

The Silver Horde

By REX BEACH

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SYNOPSIS OF PRECEDING CHAPTERS.

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

Cherry describes the salmon fisheries and Marsh, the unscrupulous head of the Kalvik 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 goodby. Holt, 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.

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

Holt 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. Hanker 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 estranges Cherry by criticizing her friendly relations with Hilliard. Cherry sees Hilliard, who unexpectedly furthurs 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.

Emerson escapes to Kodiak. Marsh follows. Fraser is released and rejoins Emerson. Emerson's machinery is tampered with.

Marsh builds a trap to prevent salmon from reaching Emerson's cannery site. He is mysteriously strangled. Emerson is accused.

Baldwin begins their run, but Marsh hires Emerson's fishermen. Clyde threatens to sell his stock. Fraser is noncommittal to Emerson concerning Cherry's early life.

Holt threatens to kill Marsh. Cherry gets a crew of Indians to help Emerson pack his salmon catch. Emerson suspects Constantine, Cherry's Indian servant, of attempting to kill Marsh. Cherry tells Emerson Mildred doesn't love him if she will not help him.

"Oh, she's good enough," said Clyde. "They're all good, but not perhaps in the way you mean."

"How do you know?"

"I don't know, but Fraser does. He's known her for years. Haven't you, Fraser?" But the adventurer's face was like wood as they turned toward him.

"I don't know nothing," replied "Fingerless" Fraser, with an admirable show of ignorance.

"Well, judge for yourself." Clyde turned again to Emerson. "Who is she? Where did she come from? What is she doing here alone? Answer that. Now, she's interested in this deal just as much as any of us, and if you don't ask her to take a hand I'm going to put it up to her myself."

"You'll do nothing of the sort!" Boyd cried savagely.

Clyde rose hastily, and his voice was shaking with excitement as he stammered:

"See here, Boyd, you're to blame for this trouble, and now you either get us out of it or buy my stock."

"You know that I can't buy your stock."

"Then I'll sell wherever I can. I've been stung, and I want my money. Only, remember, I offered the stock to you first."

"You've got a swell chance to make a turn in Kalvik," said Fraser. "Why don't you take it to Marsh?"

"I will!" declared Alton.

"You wouldn't do a trick like that?" Emerson questioned quickly.

"Why not? You won't listen to my advice. You're playing with other people's money, and it doesn't matter to you whether you win or lose. If this enterprise fails I suppose you can promote another."

"Get out!" Boyd ordered. In such a tone that the speaker obeyed with ludicrous haste.

"Did you know Cherry before you came to Kalvik?" Boyd asked, searching his companion's face with a look the man could not evade.

"Only casual."

"Where?"

"None—the year of the big rush."

"During the mining troubles, eh?"

"Sure."

"What was she doing?"

"Minding her business. She's good at that." Fraser's eyes had become green and fishy, as usual.

"What do you know about her?"

"Well, I know that a lot of fellows would go through for her at the drop of a hat. She could have most anything they've got, I guess. Most any of them miners at Nome would give his right eye or his only child, or any little thing like that, if she asked it."

"What else?"

"Well, she was always considered a right good looking party."

"Yes, yes; of course. But what do you know about the girl herself? Who is she? What is her history?"

"Now, sir, I'm an awful poor detective," confessed "Fingerless" Fraser. "I've often noticed that about myself. If I was the kind that goes anoooping around into other people's business, listening to all the gossip I'm told, I'd

make a good witness. But I ain't. No sir! I'm a rotten witness."

Despite this indirect rebuke, Boyd might have continued his questioning



"We can get him tonight if you say so," had not George Holt's heavy step sounded outside. A moment later the big fellow entered.

"What did you find at the trap?" asked Emerson eagerly.

"Nothing," George spoke shortly. "The fish struck in this morning, but our trap is corked." He wrenched off his rubber boots and flung them savagely under a bench.

"What luck with the boats?"

"Not much. Marsh's men are trying to surround our gill netters, and we ain't got enough boats to protect ourselves." He looked up meaningfully from under his heavy brows and inquired:

"How much longer are we going to stand for this?"

"What do you mean? I've got men out hunting for new hands."

"You know what I mean," the giant rumbled, his red eyes flaming. "You and I can get Willis Marsh."

Emerson shot a quick glance at Fraser, who was staring fixedly at Big George.

"He's got us right enough, and it's bound to come to a killing some day, so the sooner the better," the fisherman ran on. "We can get him tonight if you say so. Are you in on it?"

