

The Silver Horde

By REX BEACH

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SYNOPSIS OF PRECEDING CHAPTERS.

Boyd Emerson and "Fingerless" Fraser enter Katvik, Alaska, and meet a young little woman, Cherry Malotte, who shelters them.

Cherry describes the salmon fisheries and Marsh, the unscrupulous head of the Katvik cannery.

Cherry owns a cannery site. Emerson, George Holt and she go into partnership. Emerson describes his failure to "make good" in Alaska.

Emerson kisses Cherry good-bye. Holt, Fraser and Emerson nearly lose their lives in Katvik and miss the steamer at Katvik 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.

Boyd and Emerson are engaged. Her father, Wayne Wayland, is a millionaire. Alton Clyde offers \$10,000 toward the cannery.

Holt and Emerson meet Marsh in Chicago. Marsh is a cutter 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 Hillard, Seattle, refuses to lend Emerson \$10,000. Cherry, who has arrived in Seattle, accepts a dinner invitation from Hillard.

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 Hillard.

Emerson estranges Cherry by criticizing her friendly relations with Hillard. Cherry sees Hillard, who unexpectedly furnishes the money. Marsh causes a strike, delaying the loading of Emerson's machinery.

Holt's fishermen fight the strikers. Fraser shoots a striker and impersonates Emerson, for whom a warrant is issued.

It was on the afternoon following his arrival that Marsh after a tour of inspection landed from his launch and strolled up to where Boyd Emerson was at work. He was greeted courteously, if a bit coolly, and found, as on their last meeting, that his own bearing was reflected exactly in that of Boyd.

"I see you have a number of my old fishermen," Marsh observed.

"Yes; we were fortunate."

"You are very lucky."

"Indeed! How?"

"Well, don't you think you were lucky to beat that strike?"

"It wasn't altogether luck. However, I do consider myself fortunate in escaping at the last moment." Boyd laughed easily. "By the way, what happened to the man they mistook for me?"

"Let him go, I believe. I didn't pay much attention to the matter. I rather think you will have a lot to explain one of these days," he said, with deliberate meanness.

"With 50,000 cases of salmon aboard the Bedford Castle I will explain anything. Meanwhile the police may go to the devil!"

"You got away from Seattle, but there is a commissioner at Dutch Harbor, also a deputy marshal, who may have better success with a warrant than those policemen had." The trust's manager could not keep down the angry tremor in his voice, and the other, perceiving it, replied in a manner designed to inflame him still more.

"Yes, I have heard of those officers. I understand they are both in your employ."

"What?"

"I hear you have bought them."

"Do you mean to insinuate?"

"I don't mean to insinuate anything. Listen! We are where we can talk plainly. Marsh, and I am tired of all this subterfuge. You did what you could to stop me, you even tried to have me killed!"

"You dare to?"

"But I guess it never occurred to you that I may be just as desperate as you are. I broke through in spite of you, and I'm on the job. If you want to cry quits, I'm willing, but I won't be balked, and if any of your hired marshals try to take me before I put up my catch I'll put you away. Understand?"

Willis Marsh recoiled involuntarily.

"You are insane!" he cried.

"Am I?" Emerson laughed harshly.

"Well, I'm just crazy enough to do what I say. Don't come back here until I send for you. Something might fall on you."

"Then it is to be war, eh?"

"Suit yourself," Boyd pointed to the shore.

As Marsh made his way to the water's edge he stumbled like a blind man; his lips were bleeding where his small, sharp teeth had bitten them, and he panted like an hysterical woman.

During the next fortnight the sailing ships began to assemble, standing in under a great spread of canvas to berth close alongside the two steamships.

On the morning after the arrival of the last ship Emerson and his companions were treated to a genuine surprise. Cherry had come down to the site as usual—she could not let a day go by without visiting the place—and Clyde after a tardy breakfast had just come ashore. They were watching Big George direct the launching of a scow when all of a sudden they heard a familiar voice behind them cry cheerfully:

"Hello, white folks! Here we are all together again."

