THE BIG MUSKEG

By

VICTOR ROUSSEAU

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"I'LL GO WITH YOU."

SYNOPSIS.—Looking over Big Muskeg, a seemingly impassable swamp in the path of the Missanabi 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 Missanabi from him. Molly determines to go with him.

CHAPTER III—Continued.

"When Joe's death came home to me I thought things over in there, and it seemed to me that the only thing possible for me would be to go before the shareholders and tell them frankly what lay behind the enterprise. I mean the clay lands and their development.

"Well, Molly, I've changed my mind. I won't tell them. I'll keep control for Kitty. And I'll advise the shareholders to proceed with the route we've planned. I'll take the responsibility. Big Muskeg can be crossed. It shall be.

"And I'll do more than that, Molly. I'll get the shareholders' authorization before they know Joe's dead. If they knew that, it'd be all up with the line. Bowyer doesn't know. Nobody knows except ourselves."

"I've told you all this, Molly, because you have the right to know. And just as soon as we've won I shall be in a position to ask you to be my wife. Will you, dear?"

Molly turned and put her hands on his shoulders.

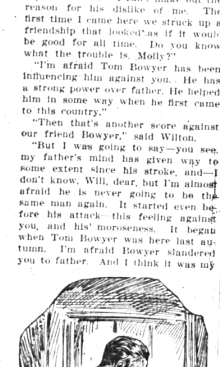
"Yes, Will," she answered. "And I hope with all my heart that you succeed in carrying out Joe's plans. And I believe you will. And I believe you will find a way to cross Big Muskeg. I see now that I must let you go, though I can't bear to. Will. But now I must say something. You know my father—"

"Doesn't altogether approve of me as a son-in-law, to put it mildly," answered Wilton. "I can't make out the reason for his dislike of me. The first time I came here we struck up a friendship that looked as if it would be good for all time. Do you know what the trouble is, Molly?"

"I'm afraid Tom Bowyer has been influencing him against you. He has a strong power over father. He helped him in some way when he first came to this country."

"Then that's another score against our friend Bowyer," said Wilton.

"But I was going to say—you see, my father's mind has given way in some extent since his stroke, and—I don't know. Will, dear, but I'm almost afraid he is never going to be the same man again. It started even before his attack—this feeling against you, and his moroseness. It began when Tom Bowyer was here last autumn. I'm afraid Bowyer slandered you to father. And I think it was my father's brooding over things that really caused his illness. So we'll just have to be patient. And I'm going to ask you, for the present, not to say anything about this to him."



"Yes, Will," She Answered.

Wilton promised, though with reluctance. He did not like the concealment. His mind, simple and direct, worked in straightforward ways. However, he had been too hard hit over Joe's death to make room for a new trouble. And he could not have refused Molly.

CHAPTER IV.

"In the King's Name!"

But he worried over the situation all night, and in the morning Molly saw with alarm that he was in a feverish condition. He should never have left his bed, and the journey seemed impossible.

"I've got to go, Molly," was all Wilton could say.

"Then," she said with sudden decision, "I shall go with you. You can't travel alone. Your men may be faithful enough, but it is my right to go. And you'll never get to the meeting without some one to take care of you on the way. That's my condition. Promise me—or else I'll lock the store door, Will, and I've got a padlock that even you couldn't force."

Molly seemed to be animated by a resolution as feverish as his own. Jules Halfhead had not fulfilled his intention of absenting himself, probably on account of the storm, which had made the security of the store seem preferable to life in the forests. He was faithful to the factor, and had never deserted him in need. He could take care of him during the four or five days of her absence.

Wilton was forced to yield.

"But you must make sure that Jules will stay," he said.

"He'll understand. He'll stay," answered the girl. "He's never run away when I was going to Moose Lake or Winnipeg."

Molly went up to the factor's room with the faint hope of reaching some understanding of plumbing her father's feeling against Wilton and overcoming it.

