show me the d—n skunk!" he shouted, half beside himself.

"It doesn't matter now," said Wilton.

McGee raved, cursing and sobbing, and suddenly rushed away into the smoke and was lost to view.

Wilton was making his way toward his shack before it occurred to him that he would not find it. Yet there was the safe. He would stay guard over that. To his immense surprise, however, he discovered that the shack had escaped the conflagration, though nothing remained of Kitty's but a few blackened beams. A backfire had been set successfully. The grass was burned all about the place, but that was all. The shack was an oasis in the devastation of cinders. Jules had stuck to his post.

Wilton knew there had been treachery. He knew that Bowyer's appearance at the portage had not been chance. Bowyer had not driven miles from Cold Junction by coincidence. Wilton had no doubt that the fire was of his making.

And even that did not matter.

At the door of his shack he stopped. He had a strange instinct of danger—the instinct of the beast returning to its den, which tells it that something has been there during its absence.

He unlocked the office door and went in. For a moment he thought his suspicions groundless. Then he saw that the door of the safe was open. He ran to it, and found the papers inside and apparently intact, just as they had been.

Jules must have scared the thieves away before they could accomplish their design. But how had they got the combination?

Wilton shouted for Jules, and then, remembering that the deaf-mute could not hear him, went out of the room toward the little wooden outbuilding which Jules had constructed for his abode. But the Muskegon was not there.

He went back through the kitchen. In the middle of the room he saw something dimly outlined on the floor. He struck a match and found Jules in a pool of blood. One side of his head had been almost battered to pieces with a hatchet that lay on the floor nearby.

And yet Jules was not dead, for, as Wilton bent over him, he opened his eyes and smiled very faintly into his master's face. And the fingers of one outstretched hand quivered and pointed toward the office.

Wilton raised Jules gently in his arms and carried him within, and laid him on the floor. The Indian was almost at his last gasp, and he seemed struggling to express something before he died.

The fluttering fingers pointed upward. All that was left of life within the broken body seemed to be concentrated in them. Wilton watched them. The fingers squirmed and twisted. It seemed to Wilton that there was something in the room that Jules wanted. They were pointing now toward the safe. Wilton raised the dying man in his arms and supported the shoulders against his knees, so that Jules might see.

Jules pointed straight at the safe, looked up, and nodded. Wilton nodded. Jules seemed to lose interest then, but



Wilton Raised Jules Gently in His Arms.

the fingers still twisted, and now they pointed toward the wall behind. Wilton shifted his position, and raised the shade of the lamp, to illuminate the other half of the room.

The fingers wandered over the woodwork, and stopped upon the carvatures of Lee Chambers that Jules had drawn. Jules Halfhead smiled up into Wilton's face and nodded. Wilton nodded. Then Jules died.

CHAPTER XII.

Kidnaped!

Since Bowyer's last visit to the store Molly had been making plans, but when these were made, she did not dare to place them before the factor.

She knew that they could not long remain at the portage. There was his increasing infirmity; there was Tom Bowyer's enmity—his hold over her father, which was bringing him into his grave.

Yet she feared one of the factor's wild outbursts of rage if she renewed her suggestion that they should go to Winnipeg. On the other hand, gradually she began to believe that McDonald was forming plans of his own. If that were so, in due time, and in his own way, he would talk to her about them.

Meanwhile she watched her father anxiously. He still dragged his leg as he walked, and the fear that was always upon him now had made him an old man within the past year. The girl's love for him, which her humiliation at Bowyer's hands had never entirely killed, burned up again after she had broken with Wilton.

But she wondered constantly what was the power that Bowyer had over her father. Had McDonald given her any encouragement she would have spoken to him, and begged for an understanding that might remove the cloud which hung over them both. But the factor was more morose than ever, especially when the winter trading ended and time hung heavily upon their hands.

The talk came at last. McDonald was in his chair upstairs, Molly reading to him. But the factor did not seem to hear her; he was looking out of the window and brooding as of old. Suddenly he turned to her.

"I'm thinking of leaving here before winter, lass," he said.

"Leaving here, father? For good?"

"For aye," he exploded. "I thoct I'd die here and be laid beside your mother. And I've held on! God, how I've held on! But I'm done with that hope. Would ye leave the portage, Molly?" he asked wistfully.

"Yes, father! I wish we could. I wish we could go somewhere together where we'd never have cause to remember it."

"Aye, never to remember it!" he echoed.

"To Winnipeg?" she suggested timidly.

(TO BE CONTINUED.)

Fortunately a young man can't even imagine that his best girl will look like her mother a few years hence.

Gaudy Sleeves in New Styles

One of the first notes from the Paris opening says: "No great change is shown, except that sleeves are more gorgeous than ever and more varied."

Well, that is just as we would have it, asserts a fashion writer in the New York Times.

We have grown accustomed to petting and pampering our sleeves as though they were the favorite twins

and transparent sleeve. Another one has made a cap over the top of the arm, or, rather, the shoulder, and has used for this a two-inch woven ribbon placed in a series of strips. Still another sleeve of ribbon—this for a more dressy sort of frock—has strips of pleated ribbon in a narrow width, extending from the elbow away into the world in careless lengths. Ingenuity goes a long way in the using of ribbon for the beautifying of sleeves. And it is possible for anyone to design a dress that will make use of some valued bit of ribbon to the glorification of the whole gown. These old-fashioned ideas are coming into general usage again, especially with relation to sleeves, for with the evident necessity for making the sleeve a picturesque quantity, all sorts of modes and manners must be employed in order to lift the modern sleeve out of the class of the usual.

