The Big Muskeg

By

VICTOR ROUSSEAU

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CHAPTER IX—Continued.

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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 Passepartout, 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 Missatibi. Driven by the tropical realization that he was working for Bowyer, Wilton had resolved to go to Clayton as soon as the trestling was completed, and try to raise the money to pay Phayre, who, he knew, would not renew the note.

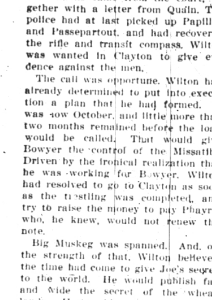
Big Muskeg was spanned. And, on the strength of that, Wilton believed the time had come to give Joe's secret to the world. He would publish far and wide the secret of the wheat lands. He would establish sufficient confidence in the line to make the raising of a loan a possibility.

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. "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 freighting business."



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

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 "Missatibi," which bolted 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 hypothecated 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—the light sentence, on the jury's recommendation. Afterward Wilton had a talk with Quain.

The two men had suddenly 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 would 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 mistake it 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 quite 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 Devill get control. 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 Missatibi. 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 counselling 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 did 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 slo'uld 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 Missatibi is good."

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

"Well? Other banks may think the same—"

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 Abysmal 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 wall man; but, as she entered, the right leg went straight 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 Missatibi's mighty slow in crossing Big Muskeg."

Molly flinged 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 advances 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.

Kitty Came Downstairs, to Find Bowyer in the Parlor.

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 sulphine look on the red face. For an instant Kitty shuddered inwardly. Her passion for Wilton was taking her into unrelished 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, I guess. 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 it's the affair of his ex 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 staunch, 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.)

YOUNG BOYS EXPERT HORSEMEN

Mongolian Youths at Home in the Saddle at an Astonishingly Tender Age.

If a daring traveler braves the dangers of a trip into Mongolia he is fascinated by the natives at the time of their summer festivals. Then every Mongolian family puts on its best bibs and tuckers and goes to the fair, much in the same way the people in our own country sections go to the county fair. However, at the Mongolian county fair one does not "hit the baby" and get a five-cent cigar, or throw rings at canes to obtain a prize, but one does see horse races.

Instead of sitting in a grand stand and watching the entire race, as you do here, you see only the start or finish. For the races in Mongolia are 30 miles long.

The Mongolians are great horsemen, and learn to ride at a very early age. Their lives are spent with and on horses. The women ride as well as the men, and by the time a boy has reached the age of ten he is an expert horseman. In fact, the jockeys are ten-year-old boys.

These little fellows are mounted on the very fast Mongolian ponies, without saddles. Their only trappings are a bridle, a whip and a handkerchief.

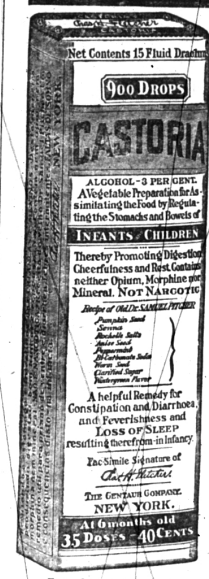
They start on their wild ride over the steppes with the courage and spirit of men, whipping their horses fiercely, but often reaching over kindly to wipe the dust from the eyes and nostrils of their ponies.

Falsehood's Goodly Outride.

"What has become of the men who used to sell gold bricks?"

"I dunno," answered Uncle Bill Bottletop. "I guess they've or themselves a supply of counterfeit labels an' gone into the bootleg business."

Probably Eve was so called, Gerald, because she arrived in the late afternoon



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Children Cry For Fletcher's CASTORIA

Special Care of Baby.

That Baby should have a bed of its own all are agreed. Yet it is more reasonable for an infant to sleep with grown-ups than to use a man's medicine in an attempt to regulate the delicate organism of that same infant. Either practice is to be shunned. Neither would be tolerated by specialists in children's diseases.

Your Physician will tell you that Baby's medicine must be prepared with even greater care than Baby's food.

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 ailing 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.

MOTHERS SHOULD READ THE BOOKLET THAT IS AROUND EVERY BOTTLE OF FLETCHER'S CASTORIA

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Careful at Least.

"You kin have yoh driver," said Uncle Eben. "Gimme a mule. A mule has sense enough to balk an' not try to pass in front of a locomotive."—Washington Star.

Cuticura Comforts Baby's Skin

When red, rough and itching, by hot baths of Cuticura Soap and touches of Cuticura Ointment. Also make use now and then of that exquisitely scented dusting powder, Cuticura Talcum, one of the indispensable Cuticura Toilet Trio.—Advertisement.

FOUND OUT WHAT WAS WRONG

Physician Might At Least Take Comfort in Fact That His Subconscious Mind Was Right.

Have you ever done a piece of work, conscious at the time that something was vitally wrong with it, but unable to figure out the defect until after the job was finished?

The "feeling that something is wrong" floats up vaguely from the subconscious mind, one of every person's two brains.

A Toronto doctor toiled evenings for two winters building in his cellar an eighteen-foot motorboat for Muskoka lakes. At that time he was conscious that something was wrong, but could not figure it out, though he pondered in detail everything from engine to paint.

