

Legends

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I include this story because it seems to be the first one alluding that Slumach would have murdered women.

C. V. Trench was a prolific fiction writer who published in such periodicals as *Boys own Paper*, *Range Riders*, *Daredevil Detective Stories*, *Western Action*, *Sky Blazers*, *Ranch Romances*, *True West Magazine* to mention but a few.

ANNALS OF CANADIAN CRIME — by C. V. Trench

“THE GOLD MINE MURDERS OF NINE BRITISH COLUMBIAN WOMEN”

GOLD NUGGETS, LIKE WALNUTS, LIE IN A LOST VALLEY JUST 60 MILES FROM VANCOUVER. MEN STILL SEEK IT—AND DIE.

Less than 60 miles from the bustling glitter of Vancouver’s Granville Street, a lonely mountain streak today leaps through a rocky canyon somewhere amid the maze of snow-capped, wooded slopes of Pitt Lake Mountains.

If you knew where, you’d be rich. Or dead.

That elusive stream, virtually on the outskirts of British Columbia’s biggest metropolis, holds the secret of perhaps the biggest gold bonanza in Canada’s prospecting history. Prospectors guess the hidden lode is worth over \$100 million.

One after another, nine pretty young B.C. women learned its location. One after another, they were murdered to keep its secret.

Their slayer, John Slumach, a full-blooded Salish Indian, was hanged in New Westminster, B.C.’s Provincial Jail, taking his precious secret with him. But, he wasn’t the last to die, for on his way to the gallows, he bitterly cursed the gold that cost his life, and swore that any man who sought the strike, would himself find death.

A curse from the gallows is supposed to be singularly effective hoodoo. The gold remains unfound. So remain the bodies of many searchers.

Raw gold by the handful

Last clue to the location of B.C.’s fabulous hoard of raw gold was a tattered copy of an old, hand-drawn map. It was owned by Hugh Murray, one-time Indian fighter, scout, stage coach driver, and prospector who made several attempts to follow it to the strike.

Recently, in New Westminster, B.C., Murray died. The map is believed to have been burned, along with other personal papers. Shortly before he died I interviewed him. He showed me the map and told me the story of Lost Creek Mine.

As we sat talking in Murray’s home, we could see through the windows Pitt Lake Mountains. Reaching them entails a 40-mile boat journey up the Fraser River to Pitt Lake, 15 miles up the lake to the mouth of the Pitt River, then an 18-mile run up-stream until further navigation is impossible. From there the prospector must go on foot over rugged mountain terrain.

The gold mine murders of nine British Columbian women

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“Somewhere out there lies gold by handfuls,” Murray mused sadly.

Lost Creek Mine, he explained lies 4,000 feet up an unnamed mountain, over snow fields and glaciers. A light pack of 80 pounds of food, bedding and tools is the most a man can carry.

All his girlfriends drowned

It was 1890, when John Slumach arrived in New Westminster, then a small town 13 miles from Vancouver. His knapsack bulged with gold, and men and women flocked about him. The taciturn, lean-faced Slumach accepted their liquor and their hospitality, but dropped no hint about his strike.

Schemers planned to trail him secretly when he returned to the wilds, but, suddenly as he appeared, Slumach vanished from town.

Three month later, Slumach was back in New Westminster, once more laden with raw gold. This time he admitted a fabulous find, boasting of a creek somewhere in the Pitt Lake Mountains where gold pieces “large as walnuts,” could be picked up by the handful.

Again a careful watch was set. Yet, one night he was drinking with a crowd of hangers-on in the Old Frontier Saloon. Next morning he was gone.

When Slumach appeared a third time he had yet more gold. Always hard-eyed and tight-lipped, this time his manner was oddly furtive.

A few days later, a fishing boat trawling of the mouth of the Fraser River brought up in its nets the body of Susan Jesner, a pretty, young Indian girl who had worked as a waitress in various local cafes. In her clothing were several golden nuggets.

Slumach’s wild orgies in town between trips had not escaped police attention. He was a Salish Indian. He had raw gold. Susan Jesner was a Salish Indian. She too, had raw gold on her person. Authorities picked up Slumach, took him to view Susan’s remains, and asked some pointed question.

