

# The Silver Horde

By REX BEACH

Author of "The Spoilers" and "The Barrier"

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## SYNOPSIS OF PRECEDING CHAPTERS.

Boyd Emerson and "Fingerless" Fraser enter Kaviak, Alaska, and meet a young white woman, Cherry Malotte, who shelters them. Cherry describes the salmon fisheries and Marsh, the unscrupulous head of the Kaviak canneries. 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 Kodiak and are soon en route for Chicago. Emerson seeks Miss Mildred Wayland. His and Emerson are engaged. Her father, Warren Wayland, a millionaire, Alton Clyde offers \$50,000 toward the cannery. Bait and Emerson meet Marsh in Chicago. Marsh is a suitor for Mildred's hand. Marsh 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 lend Emerson \$100,000. Cherry, who has arrived in Seattle, accepts a dinner invitation from Hilliard. Cherry discovers that Emerson is to marry Mildred. Marsh causes annoying delays for Emerson's party. Tacoma refuses Emerson a loan. Clyde suggests that Cherry can get the loan from Hilliard. Emerson engages Cherry by criticizing her friendly relations with Hilliard. Cherry sees Hilliard, who unexpectedly furnishes the money. Marsh causes a strike, delaying the loading of Emerson's machinery. Bait's fishermen fight the strikers. Fraser shoots a striker and impersonates Emerson, for whom a warrant is issued.

"Of course you can come along, old man," he responded heartily. "We're glad to have you."

The docks of the big, low lying tramp steamer were piled high with gear of every description. Ready now to sail, Boyd went out to the dock office to wire Mildred of his success.

"Fingerless" Fraser soon ran in upon him. "They've come to grab you for killing that striker!" he began breathlessly. "There's a couple of 'square toes' on the dock now. Better take it on the lam—quick!"

"God!" So Marsh had withheld this stroke until the last moment.

"You'd better beat it, quick!"

"How? I couldn't get through that crowd. They know me. Listen!" Outside the street broke into a roar at some taunt of the fishermen high up in the rigging. "I can't run away, and if those detectives get me I'm ruined."

Boyd clutched his hands in desperation. "I guess they've got me," he said bitterly. "There's no way out."

"From what they said I don't think they know you," Fraser continued. "Anyhow, they wanted Peasley to point you out. When they come off maybe you can slip 'em."

Boyd seized eagerly upon the suggestion. "The wharf is empty—see! I'll have to cross it in plain sight."

Through the rear door of the office that opened upon the dock proper they beheld the great floor almost entirely clear. Save for a few tons of freight at which Big George's men were working it was as unobstructed as a lawn, and, although it was nearly the size of a city block, it afforded no more means of concealment than did the little office itself, with its glass doors, its counter and its long desk, at the farther end of which a bill clerk was poring over his task.

They saw at the foot of the gang-plank two men talking with Big George. They saw Bait point the strangers curiously to the office, whence he had seen Boyd disappearing a few moments before, and turn back to his stovedores. Then they saw the plain clothes men approaching.

"Here! Gimme your coat and hat, quick!" cried Fraser in a low voice, his eyes blazing at a sudden thought. He stripped his own garments from his back with feverish haste. "Put mine on. There! I'll stall for you. When they grab me, take it on the run. Understand!"

"That won't do. Everybody knows me." Boyd cast an apprehensive glance at the arched back of the bill clerk, but Fraser, quick of resource in such a situation, forced him swiftly to make the change, saying:

"Nix. It's your only 'out.' Stand here, see?" He indicated a position beside the rear door. "I'll step out the other way where they can see me," he continued, pointing to the wagon way at the right. "Savvy? When they grab me you beat it and don't wait for nothing."

"But you?"

Already they could hear the footsteps of the officers.

"I'll take a chance. Goodby."

There was no time even for a hand-shake. Fraser stepped swiftly to the door, then strolled quietly out into the view of the two men, who an instant later accosted him.

"Are you Mr. Boyd Emerson?"

The adventurer answered bravely. "Yes, but I can't talk to you now."

"You are under arrest, Mr. Emerson."

