

The Silver Horde

By REX BEACH

Author of "The Spoilers" and "The Barriers"

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SYNOPSIS OF PRECEDING CHAPTERS.

Boyd Emerson and "Fingerless" Fraser enter Kalyk, Alaska, and meet a young white woman, Cherry Malotte, who shelters them. Cherry describes the salmon fisheries and March, the unscrupulous head of the Kalyk company. Cherry owns a cannery site, Emerson, George Bait and she go into partnership. Emerson describes his failure to "make good" in Alaska. Emerson kisses Cherry goodby. Bait, Fraser and Emerson nearly lose their lives in Katmai pass and miss the steamer at Katmai on their way out to get capital. After dreadful privations they catch the boat at Kadiak and are soon en route for Chicago. Emerson seeks Miss Mildred Wayland. Bait and Emerson are engaged. Her father, Wayne Wayland, is a millionaire. Alton Clyde offers \$10,000 toward the cannery. Bait and Emerson meet March in Chicago. March is a partner for Mildred's hand. March tells Mildred about Cherry Malotte. He and Wayne Wayland plan a cannery trust. Mildred learns that Emerson and Cherry are partners. Banker Hilliard, Seattle, refuses to loan Emerson \$10,000. Cherry, who has arrived in Seattle, accepts a dinner invitation from Hilliard. Cherry discovers that Emerson is to marry Mildred. March causes annoying delays for Emerson's party. Tacoma refuses Emerson a loan. Clyde suggests that Cherry can get the loan from Hilliard. Emerson estranges Cherry by criticizing her friendly relations with Hilliard. Cherry sees Hilliard, who unexpectedly furnishes the money. March causes a strike, delaying the loading of Emerson's machinery.

"And you didn't recognize either speaker?" "No. But I discovered at the office that rooms 610 and 612—the suit I saw that detective coming out of—are occupied by a Mr. Jones of New York, who arrived three days ago. I'll bet anything you please that you'll hear from Bait & Co. within twenty-four hours and that the occupant of those rooms at the Hotel Butler is Willis Marsh."

Big George began to mutter profanely. "It looks like they had us, and all because Fraser's tongue is hung in the middle."

"All the same, we'll fight it out," said Emerson grimly. "If I can raise that money in Tacoma"—Again the telephone bell buzzed noisily.

"Blue & Co.," presided Cherry, but for once she was wrong.

"A call from Tacoma," said Boyd the receiver in his ear. "It must be the Second National. They were not to let me know till tomorrow." Through the open door of the adjoining room his words came distinctly, while the others listened in tense silence.

"Hello! Yes! This is Boyd Emerson." Then followed a pause, during which the thin, rasping voice of the distant speaker murmured unintelligibly.

"Why not? Can't you give me a reason? I thought you said—Very well, Goodbye."

Emerson hung up the receiver carefully and with the same deliberation turned to face his companions. He nodded and spread his hands outward in an unmistakable gesture.

"What, already?" queried the girl.

"They must have been reached by phone."

"That detective may have called Marsh up from there."

"That means it won't do any good to try further in Tacoma. The other banks have undoubtedly been fixed, or they soon will be. If I can slip away undiscovered I'll try Vancouver next, but I haven't much hope."

"It looks bad, doesn't it?" said Cherry.

"As we stand at present," Boyd acknowledged, "we are the owners of a hundred thousand dollars' worth of useless machinery and unsalable supplies."

"And all," mused the girl, "because of a loose tongue and a little type."

CHAPTER X.

CLYDE next day suggested that Cherry could prevail on Hilliard to advance the money.

"Cherry?" asked Boyd. "How can she help?"

"She can do anything she wants with him."

"What do you mean?"

"I may be a heavy autumn frost as a financier," the younger man remarked, "but when it comes to women I'm as wise as a wharf rat. I've been watching her work, and it's great. People have begun to talk about it. Every night it's a dinner and a theater party. Every day orchids and other extortionate bouquets, with jewel boxes tied on with blue ribbons. His motor is at her disposal at all times, and she treats his chauffeur with open contempt. If that doesn't signify?"

"Nonsense!" exclaimed the other with disgust. "She is too nice a girl for that. You have misconstrued Hilliard's politeness."

Finding his worldly wisdom at issue, Clyde defended himself stoutly. "I tell you, he has gone off his blooming balance. I know the symptoms. Leave it to old Dr. Clyde."