It was Indian custom to take a squaw on forest trips, to repair moccasins and clothes, gather fuel, cook meals and help with making and breaking camp. Under pressure, Slumach reluctantly admitted Susan had volunteered to be his companion-assistant last trip. While floating down the swift-running Fraser River, Susan, swept overboard, had drowned. Just a little bush mishap he hadn’t thought worth mentioning, he explained.

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Suspicious police could prove nothing. He was allowed to go. B.C. Provincial Police Constable Eric Grainger was detailed to shadow Slumach. Dressing as a prospector, and acting the part, Grainger sought out places Slumach frequented in town. He gained Slumach's friendship, but, drunk or sober, Slumach never gave a thing away. And then Slumach slipped through his fingers, disappearing one night without a hint of his destination.

On his return there was more gold and another orgy. Grainger, playing his role as prospector, tagged along.

Meanwhile Sgt. Harold Nichol, in charge of Missing Persons Bureau, checking through his files had found eight women—two whites and six Indians, including the dead Susan Jesner—had disappeared approximately the same dates Slumach stole away on one or other of his trips.

Grainger's daily reports noted that Slumach, uncouth and unattractive, exercised a curious fascination over young women. He could take his pick of many, all willing to act as helpers on his trips.

Each of the missing girls had been exceptionally pretty. All had worked as waitresses in local cafes, where Slumach could have made their acquaintance. Yet, despite so many disappearances, competition to accompany Slumach on his periodical trips was keen—he promised his female helpers "all the raw gold you can carry."

\$1,000 for wooing a murderer

Now one named Molly Tynan set herself to deliberately ensnare Slumach, in hopes of acquiring a fortune.

Molly was something of an enigma herself. In her late 20s, well-bred, well-educated, she had poise and a dark exotic Oriental beauty. Half-caste daughter of an Irish father and Chinese mother, she could speak, read and write Chinese. Vancouver and New Westminster having several thousand Chinese residents, for a time she made a living as an interpreter. Now, to meet Slumach, she took a job as waitress.

The scent of exotic perfume exuded from her. Her walk was sinuous, enticing. Her eyes promised delectable things to come each time she glanced at Slumach. When she leaned over him to adjust his dishes in the Sasquatch Café, he got a glimpse of filmy underthings.

At last, she sat down across the table from him in the cubicle, and talked. She told him she was in desperate need of money to pay her way to Europe, and would do anything to obtain a considerable sum.

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Constable Grainger, still posing as a prospector and eating his meals in the same café, watched. Later that evening he had a long talk with Molly, warning she was risking her life if she accompanied Slumach. On the other hand he told her, “You will receive \$1,000 reward, if you help the police get evidence to convict Slumach of multiple murder.”

Molly, assuring Grainger she had been adventuress for years, and could take care of herself, showed him a small revolver she always carried. And for \$1,000 she eagerly agreed to help the police.

Through Molly, police learned how Slumach slipped away on his trips to his gold claim without being seen and followed.

A mile beyond New Westminster he had a canoe cached in a weed-concealed bay on the north shore of the Fraser River. He man-packed supplies to his hidden boat, setting out just before dawn when darkness was intensified by heavy early morning mist.

It took about 48 hours to reach the spot where he landed. From there, he told Molly, it was necessary to travel afoot, climbing to the 4,000-foot level of an unnamed mountain. “Camping under those conditions is cold at night,” he told her, leering. That was why he wanted her along.

Molly reported at police headquarters before she left. Superintendent Michael Dayton drilled her thoroughly in what she must do, and not do. She must make mental note of all Slumach told her, and what she saw. And she must not hesitate to shoot Slumach if she thought her life was in danger.

Nevertheless, when Slumach again showed up in New Westminster, Molly Tynan was not with him.

Superintendent Dayton immediately asked every fishing boat in the Fraser River to spread nets to recovering a corpse before it could be swept out to sea.

Slumach was picked up and grilled. He admitted he had arranged with Molly to go along with him; but at the last moment, he said, she had packed out and left town. It was a story police could neither prove nor disprove. But Molly had not been a quitter.

Next day her body was brought up in a net, a hunting knife embedded in the heart. Immersion in water does not always obliterate finger prints. Slumach’s were found on the handle.