They turned to behold a villainous looking man beaming benignly upon them. He was dirty, his clothes were in rags, and through a riotous bristle of beard that hid his thin features a mungy patch shined on either cheek. It was undeniably "Fingerless" Fraser, but how changed, how altered, from that radiant flower of innocence they had known! He was pallid, emaciated and bedraggled.

"Fraser!" they cried in chorus, then fell upon him noisily.

Fraser drew himself up with injured dignity, then spoke in dramatic accents. "I worked my way."

"How? Where?"

"On that bloody whod jammer."

"But the police?" queried Boyd.

"Oh, I squared them easy. It's you they want. Yes, sir, I worked. I'm a scullery maid."

"Tell us about it," urged Cherry.

"What's the use?" he demanded, with a glare at Clyde. "That house-head wouldn't understand."

"Go ahead," Boyd seconded, with twirling lips. "You look as if you had worked, and worked hard."

"Well, there ain't any Pullmans running to this resort, so I stow away on a coal burner, but somebody flags me. Then I try to blow out as a fisherman, but I ain't there with the gang talk and my stuff drags, so I fix it for a hide-away on the Blessed Isle—that's her name. Can you beat that for a monaker? This sailor of mine

goes good to grub me, but he never shows for forty-eight hours—or years, I forget which. Anyhow, I stand it as long as I can, then I dig my way up to a hatch and mew like a house cat. It seems they were hep from the start, and batted me down on purpose, then made look on how long I'd stay hid. Oh, it's a funny joke, and they all get a stomach laugh when I show. When I offer to pay my way they're insulted. Nix! that ain't their graft. They wouldn't take money from a stranger. Oh, no! They permit me to work my way. The scullion has quit, see? So they promote me to his job."

"You deserted this morning, eh?"

"I did. I want a bath and some clean clothes and a whole lot of sleep."

He was granted his desires.

The Bedford Castle having discharged her cargo steamed away to return in August.

The middle of June brought the first king salmon, scouts sent on ahead of the "sockeyes;" but Boyd made no effort to take advantage of this run, laboring manfully to prepare for the advance of the main army, that terrific herbe that was soon to come from the mysterious depths either to make or ruin him. Once the run proper started there would be no more opportunity for building or for setting up machinery. He must be ready and waiting by the first of July.

For some time his tin machines had been busy night and day turning out great heaps of gleaming cans, while the carpenters and machinists completed their tasks. The gill netters were overhauling their gear, the beach was lined with fishing boats. On their dock great piles of seines and drift nets were being inspected. Three miles below Big George with a picked crew and a pilerdriver was building the fishtrap. It consisted of half mile "leads," or rows of piling, capped with stringers upon which netting was hung and terminated in "hearts," "corrals" and "spillers," the intricate arrangements of webbing and timbers out of which the fish were to be taken.

As for Boyd the fever in his veins mounted daily as he saw his dream assuming concrete form. Always he found Cherry at his shoulder, unobtrusive and silent for the most part, yet intensely observant and keenly alive to every action. She seemed to have the faculty of divination, knowing when to be silent and when to join her mood with his, and she gave him valuable help, for she possessed a practical mind. One day when their preparations were nearly completed a foreman came to Boyd and said excitedly:

"Boss, I'd like you to look at the

Iron Chinks right away."

"What's up?"

"I don't know, but something is wrong." A hurried examination showed the machines to be cunningly crippled; certain parts were entirely missing while others were broken.

The Iron Chink, or mechanical cleaner, is perhaps the most ingenious of the many labor saving devices used in the salmon fisheries. It is an awkward looking, yet very effective contrivance of revolving knives and conveyors which seizes the fish whole and delivers it cleaned, clipped, cut and ready to be washed. With superhuman dexterity it does the work of twenty lightning like butchers. Without the aid of these Iron Chinks Boyd knew that his fish would spoil before they could be handled. He hastened straightway to George Holt. A half hour's run down the bay and he clambered from his launch to the pile driver, where, amid the confusion and noise, he made known his tidings. The big fellow's calmness amazed him.

