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LOST GOLD AND MURDERED MAIDS

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Illustrated by Harvey Kidder

When John Slumach got tired of a dame, he made her as hard to find as his phantom mine. Fortunately two buoyant babes stopped him before he made the town a no-woman's land

It didn't take much to cause excitement in the little town of New Westminster, B. C. back in the year 1889—but whatever it took, John Slumach didn't have any of. Slumach, a full-blooded Salish Indian was known as a “no-good Indian, a tramp, a thief and a skirt-chaser.” In a few words: John wasn't what you might call one of the first citizens of the town.

All that changed one day early that fall. When John blew into town that day he was still dirty, he was still an Indian, he was quick to prove he was still a skirt chaser—but he now had gold. So much gold he was staggering before he went into the local saloon. Not even a few large glasses of the local choice hooch could get him to say more than there was “as much more as there are stars in the sky, where this gold came from.”

Slumach, a medium-size man of 40, had long arms, black hair that snapped combs and a face that was hard on the furniture. Suspicious by nature, he eyed quietly the excitement around him, He would say nothing, except that he knew the location of fabulous riches. Although giving whiskey to Indians was illegal, the local gentry felt that with enough giggle-water under his belt, Slumach's lips would loosen. So Slumach was wined and dined royally.

Nor did certain members of the gentler sex ignore the uncouth Indian. Several of them were very friendly to him, including a waitress named Mary Warne.

For the following three days, Slumach continued to be the town's biggest attraction. He cashed his gold, bought numerous drinks for the house

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at the Old Frontier Saloon, and flung his money around like a drunken white man. But neither the promises of wantons nor frequent drinks of fire-water could loosen the tongue of the Salish brave. He accepted the hospitality of his white brothers and sisters with a knowing smirk, and rebuffed all questions with many “fill-'em-up-again” gestures. Then, on the morning of the fifth day, he disappeared without the whisper of a warning.

Later that day someone noticed that Slumach was not the only one who had disappeared from New Westminster. By an odd coincidence, Mary Warne was also missing. Several times in the past, however, the none-too-virtuous Mary had done a similar vanishing act, accompanied by some hot-blooded male, always returning alone at a later date, bitterly complaining about the fickleness of men. So no special significance was attached to her present absence; certainly in no way was it connected with that of the Indian John Slumach. The consensus among the few who cared was that she would eventually be back at her old haunts, another shattered romance behind her.

But in Slumach’s case it was different.

Opinions varied as to where he had gone, why he had gone, and how he had gotten there. The days stretched into weeks. He was still talked about - and the stories of the Indian and his gold strike continued to spread until they were eventually heard in Vancouver as well as other districts throughout British Columbia. The former local bum was now a widely discussed character, with his next appearance being looked forward to keenly.

Then, about six weeks after his departure, John Slumach suddenly reappeared in New Westminster. And once more his knapsack was bulging with raw gold, “nuggets the size of walnuts.”

For the second time, excitement ran high. The local hangers-on gathered around him. Within a half hour after his arrival, a full-scale drinking orgy was under way.



Just as the drunken guests in the Old Frontier Saloon thought that no more could happen, Slumach threw a handful of rocks—raw gold—on the floor.

This binge developed just as the first had. Slumach spent money freely, helped himself to the luxuries of civilization and partook of the hospitalities of his white-skinned brethren. He would readily buy as well as accept drinks; he was host at two lavish drunken banquets that lasted till dawn. Each was ended by his tossing several handfuls of gold nuggets upon the floor. A smirk creased his ugly features as he watched his tipsy white brothers and sisters, on their knees, scrambling, cursing and fighting for the precious metal with the fury of wild dogs. On both occasions, painted hussies put on several rousing catfights with no holds barred.

One day he caused a sensation by taking a bath in beer. "Hadn't had a bath in many moons and always wanted one in beer," was his comment. "Next time I'll take one in wine."

Oddly enough, certain women were suddenly discovering something downright fascinating about the almost-repulsive Slumach. At least it seemed to be that way; he received numerous offers of feminine companionship for his next trip to the hidden gold hoard. One young widow, Tillie Malcolm, told him she was sure he would find her to be, "A good camp cook, obliging and handy to have around."