Under relentless grilling, Slumach broke down. He admitted he had used a knife on Molly because, being on her guard, she had evaded the blow intended to knock her overboard and had grappled with him. She’d fallen in the water before

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In the “Winnipeg Free Press” of 21 April 1962 someone with the name Edward R. Green—could that have been a pseudonym of C.V. Tench—re-told Tench’s story using the same characters and names. Green’s version offers many embellishments. For example: “It did not take them [three fishermen] 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 good job. When news of Molly’s tragic end went around town, 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 a wringer. The howling mob helped them. [...] 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... etc.

he could pull the knife from her breast.

Convicted of murder, Slumach was hanged in November, 1891.

A FEW month later, veteran prospector John Jackson arrived in New Westminster. A quiet man, he listened to the many stories circulating about Slumach and his bonanza. Finally, well equipped, accompanied by two hired native helpers, Jackson set out for the heart of the Pitt Lake Mountain Range.

Months later he returned, a mental and physical wreck. But he brought with him a heavy knapsack, which he guarded closely day and night. Naturally uncommunicative, he said little about his trip except: “I’ve toughed out all my life, but never before anything like this time. Barely any fish or meat, and enough flies to eat a man alive. And the rough going—at times I was forcing my way through snow breast-high. And the natural hot springs in there make for mist and fog all the time. I seemed to be all alone in another world.”

Then Jackson left for San Francisco. Years passed. A score of prospectors entered the Pitt Lake Mountain region, and failed to return. Then, in 1912, Hugh Murray was approached by the representatives of three prominent Seattle financiers. Informed he was familiar with the Pitt Lake area, they wished to engage him as a guide. They hoped to discover the Lost Creek Mine.

The callers showed him a letter and a map John Jackson had sent to a close friend, James R. Shotwell, at Seattle. John Jackson had found Lost Creek Mine, preserving his secret until he was on his death bed. Shotwell, getting on in years, unable to seek the gold himself, had sold the letter and map to a Seattle resident, Asa Rossen, for \$1,000.

Rossen set out to find the mine. He returned defeated, after nearly losing his life fording a raging mountain torrent. After the letter and mutilated map changed hands several times, the final owners succeeded in interesting the Seattle financiers.

Murray made a copy of Jackson’s letter. He allowed me to see it. Part of it read:

“After reaching the head waters of Pitt Lake I discharged my two native guides and headed out into the mountains. I had been out about two months when, my health being seriously affected by short rations, I decided to turn back.

“I climber to the top of a sharp ridge to get my bearings and found myself looking down into a little valley or

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canyon I had not seen previously. With some difficulty I reached the little creek running through the valley. I had only a small prospector's pan, but I found colors' immediately. I knew I had struck it rich. In going up the creek I came to a spot where the bedrock is bare. Here I gathered gold by the handful, some pieces as large as walnuts. I sized up the creek and learned that beyond all doubt I had found Slumach's Lost Creek Mine.

"I traveled the course of the creek to where it flows into a subterranean tunnel and is lost. I then packed out all the gold I could carry. It brought me around ten thousand dollars when I sold it in Frisco.

"Now the doctor has told me that I am liable to go at any time. Don't give up, Shotwell. You will be rewarded beyond your wildest dreams."

MURRAY led a four-man party into the very heart of the Pitt Mountain Range. For almost two months they combed the area vainly.

But at the head of Pitt Lake, they did encounter an aged Indian woman, Marie McDougal. She remembered a prospector named Jackson, who carried his knapsack only with the greatest difficulty, being bowed beneath its load. He had camped nearby one night. While he slept, Marie had ventured a peek inside his pack. "It contained much gold," she recalled.

Years later, a picturesque prospector, known as "Volcanic" Brown, visited Murray, made a copy of the map, and announced, "I intend to seek out the lost claim."

Apparently Slumach's curse remained potent. Some weeks later Brown, caught by the swift onslaught of an early winter, returned to New Westminster with feet so badly frozen several toes had to be amputated.

Next spring, undaunted, he made a second trip into the Pitt Lake Mountains. "This time," he vowed, "I will stay until I either find Lost Creek Mine or die." He ...

The continuation of the story is missing from my copy. If anyone has a complete copy of this article, including the missing page 76, please let me know.