Boyd wanted to hear no more. The glass door swung open noiselessly under his hand, and he stepped out just as the bill clerk looked up from his

work, starting out through the other entrance.

"Fingerless" Fraser's voice was louder now, as if for a signal. "Arrest me? What do you mean? Get out of my way!"

"You'd better come peaceably."

Boyd heard a sharp exclamation—"Get him, Bill!"—and then the sound of men struggling. He ran, followed by a roar from the strikers, in whose full view Fraser's encounter with the plain clothes men was taking place. A backward glance showed him that Fraser had drawn his pursuers to the street.

Scarcely had Boyd reached Big George when a wing of the beleaguering army swept in through the unguarded entrance and down the dock like an avalanche, leaving behind them the battling officers and the hungry pack clamoring for the prisoner.

"Drop the freight and get aboard the best way you can!" Boyd yelled at the fishermen, and, with a bound, was out into the open, crying to Captain Peasley on the bridge:

"Here they come! Cast off, for God's sake!"

The dozen men who had been slinging freight on the dock hastened up the gangplank or climbed the fenders, while the signalman clung to the lifting tackle and, at the piping cry of his whistle, was swung aloft out of the very arms of the rioters.

Above, on the flying bridge, Captain Peasley was bellowing orders. At last the Bedford Castle was under way.

Even after they were miles down the sound Boyd remained at his post, sweeping the waters astern in an anxious search for some swift harbor craft, the appearance of which would signal that his escape had been discovered.

"I won't feel safe until we are past Port Townsend," he confessed to Cherry, who maintained a position at his side. "The police can wire on from Seattle to stop us and take me off at that point."

"If they find out their mistake."

"They must have found it out long ago. That's why I've got Peasley forcing this old tub. She's doing 10 knots, and that's a breakneck speed for her. Once we're through the straits I'll be satisfied."

"What will happen to Fraser?" she queried.

"Nothing serious, I am sure. You see, they wanted me and nobody else. Once they find they have the wrong man I rather believe they will free him in disgust."

A moment later he went on: "Just the same, it makes me feel depressed and guilty to leave him. I—I wouldn't desert a comrade for anything if the choice lay with me."

"You did quite right," Cherry warmly assured him.

"You see, I am not working for myself. I am doing this for another."

It was the girl's turn to sigh softly, while the eyes she turned toward the west were strangely sad and dreamy.

"Two hours more," he told her as the ship's bell sounded, "then I can eat and sleep—and sing."

Captain Peasley was pacing the bridge when later they breasted the glare of Port Townsend and saw in the distance the flashing searchlights of the forts that guard the straits. They saw him stop suddenly and raise his night glasses. Boyd laid his hand on Cherry's arm. Presently the captain crossed to them and said:

"Youder seems to be a launch making out. See! I wonder what's up. By Jove! They're signaling."

The two boats were drawing together rapidly, and soon those on the bridge heard the faint but increasing patter of a gasoline exhaust. Carrying the same speed as the Bedford Castle, the launch shortly came within hailing distance. The cycloppan eye of the ship's searchlight blazed up, and the next instant out from the gloom leaped a little craft, on the deck of which a man stood waving a lantern. She held steadfastly to her course, and a voice floated up to them:

"Aho! What ship?"

"The Bedford Castle, cannery tender, for Bristol bay," Peasley shouted back.

The man on the launch relinquished his lantern and, using both palms for a funnel, cried more clearly now:

"Here's to! We want to come aboard."

With an exclamation of impatience, the commanding officer stepped to the telegraph, but Emerson forestalled him.

"Wait. They're after me, captain; it's the Port Townsend police, and if you let them aboard they'll take me off."

Turning, the skipper bellowed: "Who are you?"

"Police!"

"What did I tell you?" cried Emerson.

"What do you want?"

"One of your passengers—Emerson. Heave to. You're passing us."

"That's bloody hard luck, Mr. Emerson; I can't help myself," the captain declared. But again Boyd blocked him as he started for the telegraph.

"I won't stand it, sir. It's a conspiracy to ruin me."