But Neither Drink, flattery nor promises could make Slumach reveal the location of his mine. A careful watch was placed on his movements.

One night, about a week after his return he had been drinking in the Old Frontier Saloon and two of his drinking cronies, nearly as tipsy as he, had finally been obliged to help him to his hotel room and put him to bed. Early the following morning the pair returned to the hotel, for he had promised he would have a surprise in store for them.

Greedy visions dancing in their heads, the two went to his room and got the promised surprise. Slumach was gone. No one had seen or heard him leave.

Two months later, again heavy with gold, he made another of his sudden jack-in-the-box appearances and still another drinking bout got under way.

For the following 16 months, John Slumach continued to amaze and bewilder the populace of New Westminster with his wealth and his sudden appearing, then vanishing, acts. Of course his presence, even if he was uncommunicative about his mine, always meant lavish spending on his part, as he “bought the best of everything for everybody,” and local merchants looked forward to his next visit to town. Wantons, moochers and barflies cheered wildly at the approach of the red-skinned playboy. But in the spring of 1891 a shocking discovery caused many to regard Slumach in a new light.

It was while Slumach was paying one of his visits to town that a fishing boat, trawling in the nearby Fraser River, brought up the body of a pretty young Indian girl in its nets.

She was recognized almost immediately by several of the crew—possibly for very good reasons—as Susan Jesner, an ex-waitress in a New Westminster café, who had disappeared a few months earlier. It was known that Susan was not averse to making “a few extra dollars.” The body’s features were battered and several gold nuggets were found in the clothing. This was enough for the police to connect her with Slumach. Like the dead girl, she was a Salish Indian, and he always carried a pocketful of gold nuggets, similar to those found in the possession of Susan Jesner. The law swung into action.

Presently John Slumach found himself ensconced in the local bastille, where a barrage of questions was shot at him.

At first, with a sneer on his moose-like features, he denied he had ever seen, let alone known, the dead girl.

When this was soon sharply disproved, he changed his story. Well, er-yes-yes, he did know her, now that the fact was brought to his attention. Come to think of it, he had known her very well; in fact she had accompanied him on his last trip into the Pitt Lake Mountains, had been with him for about six weeks. Sure he remembered her: “She kept me warm at nights.” She had come to him the night

before he left New Westminster.

“She said she wanted to get away from here for awhile,” Slumach said. “I told her if she would cook, make herself useful and never tell the location of my mine, I would take her with me and give her some nuggets for her time. She agreed, came with me, then as we were returning to New Westminster she had the accident. Too bad.”

“What accident?”

“We were in my canoe and we were just a few miles from here when she fell out of it,” was the answer.

“You know how swift-running the Fraser River is. She drowned before I could get to her and there was nothing I could do about it.”

“Why didn’t you report the matter on your arrival here?” the police asked.

“Report it? I didn’t know it was necessary. Why it was just a little accident; I never thought that anyone would be interested.”

The police were not so sure that it was “just a little accident,” and intimated as much; but they had only suspicion to go on and Slumach stuck to his story. He was finally released.

Two days later, Provincial Police Constable Eric Grainger arrived in New Westminster from Vancouver. Constable Grainger, a master man-hunter, was detailed to learn all that he could about Slumach. Tall, husky, a one-time athlete of note, Grainger dressed himself for and convincingly acted the role of a prospector with a bankroll, who might be interested in any proposition, legal or otherwise. Getting acquainted with Slumach was easy, but Grainger soon learned, as so many others had, that the Indian clammed up when asked anything personal.

Then one morning Slumach was gone.

The usual five or six weeks passed and Slumach returned. Once more he was loaded with gold and again there was a hot time in the old town that night.

During his absence, Police Sergeant Harold Nichol, in charge of the Missing Persons Bureau,

had come upon some facts of most unusual interest. In checking through his files, Nichol learned that during the past 16 months, eight women who had formerly lived in and around New Westminster were missing. On the list of three white and five Indians were the names of Mary Warne, Tillie Malcolm, Mary Murdock and Susan Jesner. Each of the women had vanished, one by one, at exactly the same time Slumach left New Westminster for his mine.

