



Saving Farley's Bog

A HIGHGATE MYSTERY



Don Sawyer

CHAPTER 4

Farley's Bog

"So this is it?" Stitch asked. "Farley's Bog."

Daffy stood next to him on a small dock that pushed through the reeds into the water. Stitch had called Daffy after he left Molly Maxwell's house. They had agreed to meet the next day at the bog. "I'm out here most of the time now anyway," Daffy had said. "Besides. I want you to see what I'm talking about."

"Yep. This is it," Daffy replied.

"Still looks like a swamp to me," Stitch joked.

Daffy bristled. "It is a swamp. That's the whole point!" Daffy's voice began to rise.

Stitch gave him a playful punch in the ribs. "Just kidding. Lighten up, eh, Daf?"

Daffy's face fell. "This isn't light, Stitch. I mean it. There are lots of things worth fighting for. And this is one of them. In Canada, we've destroyed more than half of our wetlands. Isn't that something? Over half of our swamps, bogs, marshes – gone."

Stitch looked out over the quiet bog. It covered maybe 30 or 40 acres. A line of turtles was

sunning on a log near them. A great blue heron stood motionless and regal near the shore.

“Beautiful, isn’t it?” Daffy asked.

“The heron?”

Daffy swept his hand around the perimeter of the bog. Cattails stuck up along the shore like fuzzy spears. Islands of glossy water lily leaves floated on the still water. Yellow iris bloomed in clumps in the shallows. Sedges and other grasses crowded the shore. “All of it,” he said softly. “The whole thing.”

The two men were quiet for a moment. Birds were flitting and chattering in the black spruce edging the swamp. A carp splashed gently as it turned over in the still water near the pier.

“And it’s not just about the beauty,” Daffy went on. “Wetlands are like giant sponges. They soak up rain water that could lead to floods and erosion. All these plants? They suck up poisons like insecticides and fertilizers. Yeah, and they absorb lead, mercury and other heavy metals . Without this, all that crap is in our rivers and lakes. In our drinking water.”

“And they want to pave all of this?” Stitch asked.

“Oh, not all of it,” Daffy said wryly. “Just most of it.” He pointed to a field north of the bog. “They own that parcel. What they needed was the bog. That’s what was rezoned. Venam will fill in about half of the wetland. That’s 30,000 dump trucks of dirt. Then they’ll pave the whole thing. The

runoff with the gas, oil and other crud will kill off what's left."

Stitch shook his head. "That makes no sense. No government should allow this."

Daffy laughed bitterly. "Oh, there are regulations. Tons of regulation. Take Ontario Regulation 97/04. The Development, Interference with Wetlands and Alterations to Shorelines Regulation. Here's a direct quote." Daffy looked at the sky as he recited the clause. "This regulation is intended to insure that the regulatory processes are as streamlined as possible for development approvals."

"Great," Stitch said.

"And get this," Daffy went on. "Every municipality decides what that means. It's open season. Sure, the province can step in. So can the feds if fish are involved." He shook his head. "But they never do. Not until the damage is done. When the wetland is lost forever."

Stitch was quiet for a long moment. "I can see why you care so much."

Daffy smiled and shrugged. "We do what we can, eh? There are huge issues facing our world. But this is my corner. And I'm going to fight like hell to keep it healthy."

Stitch nodded. "And that fight boils down to the city council level."

"Yeah, that's right. And of course the developers come back again and again. We can stop them 10 times. But all they need is one approval. Then

they bring in their bulldozers and it's all over. That's what Venam did. We stopped them eight months ago. Then they were back. And this time they got the vote they wanted. Maxwell's."

Stitch nodded again. "That's why I wanted to talk to you. After I left you at Tim Hortons I had a call. It's one that might interest you."

Daffy nodded. "Go on."

"It was from Molly Maxwell."

Daffy frowned a moment. "You mean Bob Maxwell's wife?"

"One and the same. She is now a client." He paused. "Quite a pretty client."

Daffy was getting exasperated. "You wanted to meet to tell me that Molly Maxwell is good looking?"

"Calm down, Daffy. And listen for a change. As my client I have to respect confidentiality. But this involves you too. And I may need you to help me figure it out. You see, Maxwell has disappeared."

Daffy whistled quietly. "She hired you to find him?"

Stitch nodded. "I can only give you the broad strokes. But there's a woman involved."

"Isn't there always?" Daffy asked.

"Yeah, but this one is a knockout. Maxwell isn't. She's 15 years younger than Maxwell. They left together."

"How'd you find all that out?"

"I visited the Blue Angel Lounge last night."

Daffy snorted. "That's a sleazy place. I thought you liked microbrews."

Stitch rolled his eyes. "Not for a drink, you lunkhead. Maxwell went there every night after work. I caught up with a couple of his friends. Asked a few questions."

"So they unloaded?"

"Nope. Completely useless. Wouldn't say a thing. But the bartender wasn't so reluctant. Especially after I gave him two 20s."

Daffy looked back over the bog. "Ah, money. Money and greed. That's what makes the world go round, it seems."

"Don't get philosophical on me. The guy filled me in. Maxwell had been showing up with the chick for the last three weeks. Maxwell introduced her as Didi."

"Didi who?"

"Not that far yet. But we're working on it. Erin is checking out some contacts. See if we can get an ID on her. Show the barkeep some pictures. In the meantime, I'm heading after Maxwell. Tomorrow."

Daffy was getting more and more interested. "Do you think this chick was blackmailing him?"

"Dunno. But Maxwell was also spending like a drunken sailor."

Daffy whistled again. "You know what this means, don't you Stitch? It means if we can prove Maxwell switched his vote because he was bribed I can get an injunction."

“I thought it might run something like that.” Stitch replied. “That’s why I wanted you to know this. But there are no guarantees. The guy has a head start. The trail is pretty cold. I don’t know if I’ll find him.” He paused and looked out over the bog. “And if I do, I don’t know if I can get him to return.”

Daffy put a huge paw on Stitch’s shoulder. “I’ve never told you this, bro. But you are one smart guy. That’s why you’re the best detective in southern Ontario.”

Stitch pretended to twist Daffy’s beard. “What about the rest of Ontario?”

Daffy shook his head. “Nah. There’s tons better than you up north.”

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