"What are you going to do now?"

"Butcher by hand," said the fisherman.

"But how? That takes skilled labor—lots of it."

George grinned. "I'm too old a bird to be caught like this. I figured on accidents from the start, and when I hired my Chinamen I included a crew of cutters. Willis Marsh will have to try again."

CHAPTER XIV.

WHILE they were talking a tug-boat towing a pile driver came into view. Boyd asked the meaning of its presence in this part of the river.

"I don't know," answered Big George, staring intently. "Yonder looks like another one behind it, with a raft of piles."

"I thought all the company traps were up stream."

"So they are. I can't tell what they're up to."

A half hour later, when the new boats had come to anchor a short distance below, Emerson's companion began to swear.

"I might have known it."

"What?"

"Marsh aims to 'cork' us."

"What is that?"

"He's going to build a trap on each side of this one and cut off our fish."

"Good Lord! Can he do that?"

"Sure! Why not? The law gives us 500 yards both ways. As long as he stays outside of that limit he can do anything he wants to."

"Then of what use is our trap? The salmon follow definite courses close to the shore, and if he intercepts them before they reach us—why, then we'll get only what he lets through."

"That's his plan," said Big George sourly. "It's an old game, but it don't always work. You can't tell what salmon will do till they do it. I've studied this point of land for five years, and I know more about it than anybody else except the Creator. If the fish hug the shore, then we're up against it, but I think they strike in about here; that's why I chose this site. We can't tell, though, till the run starts. All we can do now is see that them people keep their distance."

The "lead" of a salmon trap consists of a row of web piling that runs out from the shore for many hundred feet, forming a high, stout fence that turns the schools of fish and leads them into cunningly contrived inclosures, or "pounds," at the outer extremity, from which they are "batted" as needed. These corrals are so built that once the fish are inside they cannot escape. The entire structure is devised upon the principle that the salmon will not make a short turn, but will swim as nearly as possible in a straight line. It looked to Boyd as if Marsh, by blocking the line of progress above and below, had virtually destroyed the efficiency of the new trap, rendering the cost of its construction a total loss.

That evening when he had seen the night shift started Emerson decided to walk up to Cherry's house, for he was worried over the day's developments and felt that an hour of the girl's society might serve to clear his thoughts.

Cherry's house was situated a short distance above the cannery which served as Willis Marsh's headquarters, and Boyd's path necessarily took him past his enemy's very stronghold. Finding the tide too high to permit of passing beneath the dock, he turned up among the buildings, where, to his surprise, he encountered his own day foreman talking earnestly with a stranger.

The fisherman started guiltily.

"What are you doing here, Larsen?" asked Boyd.

"I just walked up after supper to have a talk with an old mate."

"Who is he?"

"He's Mr. Marsh's foreman."

Emerson spoke out bluntly: "See here, I don't like this. These people have caused me a lot of trouble already, and I don't want my men hanging around here."

"Oh, that's all right," said Larsen carelessly. "Him and me used to fish together." And as if this were a sufficient explanation he turned back to his conversation, leaving Emerson to proceed on his way.

He found Cherry at home and, flinging himself into one of her easy chairs, relieved his mind of the day's occurrences.

"Marsh is building those traps purely out of spite, she declared indignantly when he had finished. "He doesn't need any more fish—he has plenty of traps farther up the river."

"To be sure! It looks as if, we might have to depend upon the gill netters."

"We will know before long. If the fish strike in where George expects Marsh will be out a pretty penny."

"And if they don't strike in where

George expects we will be out all the expense of building that trap."

"Exactly! It's a fascinating business, isn't it? It's a business in which the unexpected is forever happening. But the stakes are high, and—I know you will succeed. By the way," she continued, "have you heard the historic story about the pink salmon?"

He shook his head.