When it came time to take the boat to the freight train he abruptly learned what had bothered his subconscious brain: There was no way of getting the boat out of the cellar except by tearing a big hole in the foundations of the house and digging a deep opening to the outside.

Possibly Taking No Chances.

Two tired men—the sort of men who are always tired—were talking about the forthcoming election in their town, and discussing the rival candidates.

"Now, that Mr. Pilsber is a good sort!" said one.

"I'm not so sure of that," replied the other. "But what makes you think that?"

"Why, did you notice how heartily he shook hands with me?"

"Yes, I did," replied his friend.

"He wasn't content with one hand, he grabbed both. He's a good fellow, he is."

The other looked at him thoughtfully for a moment. Then he said: "Yes, and he's very proud of his gold watch!"

Good Portable Lock.

A portable door and window lock that can be carried in the pocket and applied anywhere without nails or screws has recently been invented by B. N. Wickwire of Carbondale, Pa.

It consists of a wedge that is placed between the door and the door jamb.

The wedge carries a series of fine teeth that are brought tightly into contact with the wood by pressure upon a lever. If anyone attempts to open the door the movement wedges the lock into the jamb and the teeth grip so firmly that the entire door frame must be torn away, the inventor declares, before the lock can be forced.

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SILLY IDEA OF "BLUE BLOOD"

Austrian Aristocratic Requisites About on a Par With the Action of Foolish Boy.

Dean Hevkel of Lafayette college said at a dinner in Easton:

"The Austrian aristocracy must be taking Austria's new democratic government very hard, for Austrian society was the most rigidly exclusive in the world. You had to have four quarterings to your coat of arms—that is, all the way back to your grandfather and grandmother on both father's and mother's side all your people had to be noble. A drop of common blood, and you were not received at court or in society.

"This absurd treatment of good Austrians who didn't happen to be noble deserved to vanish as it has vanished. For it was stupid, absurd, cruel. In fact, it was all of a piece with the action of the boy who was found stoning a frog and yelling savagely at it: 'I'll Parry ye to be a frog!'"—Indianapolis News.

If a man is color blind he can't tell a white lie from a black one.

EYES HURT?

For burning or scaly lids, and to relieve inflammation, thin and sorrowful, use Hitchall Eye Salve, according to directions. Soothing, healing.

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SCENARIOS WANTED—Direct studio service. Membership now open to talented authors. Photoplay Editor, American Screenwriters' Society, 6321 Santa Monica, Hollywood, Cal.

Lehmann's Gallstone, guaranteed gallstone remedy. Two months' treatment $1.00. Money refunded if not satisfactory. Lehmann's Gallstone Remedy Co., 857 Market, Kingston, Pa.

MEN WITH TEAMS OR AUTOS WANTED to handle S. M. CO. PRODUCTS in vacant territory. For particulars address SAGINAW MEDICINE COMPANY, Saginaw, Michigan.

RHEUMATISM, NEURITIS—SEND FOR ONE treatment; take it at home; if not relieved within one week, three-course treatment costs $1. Send no money. You run no risk. Anti-Rheumatism Co., 124 St. Lansing, Mich.

Agents—Radiophone complete under $5; first payment secures; investment; collections, deliveries. Pat'd "Tupay" plan winner. Outfit free. Nat'l Specials, Tribune Bldg., New York.

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Restores Color and Beauty to Gray and Faded Hair. 50c. and $1.00 at Druggists. Hiscox Chemical Works, Patchogue, N. Y.

HINDERCORNS Removes Corns, Callouses, etc., stops all pain, ensures comfort to the feet, makes walking easy. 15c. at druggists. Hiscox Chemical Works, Patchogue, N. Y.

W. N. U., DETROIT, NO. 47-1922.

Music Induces Cows to Give More Milk.

Dr. C. Banks McNair, superintendent of the Caswell Training school, state institution, has produced proof that music induces cows to give more milk, says a dispatch to the Philadelphia Inquirer from Kinston, N. C. The school has a herd of Holsteins. The case of "Louise" was typical. One week, without music, the cow gave 382.5 pounds of milk. The next week, when a phonograph produced soothing tones at the milking periods, the production increased to 419.3 pounds. The third week, when there were no sweet strains, Louise slumped to a figure under the 400-mark. Doctor McNair declared where there were sixty or eighty cows together the profit in music would be hundreds of dollars a year.

Film Taken 23,000 Feet High.

The Mount Everest expedition set a record for movie picture making in high altitudes. Captain Noel of the Royal Geographic society, at 23,000 feet, through a telephoto lens, filmed the efforts of Captains Finch and Geoffrey Bruce, who were climbing Everest at a height of 27,000 feet.

The one way to keep sound, perfect teeth

THE only way to keep the priceless blessing of sound, perfect teeth is to eat the kind of food that supplies them not only with proper nourishment but gives them work to do. Grape-Nuts not only induces thorough mastication, but also supplies the lime and other elements required for building firm tooth structure.

This wholesome, healthful cereal food is made from whole wheat flour and malted barley. All the nutriment of these splendid grains, including the vital mineral elements so often lacking in so-called "refined" foods, is retained.

A delicious, appetizing dish, Grape-Nuts, with cream or good milk, provides complete nourishment for body, bone and nerves, in readily digestible form.

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