"Mr. Carruthers is getting ready to go," she said. "He is very ill. He is too weak to travel alone, but he must take Joe Bostock's body back to Clayton."

"Oh, aye!" said the factor, sneering. "He needs care and attention during the journey. So I am going with him."

The factor sat up in bed, brandishing her with a look of fury. "You mean you will go with Wilton Carruthers to Clayton?" he cried. "Ye winna dare, then! Mark me, how, I've done with you for aye! Molly, lass, ye winna go!" he pleaded, with a sudden change of tone. "Think of your good name in Clayton! I havena reared ye to have ye desert me in my old age and sickness, Molly!"

She turned quickly away to keep her tears from falling. "Jules can take care of you for a few days, father," she said. "It's not as if you were helpless. And his life is at stake."

"And mebbe he'll die if you don't stay with him when ye get to Clayton, eh, lass?" rasped out the factor in withering scorn.

That scorn nerved her; to his weakness she had almost yielded. She went down and dressed herself for the journey. She helped Wilton on with a mackinaw, and put a caribou robe in the sleigh. Then, while the men were harnessing the dogs, struck by a sudden thought, she stooped and began to examine the tracks of the snowshoes about the edge of the portage. They ran confusedly in all directions, for the marks had been made by seven different pairs—those of Bowyer and Chambers and their Indian; those of Wilton and his two half-breeds; those of the deaf-mute.

Of these Wilton's were blurred and almost indistinguishable, made by the dragging feet as she pulled him up from the swamp. But even had the vague purpose in Molly's mind been clear to her, there would have been no need to examine those. The rest were all similar in one respect—none had a broken string.

Wilton and Molly had arranged that he was to travel in the sleigh, to which a second had been attached bearing Joe's body in a roughly made coffin constructed by the men. The dogs were harnessed, and they started.

It was a little more than fifty miles to Clayton. Traveling along the cleared road, the distance could be covered easily in two days. The dogs ran well, the weather was clear and fine, and Wilton felt well enough to walk a good deal. Their dinner was almost like a picnic. By evening the railhead had come into sight in the distance, the empty camp, the long sheds with the miscellany of supplies, the locomotive shops, and the great ballast pits beside the line.

As the dogs climbed the last hill there came yelping from the cleared way behind them. Looking back, they perceived a sled approaching. Two men walked beside it, and the dogs, sighting Wilton's, yelped in challenge, which was taken up in an outburst of answering growls.

The sled drew in toward them, and the men resolved themselves into a sergeant and a constable of the mounted police. Wilton had stopped his dogs, but the newcomers did not halt, and went on, with curt greetings, toward the cache.

A little surprised at their abruptness, Wilton let the sled precede his sleigh. As the dogs were eager for their meal, he sent Pepillon ahead with them, and followed more leisurely with Molly. They arrived at the cache a few minutes after the half-breeds, to find the two policemen waiting for them, while the two men were unharnessing the dogs. Andersen, the old Swedish caretaker, was standing beside Joe's coffin with a stunned look on his face. The policemen were not of prepossessing appearance. The older man, the sergeant, was about forty years of age. He had fair hair, drooping mustache, a slight cast in one eye, and an expression of sullen insolence. His companion, a short, stocky young fellow, looked hardly less surly and evidently ill at ease.

"Evening, Mr. Carruthers," said the sergeant bruskly. "I'm sergeant Peters, and this is Constable Myers. That's Joe Bostock's body you're bringing in, I guess."

Wilton was staggered. "Yes, it's Joe," he said, gulping. "How did you get the news?"

The policemen exchanged glances. Peters smiled scornfully under his long mustache. "I's known, all right. It's our job to know them things," he answered. "I'm taking charge of it—to bring it in for the inquest."

"But you are not from Clayton," said Wilton, who, of course, knew all the members of the small force of police that was stationed there.

"We're from the Pas," answered the sergeant shortly.