"Well, there was a certain shrewd old cannery man in Washington state whose catch consisted almost wholly of pink fish. As you know, that variety does not bring as high a price as red salmon, like these. Well, finding that he could not sell his catch, owing to the popular prejudice about color, this man printed a lot of striking color labels, which read, 'Best Grade Pink Salmon, Warranted Not to Turn Red in the Can.' They tell me it worked like a charm."

"No wonder," Boyd laughed.

"I wish I were a man," she went on. "I'd like to engage in a business of this sort, something that would require ingenuity and daring. I'd like to handle big affairs."

"There is your copper mine. You surely handled that very cleverly."

Cherry's expression altered, and she shot a quick glance at him as he went on.

"How is it coming along, by the way? I haven't heard you mention it lately."

"Very well, I believe. The men were down the other day and told me it was a big thing."

"I'm delighted. How does it seem to be rich?"

"I hardly know. Rich! That has always been my dream, and so—"

"The wonderful feature about dreams," he took advantage of her pause to say, "is that they come true."

"Not all of them—not the real, wonderful dreams," she returned.

"Oh, yes! My dream is coming true, and so is yours."

"I have given up hoping for that," she said, without turning.

"But you shouldn't give up. Remember that all the great things ever accomplished were only dreams at first, and the greater the accomplishments the more impossible they seemed to begin with."

Something in the girl's attitude and in her silence made him feel that his words rang hollow and commonplace. While they had talked an unaccustomed excitement had been mounting in his brain, and it held him now in a kind of delicious embarrassment. It was as if both had been suddenly enfolded in a new and mysterious understanding without the need of speech. He did not tell himself that Cherry loved him, but he roused to a fresh perception of her beauty and felt himself privileged in her nearness.

It may have been the unusual order of his gaze that warmed her cheeks and brought her eyes back from the world outside. At any rate, she turned, flashing him a startled glance that caused his pulse to leap anew. Rising silently, she went past him to the piano. Never before had she surprised that look in his eyes and at the realization a wave of confusion surged over her. She strove to calm herself through her music, which shielded while it gave expression to her mood, and neither spoke as the evening shadows crept in upon them. But the girl's exaltation was short lived; the thought came that Boyd's feeling was but transitory; he was not the sort to burn lasting incense before more than one shrine. Nevertheless, at this moment he was hers, and in the joy of that certainty she let the moments slip.

They heard a child crying somewhere in the rear of the house and Chakawana's voice soothing; then in a moment the Indian girl appeared in the doorway, saying something about going out with Constantine. Cherry acquiesced half consciously, impatient of the intrusion. Boyd finally rose and, going to the door, saw that the sky was deeply overcast, rendering the night as dark as in a far lower latitude.

"I've overstayed my welcome," he ventured and smiled at her answering laugh.

With a trace of solicitude she said: "Wait! I'll get you a raincoat." But he reached out a detaining hand. In the darkness it encountered the bare flesh of her arm.

"Please don't! You'd have to strike a light to find it, and I don't want a light now."

"It has been a pleasant evening," she said inanely.

"I saw you for the first time tonight, Cherry. I think I have begun to know you."

Again she felt her heart leap. Reaching out to say good-bye, his hand slipped down over her arm like a caress until her palm lay in his.

With trembling, gentle hands she pushed him from her.

When the black bulk of Marsh's cannery loomed ahead of Emerson he left the gravel beach and turned up among the buildings, seeking to retrace his former course. As he turned the corner of the first building he nearly ran against a man who was standing motionless against the wall. The fellow, with a sharp exclamation, vanished into the gloom. Boyd lost no time in gaining the plank runway that led to the dock and, finding an angle in the building, backed into it and waited.

From his momentary glimpse of the man as he made off he knew that he was tall and active—just the sort of person to prove dangerous in an encounter. But if his suspicions were correct there must be others close by, and Boyd wondered why he had heard no signal. After a breathless wait of a moment or two he stole cautiously out, and, selecting the darkest shadows, slipped from one to another till he was caught by the sound of voices issuing from the yawning entrance of the main building on his right. The

(To be continued.)

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