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A CURSE GUARDS THIS LOST GOLD MINE

BY EDWARD GREEN

The western mineral belt, Canadian and American, is filled with stories of "lost" gold mines. All are fabulously richer than any mine yet discovered. Few of these stories have any substance but one, the lost mine of Pitt Lake, British Columbia, yielded huge amounts of nuggets to its owner. But when he was hanged in New Westminster for the murder of uncounted squaws the secret died with him. And, while standing on the gallows he snarled a curse and swore that all who tried to find his mine would die. Oddly enough, his prediction came true.

This fascinating, well-nigh unbelievable story had its start back in 1889 when New Westminster was a small town. The Fraser River gold rush was on and every merchant in town, bartenders included, had gold scales handy. Prospectors and placer miners came in and talked loudly of the strikes they had made but their combined takings were mere peanuts when John Slumach, a Salish Indian, came in with a whoop and a roar and proceeded to paint the town a brilliant vermilion.

Slumach was forty years of age, medium weight and size, with harsh black hair and a face that could drill rock. Cruelty and cunning was written in every line of it. Suspicious to the last degree, he whooped loudly, then settled back to watch the white men make pigs of themselves at his expense. He paid his shot not, with placer or river gold but in nuggets the size of walnuts and he seemed to have an unending supply of them in his packsack which was heavy enough to sag a [scow?]

Keen eyes followed his every move. Gold-hungry men laid plans to follow him to a mine that yielded such riches. For riches they were. Nugget after nugget paid for endless drinks and food for all. Others who had some money bought him drinks in return, hoping to loosen his lips and reveal the location of his private Golconda.

But the cagey Salish wasn't talking. He went about his business of buying supplies and storing them in his room and when he was sure he had enough he really went out on the town.

John's face and person were to understate it, repulsive. Yet the lovely young Indian maidens flocked around him for drinks by bestowing their favours to get him to reveal the whereabouts of his mine. He took their favours

A Curse Guards This Lost Gold Mine

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recklessly but told them nothing.

While John and his pals were enjoying the best, a fisherman on the Fraser lifted his nets and instead of them being loaded with sockeye salmon they were wrapped around the slender body of a beautiful Salish maid. In a pocket of her dress were several nuggets of the same variety so favoured by John. The police put two and two together and arrested John.

THE BODY was identified as that of Susy Jesner, a waitress in a cafe much favoured by John and his pals. John finally admitted he knew the girl. He said he knew her well enough to have taken her on his last trip to his gold mine. He said he agreed to give her some nuggets if she would cook for him and never tell where his mine was located. Yes, he admitted, she came back with him but fell out of the canoe while crossing the Fraser. He didn't report it because it was such a trivial accident. The police, having nothing more to go on, had to turn John loose. A few days later he vanished again.

Six weeks went by and John returned to fire up the town once more. It was the same old pattern, unlimited drinks and food for all. Reputable witnesses were later to testify under oath that he had prodigious numbers of nuggets varying in size from a pea to a walnut. He threw them around like confetti. Bartenders and others testified that on many occasions he threw a handful on the floor just to watch the white men fight for them.

NEW WESTMINSTER teemed with spies. When John's departure time drew near the town was ringed with watchers. A mouse couldn't have gotten through the cordon. But John did. Only the night before he had entertained [them?] by taking a bath in a tub full of beer and promised when he came back again he would wash the rancid beer of his body with good wine.

The fabulous parties of the Salish Indian went on for sixteen months, each bigger and better. Miners and prospectors grubbing for a bare living were frantic. Some proposed kidnapping John and putting him to torture to force him to reveal the whereabouts of his mine. Saner minds counselled more peaceful means, but all stayed to enjoy his hospitality.

But time was running out for John. The police aren't fools, and in checking their missing persons files they came up with the fact that every time John left the city a pretty girl disappeared and was never seen or heard of again. To date three white girls and five Indians, all noted for their beauty, had vanished. Constable Grainger, a noted man hunter, was

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detailed to look into the matter.

GRAINGER was on hand when John returned laden with gold. Disguised as a prospector who had struck it rich, he became the bosom pal of the Salish big spender. He boasted his mine was much richer than John's and tried to spend to prove it. It was like matching a piggy bank with a treasure chest. For every dollar he threw around John spent ten or twenty times as much. He tried every trick of his trade to get John to talk. It was no use. He was contemplating new methods when John vanished again.