"But, my dear young—" "Don't touch that instrument!" From the launch came cries of growing vehemence, and a startled murmur of voices rose from somewhere in the darkness of the deck beneath.

"Stand aside!" Peasley ordered gruffly. But the other held his ground, saying quietly:

"I warn you. I am desperate."

"Shall I stop her, sir?" the quartermaster asked from the shadows of the wheelhouse.

"No!" Emerson commanded sharply, and in the glow from the binnacle light they saw he had drawn his revolver, while on the instant up from the void beneath heaved the massive figure of Big George Bait, a behemoth, more colossal and threatening than ever in the dim light. He wrenched open the door and with one sweep of his hairy paw flung the helmsman from his post, panting.

"Keep her going, cap, or I'll run them down!"

The launch was abreast of them now and skimming along so close that one might have tossed a biscuit aboard of her. The spitter of the craft alongside was now punctuated by a volley of curses.

The police launch sheered off, and the sound of her exhaust grew rapidly fainter and fainter. But not until it had wholly ceased did Big George give over his post at the wheel. Even then he went down the ladder reluctantly and without a word of thanks, of explanation or of apology. With him this had been but a part of the day's work. He saw neither sentiment nor humor in the episode.

From the crow's nest of the Bedford Castle a week later the lookout stared down upon a white expanse that stretched beyond the horizon. At dawn they began their careful search, feeling their way eastward through the open lanes and tortuous passages that separated the floes, now laying to for the northward set of the floes to clear a path before them, now stealing through some narrow lead that opened into freer waters.

Captain Peasley did all the navigating in person, but eventually they were hemmed in so closely that for a day and a night they could do nothing but drift with the pack. In time, however, the winds opened a crevice through which they retreated to follow the outer limits farther eastward until they were balked again.

Late one evening they discerned smoke on the horizon, and the next morning's light showed a three masted steamship fast in the ice a few miles to the westward.

"That's the Juliet," Big George informed his companions, "one of the North American Packers' association tenders."

"She was loading when we left Seattle," Boyd remarked.

"It is Willis Marsh's ship, so he must be aboard," supplemented Cherry. "She's a wooden ship and built for this business. If we don't look out he'll beat us in after all."

"What good will that do him?" Clyde questioned. "The fish don't bite—I mean run—for sixty days yet."

Emerson and Bait merely shrugged.

To Cherry Malotte this had been a voyage of dreams, for once away from land Boyd had become his real self again—that gentle irrepresible self she had seen, but rarely—and his manner had lost the restraint and coolness which recently had disturbed their relations. Of necessity their cramped environment had thrown them much together, and their companionship had been most pleasant.

Two days after sighting the Juliet they raised another ship, one of the sailing fleet which they knew to be hovering in the offing, and then on the 5th of the month the capricious current opened a way for them. Slowly at first they pushed on between the floes into a vast area of slush ice, thence to a stretch as open and placid as a country mill pond. The lookout pointed a path out of this, into which they steamed, coming at length to clear water, with the low shores of the mainland twenty miles away.

At sundown they anchored in the wide estuary of the Kaviak river, the noisy rumble of their chains breaking the silence that for months had lain like a smother upon the port.

CHAPTER XIII.

NEVER did men have more willing hands to do their bidding than did Boyd and George, and when a week later the Juliet, with Willis Marsh on board, came to anchor the bunk houses were up and peopled, while the new site had become a beehive of activity.

The mouth of the Kaviak river is several miles wide, yet it contains but a small anchorage suitable for deep draft ships, the rest of the harbor being unobscured with mud bars and tide flats over which none but small boats may pass, and as the canneries are distributed up and down the stream for a considerable distance it is necessary to transport all supplies to and from the ships by means of tugs and lighters. Owing to the narrowness of the channel the Juliet came to her moorings not far from the Bedford Castle.

To Marsh, already furious at the trick the ice had played him, this forced proximity to his rival brought home with added irony the fact that he had been forestalled, while it emphasized his knowledge that henceforth the conflict would be carried on at closer quarters. It would be a contest between two men, both determined to win by fair means or foul.

(To be continued.)

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