"You say other people have noticed it?"

"I do. Everybody in town except you and the newsdealer at the corner—

sloutie soul, upheaved to its depths. "I beg your pardon," he said. "You are your own mistress, and you have the right to make any bargain you choose."

He saw that her eyes were misty with tears. "I want you to know," she said, "that I understand your position perfectly. If you don't succeed you not only lose the girl, but ruin yourself, for you can never repay the men who trusted you. That is a very big thing to a man, I know, yet there must be a way out—there always is. Perhaps it will present itself when you least expect it." She gave him a tired little smile before lowering her veil.

He rose and laid his hand on her arm. "Forgive my brutal bluntness."

Emerson rose from his chair and began to pace about slowly. "If Hilliard has turned that girl's head with his attentions I'll—"

Clyde threw back his head and laughed in open derision. "Don't worry about her—he is the one to be pitied. She's taking him on a Seattle trip of the most approved and expensive character."

"She isn't that kind," Emerson hotly denied.

"Now, don't be a boy until your beard trips you up. That girl is about to break into Hilliard's vault, and while she's to there, with the gas lighted and a suit case to lug off the bunk notes, why not tell her to toss in a few bundles for us?"

"If I can't get along without taking money from a woman I'll throw up the whole deal."

The curious look which Boyd had noted once before came into Clyde's eyes, and this time, to judge by the young fellow's manner, he might have translated it into words but for the entrance at that moment of Cherry herself, accompanied by "Fingerless" Fraser.

"What luck in Vancouver?" she inquired.

"None whatever. The banks won't listen to me, and I can't interest any private parties."

"See here," volunteered Fraser, "why don't you let me sell some of your stock? I'm there with the big talk."

Emerson turned on him suddenly. "You have demonstrated that. If you had kept your mouth shut we'd have been at sea by now."

The fellow's face paled slightly as he replied, "I told you once that I didn't tip your mitt."

"Don't keep that up!" cried Boyd, his much tried temper ready to give way. "I can put up with anything but a lie."

Noting the signs of a rising storm, Clyde scrambled out of his chair, saying, "Well, I think I'll be going." He picked up his hat and stick and hurriedly left the room, followed in every movement by the angry eyes of Fraser, who seemed on the point of an explosion.

"You are tired and overwrought," said Cherry quietly to Boyd. "The success of this enterprise, with any happiness it may bring you, isn't worth a human life, nor is it worth what you are suffering."

"Perhaps not, from your point of view," he said roughly, then struck his palm with his closed fist. "What an idiot I was to begin all this—to think I could win with no weapons and no aid except a half mad fisherman, an adobe brained tubercle, a confidence man!"

"And a woman," supplemented Cherry. "I'm the one to blame."

"No; I blame no one but myself. Whatever you're responsible for there's only one person you've harmed—yourself."

"What do you mean?" asked Cherry. Her surprise left him unimpressed.

"Let's be frank," he said. "It is best to have such things out. I traded my friendship for money, and I am ruined. You are staking your honor against Hilliard's banknotes." Her silence only made him the more fiercely determined to force an explanation. "Oh, I'm in no mood to speak gently," he said; then added, with a sting of contempt in his tone, "I didn't think you would pay quite that price for your copper mine."

Cherry Malotte paled to her lips. "Kindly be more explicit; I don't know what you are talking about."

"Then, for your own good, you'd better understand. According to accepted standards, there is one thing no woman should trade upon. You have set yourself to trap Hilliard, and from what I hear you are succeeding. He is a married man. He is notorious, and yet you have deliberately yielded yourself to him for a price."

Suddenly he found the girl standing over him with burning eyes and quivering body.

"What right have you to say such things to me?" she cried. "A moment ago you acknowledged yourself a murderer—at least in thought. You said you would sacrifice anything or everything to gain your ends. Do you think I'm like that too? Are my methods to be called shameful because your own are criminal? And suppose they were? Do you think that you and your love for that unfeeling woman, who sent you out to toil and suffer and sweat your soul dry in the solitude of that horrible country, are the only issues in the world?"

"We won't speak of her," he broke in sharply.