From the Pas! That explained how the sled had come along the road behind him. Bowyer must have discovered the fact of Joe's death in some manner, and had probably sped the news. Wilton surmised that Jules Halfhead had somehow managed to indicate the fact to him.

The constable solved his problem. "We was on patrol," he vouchsafed. "And we met parties who told us about Joe Bostock having died with an accident, and that you was bringing him in."

"That'll be all," snapped the sergeant, looking angrily at Myers, who subsided promptly. "I guess this young woman is Molly McDonald?" he continued.

"This lady is Miss McDonald," said Wilton angrily, "and you'll keep a civil tongue in your head, sergeant."

Peters looked him up and down insolently, and for a moment or two the men faced each other in an aggressive attitude. Then the sergeant, sneering, swung on his heel. Wilton did not know what to make of his attitude, for the police were always friendly.

Andersen's room was placed at Molly's disposal, and after Wilton had seen to her comfort he went outside the shack.

The dogs were yelping and snarling over their fish from the cache. Pepillon had just finished feeding them, and Wilton thought Peters had been speaking to him. Probably the sergeant was trying to obtain information.

The Swede came up to Wilton, holding a pan of sizzling brown potatoes. "I can't believe it, Mr. Carruthers," he said. "Only last week he passed through here with you. Gosh, he was a fine man, Joe was; How did it happen? And you're hurt yourself, sir," he continued, glancing at Wilton's arm.

"Joe was shot at my side in the woods. The same bullet hit me. I don't know who fired the shot. But I'm going to know," said Wilton grimly.

"My God, it's all up with the line yet!" muttered the old man, withdrawing to his fire.

Wilton looked at Molly, who had come out of the bedroom and was standing near him. Andersen's exclamation had gazed the whole situation. Wilton felt physically nauseated by the heat in the shack, the uselessness of the situation, and a recurrence of pain in his wound.

He went over to Andersen. "Do you happen to know either of those fellows?" he asked.

"I never saw them before, sir," said the old man. "I guess they ain't from these parts, from the looks and the ways of 'em."

"There's a new lot come up from Yerkton lately. Maybe they shifted these to the Pas when they sent some of the Pas men on to Clayton." Wilton reflected. He turned to Molly. "Anyway, we'll start bright and early," he said. "I suppose we'll have to have those fellows' company as far as Clayton. But I wonder—" He paused. "I wonder whether Joe would forgive me for leaving him in the hands of strangers for a while, if it were for Kitty?" he mused.

The two policemen came in, looking surly and a communicative as ever. After a hurried meal, eaten almost in silence, Molly said good-night to Wilton and went into the caretaker's room. As the door closed behind her Wilton saw the two men look after her. The constable whispered something to the sergeant, and both chuckled.

Wilton's blood was boiling, but he controlled himself. This was for Kitty, and his debt to Joe.

The policemen prepared to lie down. Andersen was already snoring upon the floor. The half-breeds, however, had not come in, and Wilton, going to the stables, found them curled up among the huskies.

"You fellows had better come into the shack," he said, "unless you want to freeze."

Pepillon refused. "Them d—n dogs will fight each other," he said, "if we don't stay here."

"Just as you like," said Wilton.

It was not unusual for rival teams of huskies to attack each other, but such antipathy generally developed from the first, and the dogs seemed contented enough. He went back to the shack and lay down, turning over in his mind what he was projecting, but he was utterly worn out, and fell asleep before he was aware of it.

When he opened his eyes it was already dawn. The policemen were dressed and standing outside the shack, conversing in low tones. Andersen was peeling potatoes for breakfast. Wilton heard Molly moving within the room, and his doubts fell from him. He had been upset by the surliness of the two men; he had had vague suspicions not justified in fact. He determined to put his proposal to them.

He walked over to the sergeant, who was just re-entering the shack with his companion.

"I suppose you fellows are thinking of starting at once, after breakfast," he suggested.

