



A Rock Fell on the Moon: Dad and the Great Yukon Silver Ore Heist

Alicia Priest

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In its heyday in the 1950s and '60s, the remote community of Elsa, 300 miles north of Whitehorse in the Yukon Territory, was the epicentre of one of the world's most lucrative silver mining operations—an enterprise that far surpassed the riches produced during the iconic Klondike gold rush. For twelve of those years, Gerald Priest was the chief assayer for United Keno Hill Mines (UKHM), the major player in the region. Priest was a clever man who could as easily carry the role of refined gentleman as he could rustic mountain man. As far as ten-year-old Alicia Priest was concerned, her father Gerry's life in Elsa was perfect: a home rich with music, books and pets where he never had to boil a kettle or wash a sock; a well paying job; a beautiful and affectionate wife; and two daughters who revered him as only little girls can. But as Alicia grows older, she realizes that perhaps her dad saw things differently, with four female dependents, an ailing wife who couldn't give him the son he wanted, a religiously fanatical mother-in-law and a tedious, dead-end job.

Escape becomes possible when Gerry stakes the Moon Claims and discovers a phenomenal silver-rich boulder—enough silver to make him and his family rich and fund their relocation south. But when Gerry tries to smelt and sell the ore, UKHM calls the RCMP. Too many things don't add up: geologists find the former assayer's boulder story improbable, the manpower required to hand-mine and transport seventy tons of rock across the Yukon terrain is beyond Herculean and most suspiciously, Gerry's ore looks a lot like the ore found in UKHM's Elsa mine.

In A Rock Fell on the Moon, Alicia Priest consults letters, news stories, archived RCMP files and court documents, and interviews with former mine employees, litigators and police investigators, to piece together the full story of her father's infamous heist. The result is a lively, heartrending account of a mysterious crime that came extraordinarily close to succeeding; a fascinating look into the small mining communities that once thrived in the Yukon; and the personal story of the Priest family, who could only watch aghast as the life they knew crumbled around them. As she uncovers more of the story, Alicia must reconcile two different versions of her father: the fun-loving, bush-savvy adventurer who raised her, and the man accused and convicted of the Great Yukon Silver Ore Heist.

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