"Oh, yes, we will. You say I have set a price on myself. Well, she can set a price on herself, but you can't see it. Her price was your honor, that has crumbled; your conscience, that has rotted. You have paid it, and you would pay double if she exacted it. But one thing you shall not do: you shall not judge of my bargains nor decide what I have paid to any man."

Never before had Boyd seen a woman so transformed by the passion of anger. She was the picture of defiant fury. The mask had slipped, and he caught a glimpse of the naked, pas-

sionate soul, upheaved to its depths.

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WHAT RIGHT HAVE YOU TO SAY SUCH THINGS TO ME?

I'm not clever at such things, but I would have said as much to my sister if I had one."

It was an honest attempt to comfort her, but it failed. "Goodbye," she said; "you mustn't give up."

All the way back to her hotel her mind dwelt listlessly upon his parting words. "His sister! His sister!" she kept repeating. "God! Can't he see?"

Drunk was falling when the girl, with set, defiant face, went to the telephone to call up Hilliard at the Rialto club.

"I have thought over your proposition, and I have changed my mind," she said. "Yes, you may send the car for me at 7." Then, in reply to some request, she laughed back through white lips. "Very well, if you wish it, the blue dress—yes, the blue decollete dress." She hung up the receiver, then stood with hands clinched while a shiver ran through her slender body. She stepped to a closet and flung open the door to stare at the array of gowns.

"So this is the end of my good resolutions," she laughed, and snatched a garment recklessly from its hook. "Now for all the miserable tricks of the trade!"

George Bait, Clyde and Fraser formed a grim trio as they sat in a nook of the hotel cafe, slipping moodily at their glasses, when on the following afternoon Emerson joined them. But they sensed some untoward happening even before he spoke, for his face wore a look of dazed incredulity, and his manner was so extraordinary that they questioned in chorus: "What's the matter? Are you sick?"

"No," said he, "but I—I must have lost my mind."

"What is it?"

"The trick is turned."

"The trick?"

"I have raised the money."

With a shout that startled the other occupants of the room Bait and Clyde jumped to their feet and began to chatter about in frenzy. Even "Fingerless" Fraser's expressionless face cracked in a wide grin of the blindest amazement.

"About noon I was called on the phone by Hilliard. He asked me to come down to the bank at once, and I went. He said he had reconsidered and wanted to put up the money. It's up. He'll back us. I've got it in writing. It's all etched—\$100,000, and more if we need it."

"You must have made a great talk," declared Clyde.

"I said nothing. He offered it himself as a personal loan. It has nothing to do with the bank. I'm going to tell Cherry now."

Alton Clyde twittered. "I told you she could pull it off," he said.

"This was Hilliard's own notion," Boyd returned coldly. "He merely reconsidered his decision, and—"

"Turn over! You're on your back!"

"It was only yesterday afternoon that I talked with Cherry. I dare say she hasn't seen him since."

"Well, I happen to know that she has. As I came home last night I saw them together. They came out of that French cafe across the street and got into Hilliard's car. She was dressed up like a pony."

"What's that got to do with it?" demanded "Fingerless" Fraser.

"She pulled the old fellow's leg, that's all," explained Alton.

"If I thought she had done that," said Emerson slowly, "I wouldn't touch a penny of the money."

"I don't care where the money came from or how it got there," rumbled Bait. "It's here; that's enough."

But Boyd clung to his point with a stubbornness which he himself found difficult to explain. The arguments of the others only annoyed him. The walk to Cherry's hotel afforded him time for reflection, while it deepened his doubt, somewhat lessened his impatience, and when he was shown into her presence he did not begin in the impetuous manner he had designed.

"What makes you think I had anything to do with it?" she asked after he had spoken.

"You were with Hilliard last night," she nodded slightly. "We closed our negotiations for the copper mine last night."

"How did you come out?"

"He takes it over and does the development work," she answered.

"That means that you are independent; that you can leave the north country and do all the things you want to do?" This time her smile was puzzling. "You don't seem very glad."

"Not. Realization discounts anticipation about 50 per cent. But don't let's talk about me. I—I'm unstrung today."

"I'm sorry you aren't going back to Kalyk," he said, with genuine regret. "But I am," she declared quickly. "I'm going back with you and George if you will let me. I want to see the finish of our enterprise."

"See here, Cherry, I hope you didn't influence Hilliard in this affair."

"Why probe the matter?"