Then exotic and shapely Molly Tynan, half-caste, drifted into town from Vancouver. Molly Tynan represented sex with a capital "S," knew it, and was happy about the whole business. She was around 28, the daughter of a woman from the land of Confucius and a man from the river Shannon.

It was soon apparent to the watching Grainger that Molly was out to attract Slumach right from the start. Securing a job as waitress in the Sasquatch Cafe, the Indian's favorite eatery, she made it a point to see that he would have no cause to complain about the service. Her best smiles were for him alone, and she only rolled her eyes at his pawing hands. Bending low, she set food-laden plates before him, and what he saw quickened his pulse and took his mind off his dinner.

It was exactly what the half-caste wanted.

Constable Grainger, who several times had been the Indian's eating companion at the restaurant, became worried. He did not want Molly Tynan to end her days in the Fraser River, another of Slumach's victims, and knew immediate steps were necessary to avert more tragedy. The girl had to be warned that she was playing with dynamite. Late one night Grainger knocked on the door of her room. She opened it, showing no surprise at his presence.

He came directly to the point. "Miss Tynan, I am not a prospector as you might have been led to believe. I am Constable Grainger of the Provincial Police."

She nodded. "I know, or at least I suspected as much."

“Indeed. And did you suspect that John Slumach might be a murderer?”

“I am almost certain that he is.”

As he stared in surprise, she added: “In Vancouver I heard several stories about Slumach; that is why I am here.” Her eyes went to a chair. “If you will sit down, Constable Grainger, there is a story I would like to tell you. A very brief story of my life.”

Molly Tynan, referring to herself as “an adventurer,” told enough to convince Grainger that she had been around and knew the score. Speaking Chinese fluently and with Vancouver having thousands of Chinese residents, she had provided for herself by being an interpreter. Then she had heard of Slumach, of his seemingly inexhaustible gold supply and his fondness for broad-minded women.

“So I came here and made it a point to meet him,” she told Grainger.

“What good would a fortune be if you were dead?”

“I’ve heard rumors of women who have gone into the mountain with Slumach and never returned. But it’s my only chance for big money and besides; I know how to take care of myself. See!”

Her right hand made a swift movement, shot into a pocket of her dress and appeared with a small revolver.

All of Grainger’s attempts to discourage her from accompanying Slumach were useless. To the avaricious Tynan it was her big chance for riches—“All the raw gold I can carry”—and she was confident that she could take care of herself.

The following afternoon when Grainger dropped into the cafe, she whispered that she had surprising news for him and arranged to meet him. Around 10 that night, she arrived at Police Headquarters where Grainger and superintendent Michael Dayton awaited.

“He wants me to leave with him before dawn,” she exclaimed, “and I have learned how he always manages to leave town without being seen. He man-packs his provisions, leaves here around 2 a.m. A mile away, on the north shore of the Fraser River,

he has a canoe hidden in a weed-concealed bay. He takes off in the heavy mists before dawn and is miles away by sunrise.”

He told me that we must first travel by canoe for two days. Then he said we would head into the mountains for five more, and finally have to climb some mountain to a 4,000-foot level. He added that when we got to his mine, I would see so much gold that I could not believe my eyes.”

“When does he plan to leave?”

“In five hours.”

“Miss Tynan,” spoke up Superintendent Dayton, “I absolutely forbid you to accompany Slumach.”

His words seemed to amuse her. “That’s about all you can do,” was her answer, “I am not your prisoner nor am I breaking any law. As for your concern about me, I have been on my own since I was fourteen and I was always able to take care of myself.”

Since they couldn’t dissuade her, the man-hunters gave her expert advice. Molly Tynan was an attentive listener. It was nearly midnight before she returned to her room.

The following morning, word drifted around that John Siumach had once more left town; Molly Tynan had also disappeared. To officers Grainger and Dayton, it was the beginning of a long wait.

The usual five or six weeks passed, and then one day John Siumach returned to New Westminster—alone. There was no sign of Molly.

