

Miscellania

Translated from:

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pp 90-95 "Das Geheimnis des Alten Indianers"

The secret of the old Indian

The only man who knew the location of the greatest gold vein in British Columbia, Canada—the fabulously rich 100-million-dollar Slumach mine—took his secret to his grave. Hundreds put their lives in peril, and a dozen treasure hunters who wanted to find this gold mine, discovered by an Indian, died in mysterious ways.

On a winter evening in 1882, in the Black & White pub in the outskirts of Vancouver, a not so young Indian presents himself at the bar and orders a whiskey. He drinks a few glasses and before disappearing without a word, throws down in front of the stunned barman a handful of gold nuggets as large as walnuts.

Among the colourful group of prospectors, gold hunters and other adventurers the news spreads quickly about this white-haired Indian, who despite his age is still fit and who makes his rounds through the pubs of Vancouver, mostly accompanied by a nice-looking girl, white or Indian. Instead of paying his bills with dollars, he gleefully flings a handful of gold nuggets to the barkeeper.

In spring, when the snow starts melting, the Indian disappears as suddenly as he appeared. "He is on his way north with supplies and a girl," say loggers who meet him in the forest. At the first snowfall he is back again, pockets full of nuggets, in a good mood and smiling. But he is alone.

This winter again he is a popular regular in Vancouver's pubs and people even get to know his name: Peter (or John) Slumach. He flirts with Lucy Brownie, a fair-haired servant girl who has just come to this part of the world from Ireland, and the entire winter he makes the rounds with her from one establishment to the other.

It is clear that Slumach has discovered a rich gold mine somewhere in northern British Columbia, where he spends his summers digging for gold with the help of a female companion and that he overwinters in the city. In the last months of winter many an envious adventurer keeps an eye on the old man, and when the sun climbs higher, a couple of jobless gold hunters arrange to follow Slumach's tracks and find the

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fabulous mine.

Again the Indian with his pretty Lucy and supplies travels north, and this time a pack of gold hunters follows him. But the chase ends as soon as Slumach and his companion reach the Pitt River and disappear in the wilds of the tall forests, glaciers, and ice-cold streams, which Indian knows like the back of his hand. The pursuers curse terribly and turn around disappointed.

Summer passes and at the start of winter it all starts over again. Loaded with gold, Slumach makes his rounds of the saloons, this time at his side a young Indian girl, an orphan brought up by nuns. In spring the scene repeats itself and at Pitt River the Indian and his companion leave their nosy pursuers behind.

When the first snow falls Slumach again stands at the bar with a new girlfriend. So the years pass. The barkeepers note that the Indian gets older, the girlfriends younger, and the lumps of gold larger.

Then one spring again the sinewy Slumach disappears in the forest with his girlfriend—this time to his misfortune it is not a new arrival or a young Indian girl of uncertain origin no one cares about, but a minister's wife who, bored of life between kitchen and church, left her husband and is looking for adventure.

When the minister hears that his Mary disappeared in the forests to the north with Nugget-Peter, he does not make an effort to do what even oldtimers would not have accomplished: search for the Indian and his unfaithful wife in the wilderness. But he knows that around mid-November Slumach will appear somewhere in Vancouver.

And indeed, as soon as the first snow falls there is the trim figure of the Indian in the Black & White saloon, tossing down one glass after the other. His Mary is not with him and since Slumach can only tell vague stories about how she did not return from collecting mushroom in the fall, the irate minister alerts the Mounted Police.

They interrogate Nugget-Peter, but the crafty old man knows how to get out of the affair, and in spring he again disappears in the forests with his new girlfriend, a fair-haired, chubby immigrant from Germany. Also this time the pursuing fortune hunters lose the pair from sight somewhere at the Pitt River.

Nugget-Peter could have played this game for many more years if he hadn't lost his nerve one day. On 9 September

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1890, Slumach, without any ground, shoots a trapper named Louis Bee who happens to fish for salmon. He chases both of Bee's friends away, threatening them with his rifle, loads the corpse in his canoe, sinks the body in the middle of the lake, and disappears in the wilderness.

Now a dozen Royal Mounted Police members and other guardians of the peace are on Nugget-Peter's heels. For a month Slumach shakes off his pursuers until, starving and lacking munitions and food, he has to surrender.

He is sentenced to death and before he dies admits, that he killed 18 to 20 women—he has forgotten the exact number—who helped him collect gold to ensure that they wouldn't give away the location of the mine. Nugget-Peter dies on the gallows on 16 January 1891 at 8 o'clock in the morning.