The sergeant looked him up and down. "That's about the size of it," he growled. "Got any objection?"

Wilton resolutely ignored the affront.

"I've got important business in Clayton, affecting Mr. Bostock's interests,"

The Two Policemen Came In.

he said. "It is very important that his death should not be known there until midday tomorrow."

The constable, who was leaning against the door-post, chewing the end of a twig, started slightly. Peters fixed Wilton with his crooked stare.

"Rather a nervy thing to propose, Mr. Carruthers," he sneered.

"Maybe, but it's a business matter affecting Mr. Bostock's wife," said Wilton, loathing himself for making the request, but nerving himself to do so by the thought of Kitty. "If the news of his death reaches Clayton before the time I've mentioned, some people who are antagonistic to Mr. Bostock's interests will jump at the chance to turn it to account. It will mean a heavy loss to Mrs. Bostock. You've come a long way, and you could quite reasonably wait till afternoon on account of the dogs. That will bring you in before noon tomorrow. And—if you can see your way to it, you two won't be the losers."

The sergeant eyed him more insolently than ever. "So that's the program, is it?" he answered. "Well, keep your mind easy. The news won't be known in Clayton tonight, nor tomorrow neither. We ain't going to Clayton."

"You're not, eh? Then where the devil are you going?" cried Wilton, nettled almost beyond endurance at the man's demeanor.

"We're taking Joe Bostock's body back to the Pas," retorted the sergeant. "That's what we come here for."

"The Pas? This isn't in the Pas jurisdiction!"

"It ain't, eh? Perhaps it's in yours, then?"

"See here," cried Wilton in exasperation, "Clayton has its own police detachment, as you know perfectly well. Your route doesn't lie in this direction. Joe Bostock's home's there. He's going to be buried there. And his body isn't going to be dragged here and there about the country by a couple of fool policemen. I'll make things pretty warm for you if you try any game like that."

"Keep your hands up, both of you. Give me the revolver, Molly!"

(TO BE CONTINUED.)

DESERVED THE HONORS PAID HIM

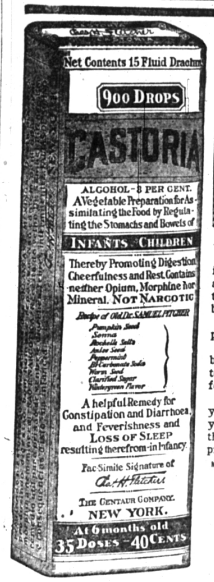
Monument at Washington Recalls Notable Services Rendered by Indian Chief to Young Republic.

In the old Congressional cemetery at Washington stands a monument, the subject of which is known to very few of even the well-informed citizens of this country. It commemorates Pushmataha, a Choctaw Indian chief whose remains lie underneath. The monument was erected by his brother chiefs who were associated with him in a delegation to Washington in 1824.

Pushmataha was chiefly celebrated for his unfaltering friendship for the young American republic, and throughout his life he was able to demonstrate this friendship in various valuable ways. During the War of 1812 he headed the Indians who composed a portion of Andrew Jackson's army, and his services in that conflict were so noteworthy that Jackson granted him a commission as brigadier general. He cooperated with the white authorities in the removal of the Choctaws from their original location in the Mississippi country to what was later Indian territory. He died in 1824 while on a visit to Washington in connection with this removal.

Soft Music Aids the Girls.

Music store clerks say that grandma and grandpa keep up to date with the jazz and the syncopated stuff. It is the sixteen-year-old granddaughter who plays "When You and I Were Young, Maggie," on the phonograph for her beau, and gazes soulfully into his eyes as the music weeps forth. The music store people declare that the old tunes bring the beau to the speaking point as the saxophones never do.—Milwaukee Journal.



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A Baby's stomach when in good health is too often disarranged by improper food. Could you for a moment, then, think of giving to your *sitting* child anything but a medicine especially prepared for Infants and Children? Don't be deceived.