But he was not destined to be alone for any great length of time. He soon had company—uninvited and lots of it. Minutes after learning of his return, Grainger sought out Slumach and found him in a bar. A strong hand dropped on the Salish Indian’s shoulder and he was soon behind bars once more, answering the sharp questions of burly officers of the law. Slumach denied having any knowledge as to the whereabouts of Molly Tynan.

“How could I know where she is?” he asked. “Yes, at first she agreed to go with me to the mountains but when we arrived at my canoe to start the trip,

for some reason she changed her mind. She suddenly said she was not going to go, turned and walked off. I paddled away alone and have not seen her since.”

“Then you say she did not go?”

“She did not go with me. She said something about going to Vancouver.” Both Grainger and Dayton knew he was lying, and were determined to prove it. And surprisingly enough, they had little trouble in doing so. With the services of three fishing boats, the search got underway the following morning. A short while later the dripping body of the shapely half-caste was lifted out of the Fraser River in a fishing net—a hunting knife embedded to the hilt in her heart. A look of terror was on her dead features.

Sure shot that she was. Molly Tynan had been unable to cope with her killer. When news of the discovery reached New Westminster, angry men began to gather. The sound of rising voices reached the cell of the imprisoned man. That ominous warning, along with the incessant questions of his captors, was too much for Slumach. He broke down and confessed. Yes, he had murdered Molly Tynan, the day before he arrived in town. She knew the whereabouts of his mine and he had to get rid of her. They were paddling down the Fraser River when he suddenly turned in the canoe and tried to strangle her. “She sprang to her feet, her hand went to the pocket where she kept her revolver,” Slumach said. “I rose with her and drove my knife into her chest. But she fell backwards, the knife slipped out of my hand and she dropped over the side of the canoe. She almost tipped it over.”

On a gloomy November morn in 1891, John Slumach was hanged in the jail at New Westminster. To the end he would not reveal the location of his mine, though it is on record that while on his way to the gallows, he cursed the gold that had helped to bring around his death, and swore that whoever found the mine would likewise know a violent death. A moment later he plunged through the trap.



There were no mourners.

Shortly after Slumach's earthly spirit took its flight, the first of many attempts to find the fabulous mine got under way.

John Jackson of San Francisco is one man believed by some to have actually discovered the Lost Creek Mine. Less than a year after Slumach's death, Jackson arrived in New Westminster, asked numerous questions for the next two weeks and finally, accompanied by two native guides, set out for the Pitt Lakes Mountain Range. Five months later he returned to New Westminster, 40 pounds lighter and a physical wreck. He told stories that should have discouraged any of his listeners who might have secret ambitions of finding Lost Creek Mine. They were tales of incredible hardships:

“Flies enough to eat a man alive! At other times forcing myself through snow waist-high! Natural hot springs caused the heavy fogs that seem endless, and you’re frightened and alone in a world of mist.”

Some noticed that John Jackson’s knapsack was unusually heavy. Yet he made no mention of its contents or any discovery; a few days later he left town. Several years passed. Then a close friend of his since boyhood, one James R. Shotwell of Seattle, received a letter and a map from the then dying Jackson. Claiming to have discovered Slumach’s lost mine, Jackson wrote that the map would guide Shotwell to the hidden bonanza. The letter went on to tell how the find had been made.

After reaching the Pitt Lake Mountains, Jackson had dismissed his guides and gone on alone. It was several months later when alone, desperately ill from the ravages of malnutrition and hopelessly lost, he stumbled upon a hidden valley and Slumach’s mine. The letter read, in part:

“With great difficulty I finally descended the steep cliff and reached the little creek running through that small and lonely valley. I knew I had struck it rich for gold was everywhere; you had only to bend down and pick it up. --- I gathered up gold by the handful, some pieces as large as walnuts. My God, Shotwell, in the early morning sunlight the entire valley was glowing like a golden dawn ---- I sized up the length of the stream as well as my surroundings, and knew that beyond all doubt I had finally stumbled upon Slumach’s Lost Creek Mine. ---- I traced the course of the creek to where it flows into a subterranean tunnel and is lost. ---- Sick and weak as I was, I finally packed up all the gold I could stagger under. ---- Slowly and painfully I made my way out of that valley of incalculable riches, to begin my long trek back.