Boyd faced the window slowly, while the others followed him with anxious eyes. Inside the room a deathlike silence settled.

Moreover, Mildred Wayland was soon to arrive—the yacht was expected daily—and she would find him a failure. What was worse, she would find that Marsh had vanquished him. She would turn elsewhere—perhaps to the very man who had deceived his undoing. At thought of this a sort of desperation seemed to master him; he began to mutter aloud.

"What did you say?" queried Holt.

"I said that you are right. The time is close at hand for some sort of a reckoning," answered Boyd in a harsh, strained voice.

"Good!"

Emerson was upon the point of turning when his eyes fell upon a picture that made him start, then gaze more intently. Out upon the placid waters, abreast of the plant, the launch in which Cherry had departed was approaching, and it was loaded down with men. Not only were they crowded upon the craft itself, but trailing behind it like the tail of a kite was a long line of canoes, and these also were peopled.

"Look yonder!" cried Boyd.

"What?"

"Cherry has got—a crew!" His voice broke, and he leaped toward the door as Big George bolted to the window.

"Injuns!" wildly shouted the giant, and without stopping to stamp his feet into his boots he rushed out barefoot after Boyd and Fraser. Together the three men reached the dock in time to help Cherry up the ladder.

"What does this mean?" Boyd asked her breathlessly. "Will these fellows work?"

"That's what they're here for," said the girl. After her swarmed a crowd of slant eyed, copper hued Aleuts. Those in the kyaks astern cast off and paddled toward the beach.

"I've got fifty men, the best on the river. I tried to get more, but—there aren't any more."

"Fingerless" Fraser slapped himself resoundingly upon the thigh and exploded, profanely. Boyd seized the girl's hands in his and wrung them.

"Cherry, you're a treasure!" The memory of his desperate resolution of a moment before swept over him suddenly and his voice trembled with a great thankfulness.

"Don't thank me!" Cherry exclaimed. "It was more Constantine's work than mine."

"But I don't understand. These are Marsh's men."

"To be sure, but I was good to them when they were hungry last winter, and I prevailed upon them to come. They aren't very good fishermen. They're awful lazy and they won't work half as hard as white men, but

it's the best I could do." She laughed gladly, more than repaid by the look in her companion's face. "Now get me some lunch. I'm fairly starved."

Big George, when he had fully grasped the situation, became the boss fisherman on the instant. Before the others had reached the cookhouse he was busied in laying out his crews and distributing his gear. The tempo had had happened; victory was in sight; the fish were running. He cared to know no more.

That night the floors of the fish dock groaned beneath a weight of silver-fleshed salmon piled waist high to a tall man. All through the cool, dim lit hours the ranks of Chinese butchers backed and silt and slashed with swift, sure, tireless strokes, while the great building echoed hollowly to the clank of machines and the hissing sighs of the soldering furnaces.

It seemed to Boyd that he had never felt such elation as during the days that followed. He trod upon air; his head was in the clouds. He joked with his men, inspiring them with his own good humor and untiring energy. He was never idle save during the odd hours that he snatched for sleep.

While the daily output was disappearing, Emerson drew consolation from the prospect that his pack would be large enough at least to avert utter ruin.

Up at the trust's headquarters Willis Marsh was in a fine fury. As far as possible his subordinates avoided him. On the third day after Boyd's delivery Constantine sought him out in company with several of the native fishermen, translating their demand to be paid for the fish they had caught.

"Can't they wait until the end of the week?" Emerson inquired.

"No! They got no money—they got no grub. They say little baby is honry, and they like money now. So soon they buy grub, they work some more."

"Very well. Here's an order on the bookkeeper."

Boyd tore a leaf from his notebook and wrote a few words on it, telling the men to present it at the office. As Constantine was about to leave he called to him:

"Wait! I want to talk with you."

The breed halted.

"How long have you known Mr. Marsh?"

"Me know him long time."

"Do you like him?"

A sly grin ran over the fellow's copper face as he replied:

"Yes. Him good man."

"You used to work for him, did you not?"

"Yes."

"Why did you quit?"

Constantine hesitated slightly before answering. "Me go work for Cherry."

"Why?"

"She good to my little broder. You savvy little child—so big?"

"Yes, I've seen him. He's a fine little fellow. By the way, do you remember that night about two weeks ago when I was at Cherry's house—the night you and your sister went out?"

