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THE BLUEBEARD OF LOST CREEK MINE

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Occasionally weird and awe-inspiring legend and old tales drift in from B.C.'s vast hinterland, that land of everlasting glaciers, rugged peaks. "lost valleys," and hoodooed wealth. Perhaps the strangest of all is that of Lost Creek Mine and its weird story of murder, hanging, starvation and sudden death dealt out to those hardy enough to dare the warnings and search for the fabulous wealth stored in the fastnesses of the Pitt Lake Mountains.

The existence of the bonanza in the district was first revealed some forty years ago when an Indian from that district appeared at New Westminster who was apparently very stakey [?] since the tales of his wild spending are still told with relish by the old-timers of the city. Slummock was a slim wiry young Indian, possessing to an unnatural degree the usual Indian taciturnity. Try as they might, neither his fellow tribesmen nor the friendly whites could find the slightest inkling as to the source of his new-found wealth. In spite of the vigilance of friends he slipped quietly away when his one-man Potlach was over. Twice again the town was livened up by the visit of Slummock. The third gala occasion seemed to pall a little on the red man. Despite his boast, he seemed worried.

Even as he flung his gold to the four winds and had his moment of importance, the police was engaged in a gruesome task on the banks of the river a few miles north. They were searching the battered body of a young Indian squaw that had been fished from the river. On her person they found several good-sized nuggets. She was of Slummock's tribe. Questioned about her, the young Indian admitted that she had helped him on his last trip to the mountains but had been washed off the raft they made to descent the Pitt River. Although suspicion was rife as to how many others he had helped to disappear, there was not enough proof to convict him.

Some years later Slummock again appeared in town and boasted of his wealth and his find in the hills. When pressed as to the location he still refused to tell. This was to be his last visit. As before, even as he indulged in his fling, another body was picked out of the river. Although highly suspicious, the police had not sufficient proof for an arrest. Many wondered how many other had gone the same way as the young squaw, since it was certain that no Indian of Slummock's present standing would enter the woods without a squaw to

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pack and cook for him.

It was some years later before Slummock again appeared. His opulence was apparent. No less than four squaws formed his entourage as he strutted down the main street. Again he launched forth on his wild orgy. This was to prove his last fling. A third body was turned over to the police, again a comely young squaw. This time a hunting knife protruded from her back. It was Slummock's own knife. Other evidence brought out at the trial proved the guilt of the man beyond all doubt.

Brazen and boastful, the young Bleubeard told of the killing of eight other squaws. It was an easy matter to persuade them to "pack in" for him by promising them untold wealth. For fear that they would tell of his rich strike to others, he disposed of them on the return trip. That his murders would be discovered did not bother him in the least. He counted on the inaccessibility of the wild and rugged country through which he travelled.

Defiant to the end, he laughed at all attempts to worm from him the location of his wealth. The clang of the gallows took the secret to eternity.

The furore created by the facts brought out at Slummock's trial as to the location of his killings was to bring tangible evidence of the existence of his valley of gold. This was not to be won easily. More than one hardy prospector bitten with the gold-bug started out in the spring to face the wilds and struggled back months later a beaten and broken man. Fierce mountain torrents, treacherous ice crevasses, starvation and sickness plagued the boldest and accounted for many who never returned. The Pitt River Mountains were reluctant to reveal their secret to the grasping hand of the whites.

Almost thirty years after the excitement and the disappointment of the search has disappeared, the Lost Mine came to life again.

In 1930 a party of Seattle financiers and mining men appeared in New Westminster and began interviewing all the old-timers and prospectors they could locate. From each they gleaned the facts and rumours concerning the Lost Mine of Pitt River. To those who scoffed and called them fools they showed a letter and a map drawn by a prospector named Jackson. This was the one man upon whom Lady Luck had smiled. Soon after Slummock's execution he had set forth into the area north and west of Pitt Lake. There he had

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stumbled upon Lost Creek. There he had found gold beyond his wildest dreams. Being just about at the end of his tether, he had filled a knapsack with gold and started the long trek to civilization and food and rest. He was the merest wreck of a man when he reached town. Revealing not a hint of his colossal luck, he had gone to San Francisco. There the doctors told him that he was a doomed man—the hoodoo of the Lost Mine. With Death his constant company he had found his wealth of little satisfaction.

Jackson wrote all that to his friend in Seattle. He had enclosed a crude map of the area and urged his friend to find the mine again. Unable to do so, his friend had sold the map for one thousand dollars. It passed through many hands in the succeeding years and was scanned as eagerly as any Captain Kidd ever drew. Years later the bedraggled letter and the smudged map appeared in the hands of the adventurers in New Westminster. Determined to trace the lode down, the party set out for land beyond the Pitt River. They did not find the mine. But they found evidence that Jackson had been there and that he had found gold. Near the head of Pitt Lake they camped. Into the camp came an Indian and a very old squaw. It was she who had seen and helped Jackson on his trip out. He had stayed with her party for two days. Discouraged the party returned. The towering peaks hold their secret, guarded by the everlasting snows and the howling blizzards.