Ruffles of Soft Chiffon.

Another sleeve is made of a series of ruffles of soft chiffon. It is a youthful sleeve and one that, doubtless, will find great favor among the younger girls still wanting to look their fluffiest selves. At any rate, it is a sleeve that any mother will love to design for her daughter's party frock. It carries with it so much of charm and grace. And it is evident that, with a sleeve of this fluffy character, not a great deal in the way of other trimming is needed. There might be a few ruffles to match on the skirt, but a more attractive idea would be to keep the frock very straight and plain and full, with the low hanging bertha, and the girle of brightly colored ribbon roses. Then let the ruffles on the sleeves in their graduated widths count for everything all by themselves. They will be much more effective that way and will have a chance, without interruption of design, to display the really lovely lines which they establish for the whole costume.

An interesting sleeve finish is suggested for a dinner dress. The dress itself is one of those draped affairs with the lines of the fabric made gracefully to follow those of the figure itself. Then a shaped piece of silver and gold brocade is arranged for a low-cut collar and over the arm is hung a strip of the same trimming to make the armhole decoration. By this little trick, that sometimes ugly line of the sleeveless gown is done away with altogether and the arm is still left to shine in uninterrupted splendor. There are any number of adaptations of this idea to be seen on the newer gowns, and while the combination of black satin with sparkling silver trimming is one that has found much favor, there are other color combinations which can be worked out most successfully in this way.



Sleeve of Lace Cut in Circular Piece (Top), Having Turned-Back Cuff of White Moire. Below: White Puffed Chiffon, Fur Cuff and Cuff of Plaited Organdie, Black Velvet Wristband.

of the family. We know now that unless we pay special attention to that portion of our costume we are lost as far as style is concerned. And we have realized the fact that beautiful sleeves can make a gown as no other detail can.

A trifle of experimentation will show that the design of one's sleeves can be carried into the line of the gown in such a way that the sleeves become and remain the actual center of attraction and style. And now that we have the sanction of Paris for going ahead with our sleeve achievements, we should manage to do some extraordinarily lovely things during the coming season. We have spent a season in experimentation, as it were, and now, after our months of education, we are launched upon a career of actual artistic accomplishment.

The style declaration that there is no trimming can be accepted and believed until we consider the sleeves of the day. For all the decoration that once was spread over a far broader surface has now been concentrated within the area of the sleeve. We find there not a mere suggestion of trimming, but an actual mass of it. The fact is that often the sleeve is nothing but trimming, and so greedy is it of the place it has come to hold that it succeeds in preventing decoration in any other place. We find embroidered sleeves, brocaded sleeves, lattice-worked sleeves, puffed sleeves, plain sleeves. In fact, there is no end to the surprises that are sprung upon us at every turn of fashion's way.

Now there are certain questions about sleeves which might as well be settled at once. First, sleeves will be long. They will still be full, though not quite so extraordinarily so as they have been. Some of them will be fitted, even from the elbow to the wrist. In evening dresses there will still be only suggestions of sleeves or indications that sleeves might be there in that particular space if the thing had so happened. For coats and capes there will be those voluminous crosses between sleeves and capes which make the wraps look as spacious and comfortable as can be. All of these things will be so, and then there will be so many exceptions that the rules will seem utterly superfluous.

Some of the Newer Sleeves.

A study of some of the newer sleeves is a good approach to the fall costumes, for, as has been said, they will set the pace. And if one's foundation fashion knowledge has much to do with sleeves, then the path to general smartness of attire will be a simple one indeed.

Among three interesting types of sleeves one is made of strips of beautifully brocaded ribbon. The design is Egyptian, and the colors are all those gorgeous dull ones that designate that period. The color of the gown is a dull blue and the material is one of those soft and pliable silk crepes so fashionable just now. Then the ribbon with its dark yellow, green, red and golden tones is applied in long bands on the sleeves ending at the elbow, and the sleeve is faced with a dull red silk to match that coloring in the woven ribbon.

There are any number of ways of using ribbons in these newer and more elaborate sleeves. They fairly blossom forth in this particular, for all the intensely colored ribbons and all those with metal threads and brilliant designs can, in some way, be worked into the design of a gown so that this sort of trimming will look like some intricately executed placement of embroidery.

One designer has used many rows of that narrow-patterned grosgrain ribbon to form a band on the end of a full

Showing Winsome Group of Sleeves That Are Prominent in Some of the Newer Frocks. These Sleeves Range From the Chiffon Ruffles to the Flat Strips of Brocade Material.



a black satin dress quite handsomely trimmed with some of this lingerie trimming that the season's thin and organdie dresses have made popular. And, invariably, along with the long, low collars and the flouncy trills about the throats, there go wide cuffs or sleeve ends to carry out the complete idea.

There is the frilled and plaited organdie cuff arranged in three stiff tiers and held snugly around the wrist with a black velvet ribbon band and cut steel buckle. This is a sparkling cuff, trimming, if you please, but it is only illustrative of the lengths to which the designers are going in their effort to supply a touch of daintiness to some of the newer black frocks.

Then there is a circular cuff, flaring back and away from the hand, being confined by only the simplest and narrowest sort of a band, closely held about the wrist.