Make a mental note of this:—It is important, Mothers, that you should remember that to function well, the digestive organs of your Baby must receive special care. No Baby is so abnormal that the desired results may be had from the use of medicines primarily prepared for grown-ups.

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Speaking of tights.

Women who think they are not free should remember that in some cities a man cannot go into a theater with his coat on his arm even on the hottest of days, and that the boys in the Haverhill high school cannot go without collars.—Worcester Telegram.

Cuticura for Sore Hands.

Soak hands on retiring in the hot suds of Cuticura Soap, dry and rub in Cuticura Ointment. Remove surplus Ointment with tissue paper. This is only one of the things Cuticura will do if Soap, Ointment and Talcum are used for all toilet purposes.—Advertisement.

IN LINE WITH BOLSHEVISM

Parallel Drawn by H. G. Wells Is Pretty Good Explanation of Existing Situation.

H. G. Wells was discussing bolshevism.

"It's too bad," he said, "for, after all, the bolsheviks meant well. But they went too far, you see. That's our trouble everywhere. Either we don't go far enough, or else we go too far.

"Like the man in the French restaurant.

"This poor devil looked at the French menu, which was Greek to him, and then he touched an item with his finger. The waiter brought him a plate of soup.

"Well and good. His soup finished, he touched the next item. The waiter brought him a second plate of soup. With a repressed oath he touched the third item, and a third plate of soup was set before him.

"In desperation then he touched the last item of all.

"The waiter brought him toothpicks."

Rheostat for Vacuum Tubes.

Rheostats for controlling the current in vacuum tubes and constructed for mounting on panels varying from one-eighth to one-half inch in thickness, are now being manufactured by a Milwaukee (Wis.) concern, says an illustrated article in Popular Mechanics Magazine. Two styles, one with vernier adjustment for detector tubes, and the other for amplifier tubes, are available, both designed for an operating range from zero to four ohms.

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DIPLOMACY TO THE RESCUE

With Ice Cream Cone in Sight, It Must Be Conceded That Betty Withdrew Gracefully.

Betty, who is four, had been scolded by auntie for some misdemeanor, and her feelings were badly hurt. She kept referring to the matter and saying to auntie: "All right for you. I don't care about you any more."

Finally aunty retorted: "Well, all right for you, then. If you don't care about me any more I won't need to get you that ice cream cone I intended to buy you."

Betty looked abashed for a moment. She did not wish to unbend so far as to accept a bribe, but she disliked to lose that ice cream cone.

Then her face brightened with a happy thought. "Oh—uh—April fool!" she said triumphantly.—Detroit Free Press.

Air Disarmament Completed.

Since January, 1920, the allied commission of aeronautical control has destroyed 14,800 airplanes, and the work of disarming Germany in the air is ended. Of the 29,500 motors handled, some have been turned over to the allies, but the greater number have been broken up.

It requires concentrated thought to reflect how pretty your feet look when your shoes hurt.

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W. N. U., DETROIT, NO. 33–1922.

The Proof.

The Flitterbys had but recently returned from their honeymoon and taken possession of their new home.

Said Mr. Flitterby one evening, as he glanced about the dining room: "Do you know, my dear, I can scarcely realize that we are really and truly married?"

"In that case," returned Mrs. Flitterby with a wicked smile, 'just look over these bills, darling, and you'll have no doubt whatever."—Philadelphia Public Ledger.

Breaking It Gently.

"I want you to understand, sir, that my pride forbids me to accept anything from you after I marry your daughter."

"How are you going to live?"

"Well, I thought you might make some kind of a settlement beforehand."—From the Boston Transcript.

Men take opposite sides on the money question, but the majority are on the outside.

Are your nerves sound?

HEALTH authorities agree that children should let coffee and tea alone, that their nerves may be kept free from the caffeine drug disturbance, and grow up in natural health.

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