

# The Silver Horde

By REX BEACH

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Author of "The Spoilers" and "The Barrier"

HARPER & BROTHERS

The breath of the wild north-west is in this great story of love and life and hate and death. Rex Beach and Jack London have revealed the hidden mysteries and romances of the Alaskan wastes as have no other authors, and in this stirring, gripping narrative is shown the best work of Mr. Beach's career. Boyd Emerson and his superhuman efforts to win a fortune for the woman he loved; Cherry Malotte, the captivating, energetic young woman who combated desperate men on the battleground of their own choosing; Mildred Wayland, the imperious beauty and society favorite, whose hand was sought by bitter rivals who did not stop at murder; George Balt, the sturdy fisher hero, whose voice was like the roar of giant waves on a lee shore; "Fingerless" Fraser, whose quaint humor alone prevented him from going to jail, where he really belonged, and Willis Marsh, unprincipled intriguer and a betrayer of men and women—these are some of the characters and elements that make this story one of the greatest tales of adventure ever written.

## CHAPTER I

THE trail to Kaitik leads down from the northward mountains over the tundra which flanks the tide flats, then creeps out upon the salt ice of the river and across to the village.

A Greek church, a Russian school with a soaked priest presiding and a group of shivering houses beside the canal make up the village.

Early on a summer afternoon there entered upon this trail from the timbered hills far away to the northward a pack train of six dogs, driven by two men.

The travelers had been plodding steadily hour after hour, dispirited by the weight of the storm.

"Fingerless" Fraser broke trail, and Boyd Emerson drove.

"Another day like this and we'd both be snow blind," observed Emerson grimly as he bent to his task. "But it can't be far to the river now."

An hour later they dropped from the plain down through a gutterlike gully to the river, where they found a trail, glassed beneath its downy covering. A cold breath sucked up from the sea. Ahead they saw the ragged ice upended by the tide. One branch led to the village, which they knew lay somewhere on the farther side, hidden by a mile or more of shifting snow.

The going here was so rough that both men leaped from their seats and ran beside the sled. They mounted a swelling ridge and rushed down to the level river ice beyond, but as they did so they heard a shivering creak on every side and saw water rising about the sled runners. Emerson shouted, the dogs leaped, but with a crash the ice gave way, and for a moment the water closed over him. "Fingerless" Fraser broke through in turn, gasping as the icy water rose to his armpits.

Each man aimed to secure an independent footing, but the efforts of all only enlarged the pool. Emerson shouted:

"Cut the team loose, quick!" But the other spat out a mouthful of salt water and spluttered:

"I—I can't swim!"

Whereupon the first speaker half swam himself through the slush to the forward end of the sled and, seeking out the sheath knife from beneath his parka, cut the harness of the two animals. Once free they scrambled to safety and rolled in the dry snow.

Emerson next attempted to lift the nose of the sled up on the ice, shouting at the remainder of the team to pull, but they only wagged their tails and whined. Each time he tried to lift the sled he crashed through fresh ice, finally bearing the next pair of dogs with him and then the two animals in the lead. All of them became hopelessly entangled.

Suddenly rang out a sharp command uttered in a new voice. Out of the snow fog from the direction in which they were headed broke a team, running full and free. Emerson marvelled at the outfit, having never seen the like in all his travels through the north, for each animal of the twelve stood big high to a tall man, and they were like wolves of one pack, gray and gaunt and wicked. A tall Indian runner left the team and headed swiftly for the scene of the accident. The man ran forward till he neared the edge of the opening where the tide had caused the floes to separate; then, flattening his body on the ice, he crawled out cautiously and

seized the lead dog. Carefully he worked his way backward to security.

It had been a ticklish operation, requiring nice skill and dexterity, but now that his footing was sure the runner exerted his whole strength, and as the dogs scratched and tore for a firm foothold the sled came crunching closer and closer through the half inch skin of ice. Then he reached down and dragged Emerson out, dripping and nerveless from his immersion. Together they rescued the outfit.

The person in the sledge had watched them silently, but now spoke in a strange patois, and the breed gave voice to her words, for it was a woman.

"One mile you go—white man house. Go quick—you freeze."

"Ain't you got no dry clothes? Our stuff is soaked."

Again the Indian translated some words from the girl.

"No. You hurry and no stop here. We go quick over yonder. No can stop at all."

He hurried back to his mistress, cried once to the pack of gray dogs, "Goonah!" and they were off as if in chase.

As they dashed past both white men had one fleeting glimpse of a woman's face beneath a furred hood, and then it was gone.

"Did you see?" Fraser ejaculated. "Good Lord! It's a woman—a blond woman!"

"Nonsense! She must be a breed," said Emerson.

"Breeds don't have yellow hair!" declared the other.

Swiftly they bent in the free dogs and lashed the team to a run. They felt the chill of death in their bones, and instead of riding they ran with the sled till their blood beat painfully. Their outer coverings were like shells, their underclothes were soaked, and, although their going was difficult and clumsy, they dared not stop, for this is the extremest peril of the north.

They swung over the river bank and into the midst of great rambling frame buildings. Their trail led them to a high banked cabin. Another mile would have meant disaster.

"Rout out the owner and tell him we're wet," said Emerson. "I'll free the dogs."

Before he could reach the cabin the door opened and Fraser appeared, a strange, dazed look on his face. He was followed by a large man of sullen countenance.

"It's no use," Fraser said. "We can't go in."

"What's wrong? Somebody sick?"

"I don't know what's the matter. This man just says 'nix,' that's all."

The fellow growled, "Yaas; Ay got no room."

"But you don't understand," said Emerson. "We're wet. We broke through the ice. Never mind the room. We'll get along somehow."