Finally, he reached the outside world. He wrote that in San Francisco the gold he carried brought him “around fifteen thousand dollars” (it was in 1892, remember) and concluded the letter with:

“Now the doctor has told me that I am liable to go

at any minute but don't give up, Shotwell. You will be rewarded beyond your wildest dreams.”

Shotwell, however, was no longer young, nor had he the necessary funds for such a search. He sold the map and letter for \$1,000 to a Seattle resident, A. Rossen, who not only failed to find the mine but nearly lost his life in a mountain stream while attempting to do so. The map and letter changed hands several times and finally came into the possession of three Seattle men, who journeyed to Vancouver and engaged as a guide one Hugh Murray, who was familiar with the rugged area that is the Pitt Lake Mountains. It was recalled that Slumach, in his final moments of life, had called down a curse on anyone who would attempt to find his gold, and said curse must have still been potent for the search was an utter failure.

Murray, in later life—he died only a few years ago—often expressed his opinion that there was such a mine and valley, “just waiting to be found.” He told how he and the three others, when leaving the mountains, came upon an elderly squaw who had once met John Jackson years earlier. She said he was trying to get to the head waters of Pitt Lake, was “wandering along, weak, ragged, his knapsack heavy,” and had camped beside her that night.

“The fire was low,” she said, “and he was sleeping when I crept up and took a look inside his knapsack. It was filled with gold!”

As recently as the early summer of 1957, interest was again aroused in certain sections of British Columbia and old stories retold, when a hardy individual who evidently puts little stock in the grim prophecy of a man on the gallows, announced that he intended to tackle the Pitt Lake Mountains country and search for the Lost Creek Mine. One grizzled old-timer who made a similar attempt 30 years ago and has only amputated toes—the result of frozen feet—to show for his efforts, told a member of the press:

“That will make about the hundredth fool: includin’ myself, who has tried to find that blasted mine, and the bones of most of ‘em are still Iyin’

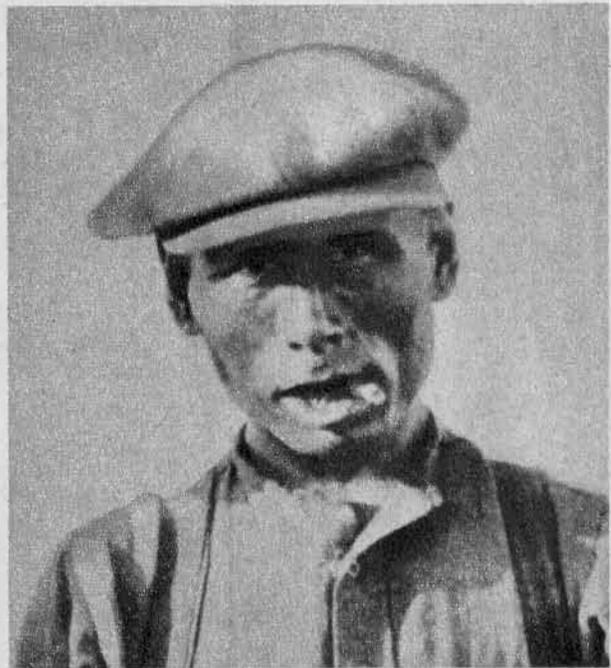
around somewhere out on the Pitt Lake Mountains. Remember old 'Volcanic' Brown? There was a time when everyone around here knew of him.

"Old 'Volcanic' knew that wild country as well as any man that ever lived; as a woodsman he could give lessons to the Indians," replied the old-timer. 'Volcanic' went out to find the Lost Creek Mine, swore he would not return till he did, and like lots of the others he never came back!"

That now almost legendary mine in remote valley, somewhere in the vastness of the snow-tipped, towering and heavily wooded Pitt Lake Mountains, is probably not more than 60 miles from the progressive city of Vancouver. In more ways than one, it is still a "ghost" mine.



GREEDY Susan Jesner accompanied Slumach on one of his trips—and started him toward the gallows.



DEADLY John Slumach had a weakness for women and liquor, but never revealed the source of his gold.