"Because I haven't lost all my manhood," he answered roughly. "Yesterday you assumed the blame for this trouble and spoke of sacrifices, and—well, I don't know much about women, but for all I know you may have some ridiculous, quixotic strain in your makeup. I hope you didn't—"

"What?"

"Well, do anything you may be sorry for." At last he detected a gleam of spirit in her eyes.

"Suppose I did. What difference to you would that make?" He shifted uncomfortably under the girl's scrutiny.

"Suppose that Mr. Hilliard had called on me for some great sacrifice before he gave up that money. Would you allow it to affect you?"

"Of course," he answered. Then, unable to sit still under her searching gaze, he arose with flushed face to meet further discomfiture as she continued:

"Even if it meant your own ruin, the loss of the fortune you have raised among your friends—money that is intrusted to you—and—and the relinquishment of Miss Wayland? Honestly, now—her voice had softened and dropped to a lower key—"would it make any difference?"

"Certainly!"

"How much difference?"

"I'm in a very embarrassing position," he said slowly. "You must realize that with others depending on me I'm not free to follow my own inclinations."

She uttered a little mocking laugh. "Pardon me. It was not a fair question, and I shouldn't have asked it, but your hesitation was sufficient answer." Then as he broke into a heated denial she went on:

"Like most men, you think a woman has but one asset upon which to trade. However, if I felt responsible for your difficulties that was my affair, and if I determined to help extricate you that also concerned me alone." He stepped forward as if to protest, but she silenced his speech with an imperious little stamp of her foot.

In spite of the cheering turn his fortunes had taken, it was in no very amiable mood that he left her at last to write the wiser for all his questioning in the hotel lobby below he encountered the newspaper reporter who had fallen under Fraser's spell upon their first arrival from the north. The man greeted him eagerly.

"How d'you do, Mr. Emerson? Can you give me any news about the fisheries?"

"No."

"I thought there might be something new bearing on my story."

"Indeed! So you are the chap who wrote that article some time ago, eh?"

"Yes, sir. Good, wasn't it?"

"Doubtless, from the newspaper point of view. Where did you get it?"

"From Mr. Clyde."

CHAPTER XI.

CLYDE! You mean Fraser—Fraser, I should say," gasped Boyd to the reporter.

"No, sir. Alton Clyde! He was pretty talkative the night I saw him." The reporter laughed meaningly.

"Drunk, do you mean?"

"Oh, not exactly drunk, but pretty wet. He knew what he was saying, however. Can't you give me something more?"

"Nothing," Boyd hurried to his hotel, a prey to mingled anger and contrition. So Fraser had told the truth, after all, and with a kind of sullen loyalty had chosen to remain under a cloud himself rather than inform on a friend. It was quite in keeping with the fellow's peculiar temperament. As it happened, Boyd found the two men together and lost no time in acquainting them with his discovery.

"I've come to apologize to you," he said to Fraser, who grinned broadly and was seized with a sudden abashment which stilled his tongue. Emerson turned to Clyde. "Why did you permit me to do this injustice?"

"I—I didn't mean to give out any secrets—I don't remember doing it," Alton apologized lamely. "You know I can't drink much. I don't remember a thing about it, honestly." Boyd regarded him coldly, but the young man's penitence seemed so genuine, he looked so weak, so pitifully incompetent, that the other lacked heart to chastise him. It requires resistance to develop heat, and against the absence of character it is impossible to create any sort of emotion.

"When you got drunk that night you not only worked a great hardship on all of us, but afterward you allowed me to misjudge a very faithful man," declared Boyd. "If you can't keep a close mouth and do as you are told you'd better go back to Chicago."

"Don't climb any higher," admonished "Fingerless" Fraser. "He's all stuffed up now. I'll lay you 8 to 1 he don't make another break of the kind."

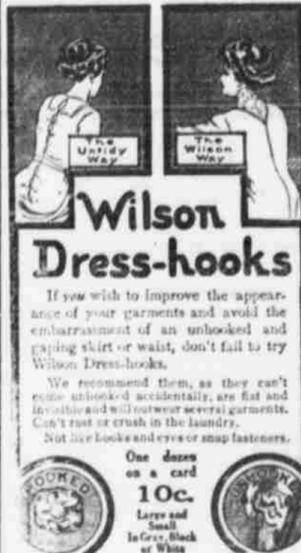
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