"You can't come in bar. You find another house 'free mile farder."

The traveler pushed forward. Involuntarily the watchman drew back, whereupon the unwelcome visitor crowded past, jostling his inhospitable host roughly.

Emerson's quick action gained him entrance, and Fraser followed behind into the living room, where a fat nosed squaw withdrew before them. The young man addressed her peremptorily:

"Punch up that fire and get us something to eat, quick!"

Sour obedience followed.

Fraser had been watching the fellow and now remarked to his companion:

"Say, what ails that ginney?"

The assumption of good nature fell away from Boyd Emerson as he replied:

"I never knew anybody to refuse shelter to freezing men before."

The watchman reappeared.

"You can't stop bar!" he said. "Ay got orders. By Ylago, Ay trow you out!"

He stooped and gathered up the garments nearest him, then stepped toward the outer door, but before he could make good his threat Emerson whirled like a cat, his deep set eyes dark with sudden fury, and seized his host by the nape of the neck. He jerked him back so roughly that the wet clothes flapped to the door in four directions, whereat the Scandinavian let forth a bellow, but Emerson struck him heavily on the jaw with his open hand, then hurried him backward into the room so violently that he reeled, and his legs colliding with a bench, he fell against the wall. His assailant stepped in and throttled him, beating his head violently against the logs Emerson, stepping back, spoke in a quivering voice which Fraser had never heard before:

"I'm just playing with you now. I don't want to hurt you."

"Get out of my house! Ay got orders!" cried the watchman and made for him again.

Emerson dragged him to his own door, jerked the door open and kicked him out into the snow, then barred the entrance and returned to the warmth of the logs, his face convulsed and his lips working.

When the slatternly woman had slunk forth and was busied at the stove Emerson observed inauspiciously:

"I wonder what possessed that fellow to act as he did."

"He said he had orders," Fraser of fered. "If I had a warm cabin, a lot of grub and a squaw I'd like to see somebody give me orders."

Their clothing was dry now, and they proceeded to dress leisurely.

When they had finished their coffee Emerson laid two silver dollars on the table, and they left the house to search out the river trail again.

The darkness was upon them when they crept up the opposite bank an hour later toward a group of shadowy buildings. Approaching the solitary gleam of light shining from the window of the watchman's house, they applied to him for shelter.

"You can't stop here," gruffly.

"Is there a roadhouse near by?"

"Try the next place below," said the watchman hurriedly, slamming the door in their faces and bolting it.

At the next stop they encountered the same gruff show of inhospitality.

"I'll make one more try," said Emerson between his teeth gratingly. "If

that doesn't succeed then I'll take possession again."

A mile farther on they drew up before a white pile surmounted by a dimly discerned Greek cross, but their signals awakened no response.

"Gone!"

They wasted no words when, for the fourth time their eyes caught the welcome sight of a shining radiance in the gloom.

"Unhitch!" ordered Emerson doggedly as he began to untie the ropes of the sled. He shouldered the sleeping tugs and made toward the light that filtered through the crusted windows, followed by Fraser similarly burdened. But as they approached they saw at once that this was no cannery; it looked more like a roadhouse or trading post. Behind and connected with it by a covered hall or passageway crouched another squat building of the same character, its roof piled thick with a mass of snow, its windows glowing.

They mounted the steps of the high building and without knocking fung the door open, entering. With a sharp exclamation an Indian woman regarded them round eyed.

"We're all right this time," observed Emerson. "It's a store." Then to the woman he said briefly, "We want a bed and something to eat?"

On every side the walls were shelved with merchandise, while the counter carried a supply of clothing and skins.

"What you want?" demanded the squaw.

Boyd and Fraser, divesting themselves of their furs, noticed that she was little more than a girl—a native undoubtedly.

"Food! Sleep!" Boyd replied.

"You can't stop here," the girl assered firmly.

"Oh, yes, we can," said Emerson. The squaw called, "Constantine!"

The tall figure of a man emerged, advancing swiftly.

It was the copper hued native who had rescued them from the river earlier in the day. The Indian girl broke into a torrent of excited volubility.

"You no stop here," said Constantine. Making toward the outer door he fung it open.

"We've come a long way and we're tired," Emerson argued. He faced the Indian with his back to the stove, his voice taking on a determined note.

"We won't leave here until we are ready. Now tell your 'klootch' to get us some supper. Quick!"

A soft voice from the rear of the room halted the advancing Indian.

"Constantine," it said.

The travelers whirled to see, standing out in relief against the darkness of the passage whence the Indian had just come a few seconds before, the golden haired girl of the storm to whom they had been indebted for their rescue. She advanced, smiling pleasantly.

"These men no stop here!" cried Constantine violently.

"I—I—beg pardon," began Emerson. "We didn't intend to take forcible possession, but we're played out—we've been denied shelter everywhere—we feel desperate."

She addressed the Indian girl in Aleut and signaled to Constantine, at which the two natives retired.

"We're glad of an opportunity to thank you for your timely service this afternoon," said Emerson.

"Oh, that was nothing. I've been expecting you hourly. You see, Constantine's little brother has the measles, and I had to get to him before the natives could give the poor little fellow a Russian bath and then stand him out

in the snow. They have only one treatment for all diseases."

"If your—er—father"—The girl shook her head.

"Then your husband—I should like to arrange with him to hire lodgings for a few days. The matter of money"—

Again she came to his rescue.

"I am the man of the house. I'm boss here. You are quite welcome to stay as long as you wish. Constantine objects to my hospitality and treats all strangers alike, fearing they may be company men."

"We throwed a Swede out on his neck," declared Fraser, swelling with conscious importance, "and I guess he's 'crabbed' us with the other square heads."

(To be continued.)

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