A short time before John was due to reappear Molly Tynan, a shapely exotic halfcaste, Irish-Chinese, blew into town. She let it be known she was out to get John for her own. Grainger hastened to dissuade her. He told her many girls had gone into the forbidding mountains with the brutal Salish and had never been heard of again. Molly laughed. She patted a mean looking pistol in a pocket of her skirt and said she was able to take care of herself. She had, she said, handled the toughest of men from the Barbary Coast to Alaska so John would be no problem.

Grainger pleaded in vain. Molly was a determined girl. She said this was the one chance in her life to get rich quick and she wasn't going to lose it. Grainger told her she would lose more than that but she only laughed.

MOLLY WENT AFTER John when he returned by getting a job as a waitress at the Sasquatch Cafe. John, running true to form with a bagful of nuggets and his adoring followers, ate at the Sasquatch and in no time at all he exerted his charm on Molly. He promised all the gold she could carry if she would go with him to the mountains and be his cook. She agreed.

That night Grainger, having not heard of the agreement, tried to warn her again. She said she would take care of herself and John too if he tried anything. She wasn't going to settle for a mere bag or two of gold. She wanted it all. The following day, despite the close watch and outposts, the Indian and Molly disappeared.

John returned with a pack of nuggets but no Molly. Before he had a chance to start high wassail the police took him in charge and began to ask embarrassing questions. Yes, John said, Molly had gone with him all right, or at least she agreed to go. But when they reached the place where he had his canoe hidden she refused to go any further. She said she was going to Vancouver and walked off.

Constable Grainger had an idea or about how far Molly had

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walked. After seeing John securely locked in jail he gathered some men and with the help of three fishermen and their boats began to search the fast flowing Fraser with nets. It didn't take them long to find the mortal remains of Molly Tynan with a hunting knife in her heart and a look of stark terror on her face. For a woman who could take care of herself she hadn't done a very good job.

WHEN NEWS of Molly's tragic end went around town an angry mob gathered around the jail bent on a lynching party. Most of them didn't care if John murdered half a dozen Mollys, which he had, but they hoped to frighten him into giving the secret of his mine. The police, however, placed a strong guard around the jail and began to put John through the wringer. The howling mob helped them.

Yes, the Indian said, Molly had gone with him. He was about to deny killing her when more angry shouts reached his ears. He began to panic. He cast fearful glances at the window and seemed to know that no matter what he said now he was a dead pigeon. He began a story of how he took Molly to his secret gold and after they reached his canoe he said she must never tell. Molly, he said, wouldn't agree, so what else could he do but kill her?

If wasn't long before John Slumach found himself on the gallows in the bleak yard of New Westminster Jail. He then, when asked if he had anything to say, delivered his celebrated curse and said that whoever found his mine would die as surely as he was dying and that anyone even trying to find it would suffer incredible hardships or death or both. He would say no more. The secret would die with him. It did. He was sent through the trap a minute later.

JOHN SLUMACH'S sudden demise left his source of wealth without an owner. But where was it? There was no question about its existence because too many people had seen proof of it. There must be a golden creek somewhere in the Pitt Lake Mountain Range. Slumach had spent only nuggets, no dust. Therefore the place must be disgustingly rich. It was also disgustingly elusive for many tried to locate it. However, a man came up from San Francisco to seek what was now called The Lost Creek Mine. He hired native guides who took him to the, frowning mountains.

Five months passed before he returned. He was a physical wreck, [two unreadable words] He told a tale of incredible hardships, of flies that were poisonous enough to cripple a man, of dense fogs from hot springs, impenetrable underbrush, devils club that tore clothing to shreds

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and ripped, your skin. He said nothing about what he had found but it was noticed his packsack was unusually heavy. He went away and sometime later he died as a result of his hardships. Before he died he left a map that he gave to a friend. With it was a letter.

The letter described how he had found Slumach's golden creek and how it was literally paved with nuggets. He had, he said, packed out fifteen thousand dollars worth of gold and sometime later a squaw said she had met this man and he had a pack loaded with nuggets, which she saw. But the friend was too old to tackle the search and sold the map. The men who bought it ran into nothing but disaster from the start and almost lost their lives, so they returned empty handed and had no wish to try; it again. -

Others tried in vain. Some said they would stay in those forbidding mountains and find the creek or die trying. They did exactly that. Many who, went in never came out. More than twenty five people died in the attempt to find Lost Creek Mine. Those who did get in and were lucky enough to come out swore they would never go in again. John Slumach's curse was indeed potent. And what is more, it still holds good.

Only last year, Lewis E. Hagbo, 49 years old, of Bremerton, Washington, made an effort to find the rich creek. He dropped dead on the trail, the victim of a heart attack.