Shortly before Slumach's death, his son is allowed to say farewell and he learns the location of the mine from him. Although his father warns him, "only when times are hard should you go there, because the road is very, very dangerous," the son disappears right the next day and returns, so it is told later, with bags full of gold.

But for the son the days of boundless wealth come to an end when he takes his companion, a half-breed from Calgary, with him into the mountains. Only the companion returns from their expedition to the north. A year later the half-breed, named Greno, comes to his end when two white prospectors secretly follow him as far as a creek "ankle-deep full of gold," and shoot him to death.

It is certain that they get about \$200,000 from there, but only one of them, John Jackson, returns. With a bullet in his back he drags himself with the last of his strength to Edmonton and deposits nearly \$100,000 at a bank. Before he dies, he draws two maps, one of which he thrusts in the hand of the nurse who assisted him in his last hour, and the other one he leaves to his friend, a certain Shotwell.

But neither the nurse nor Shotwell are interested in looking for their fortune up north and without hesitation they sell the valuable maps. As a result, years later dozens of treasure hunters are still roaming the distant mountain ridges behind the Pitt River and they all brag they have the original map drawn by the dying Jackson.

If one believes a trapper who returned to Vancouver empty-handed but at least in good health, the backside of the map that Jackson left to his friend shows the following clue: "The Lost Creek Mine is situated at a spot less than 20 miles from

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the sharp elbow of the Pitt River before it flows into a canyon and is lost from sight. This canyon is guarded by three mountain tops.” So many treasure hunters don’t come back from there.

After the Second World War, there were downright expeditions searching unsuccessfully for Slumach’s legendary gold. The only man who could have told more about the location of the Lost Creek Mine, the former Forest Ranger Daniel Keble-Chaterion from British Columbia, died in the summer of 1974, 85 years of age. Many years earlier the ranger accidentally found Slumach’s mine.

November 1940. The grey-haired prospector Clark, also called “Green Jack,” has chased dreams all his adventurous life. He has struck fortune more than once but not for long, leaving him merrily continuing his search. One day he goes missing and Daniel Keble-Chaterion guides a search party to look for him.

Every spring in the 1930s Green Jack left for the lands around Pitt River. At the end of the season, around say mid-September, on his way back to civilization, the old treasure hunter usually takes a break at the federal salmon hatchery at the head of Pitt Lake. Those who know the canny Green Jack are sure that he always returns with a tidy amount of gold; although he never gives a hint and lives very frugally.

At the end of 1970, the hatchery staff look out in vain for the elderly 84-year-old gold hunter. Weeks pass without a sign from him, and when winter swiftly announces itself, the people at the station fear the worst.

At the start of November Ranger Daniel Keble-Charterion and his team set out on to search for old Green Jack. An almost arctic winter has set in—it is a gruelling expedition.

After only a few days one of the men breaks an ankle and another has to accompany him back to the hatchery. The ranger and Jacob Dayne carry on into the white wasteland.

They get to the upper reaches of Seven Mile Creek and later to Homestead Glacier. The following five days a snowstorm rages and almost buries their small tent. When the storm lessens they venture forward step by step through the heavy snow.

At last, after another three days, they leave the five-kilometre-wide glacier behind them. In Porcupine Valley they climb above the vegetation line and find their way up across Stave Glacier, ten-kilometre-wide.

There, at the end of the glacier, they find Green Jack’s last

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camp. Only the top of his tent peeks out of the fresh snow, but there is no trace of the gold hunter. Under the tent are his rifle, cooking utensils, a notebook, and a tin can full of gold nuggets, "as large as chicken eggs."

Not finding Green Jack they turn back, and after 27 days the search party is home again. Until today the remains of Green Jack have not been discovered.

However, three caribou hunters tell about a curious encounter in the winter of 1940. One night early in December, a grey-haired prospector, exhausted and hungry, stumbled into their hunting cabin. The old man was in bad shape, but he recovered after consuming some roast beef and drinking hot toddy and then talked about his adventures. He called himself Green Jack.

Many years ago, he said, in the backwoods he met a mortally ill Indian and cured him back to health. It turned out that he was the grandson of Slumach. In gratitude for his rescue he mentioned the exact location of his grandfather's gold mine. That is the last that was heard about Green Jack.

After the death of his companion Dayne, who drowned in a creek in the spring of 1941, Ranger Keble-Chaterion is the only one who knows the fabulously rich Lost Creek Mine, but he doggedly keeps his silence. After his death in August 1974, the secret of the Indian's gold continues to remain a mystery.