"I member."

"Where did you go?"

Constantine shifted his walrus soled boots. "What for you ask?"

"Never mind! Where did you go when you left the house?"

"Me go Indian village. What for you ask?"

"Nothing. Only if you ever have any trouble with Mr. Marsh I may be able to help you. I like you, and I don't like him."

The breed grunted unintelligibly and was about to leave when Boyd reached



WITH A STARTLED CRY, CONSTANTINE WHIRLED, HIS FACE CONVULSED.

forth suddenly and plucked the fellow's sheath knife from its scabbard. With a startled cry, Constantine whirled, his face convulsed, his nostrils dilated like those of a frightened horse.

But Emerson merely fingered the Indian's weapon carelessly, remarking:

"That is a curious knife you have. I have noticed it several times."

He eyed him shrewdly for a moment, then handed the blade back with a smile. Constantine slipped it into its place and strode away without a word.

It was considerably later in the day when Boyd discovered the Indians to whom he had given the note talking excitedly on the dock. Seeing Constantine in argument with them, he approached to demand an explanation, whereupon the quarter breed held out a silver dollar in his palm with the words:

"These men say this money no good."

"What do you mean?"

"It no good. No can buy grub at company store."

It was evident that even Constantine was vaguely distrustful. Another native extended a coin, saying:

"We want money like this."

Boyd took the piece and examined it, whereupon a light broke upon him. The coin was stamped with the initials of one of the old fishing companies, and he instantly recognized a ruse practiced in the north during the days of the first trading concerns. It had been the custom of these companies to pay their Indians in coins bearing their own impress and to refuse all other specie at their posts, thus compelling the natives to trade at company stores. Seeing that his words carried no conviction, Emerson gave up at last, saying:

"If the company store won't take the money I'll sell you whatever you need from the commissary. We are not going to have any trouble over a little thing like this."

He marched the natives in a body to the storeroom, where he saw to it that they received what provisions they needed and assisted them in loading their canoes.

But his amusement at the episode gave way to uneasiness on the following morning when the Aleuts failed to report for work, and by noon his anxiety resolved itself into strong suspicion.

Holt had returned from the banks earlier in the morning with news of a struggle between his white crew and Marsh's men. George's boats had been surrounded during the night, nets had been cut and several encounters had occurred, resulting in serious injury to his men. The giant, in no amiable mood, had returned for reinforcements, stating that the situation was becoming more serious every hour. Hearing of the desertion of the natives, he burst into profanity, then armed himself and returned to the banks, while Boyd, now thoroughly alarmed, took a launch and sped up the river to Cherry's house in the hope that she could prevail upon her own recruits to return.

He found the girl ready to accompany him, and they were about to embark when Chakawana came running from the house as if in sudden fright.

"Where you go?" she asked her mistress.

"I am going to the Indian village. You stay here."

"No, no! I no stop here alone. I go long too." She cast a glance over her shoulder.

"But, Chakawana, what is the matter? Are you afraid?"

"Yes," Chakawana nodded her pretty head rigorously.

"What are you afraid of?" Boyd asked, but she merely stared at him with eyes as black and round as ox-heart cherries, then renewed her entreaty. When she had received permission and had hurried back to the house her mistress remarked, with a puzzled frown:

"I don't know what to make of her. She and Constantine have been acting very strangely of late. She used to be the happiest sort of creature, always laughing and singing, but she has changed entirely during the last few weeks. Both she and Constantine are forever whispering to each other and skulking about until I am getting nervous myself." Then, as the Indian girl came flying back with her tiny baby brother in her arms, Cherry added: "She's pretty, ain't she? I can't bear ugly people around me."

At the native village, in spite of every effort she and Boyd could make, the Indians refused to go back to work.

"Since they can't use your money at the store, they don't seem to care whether it is good or not," Cherry announced after a time. "Oh, but it's maddening!" She stamped her foot angrily. "And I was so proud of my work. I thought I had really done something to help at last. But I don't know what more we can do. I've reached the end of my rope."

"So have I," he confessed. "Even with those fifty Aleuts we weren't running at more than half capacity, but we were making a showing at least. Now!" He flung up his hands in a gesture of despair. "George is in trouble, as usual. Marsh's men have cut our nets, and the yacht may arrive at any time."

"The yacht! What yacht?"

"Mr. Wayland's yacht. He is making a tour of this coast with the other officers of the trust and—Mildred."

"Is—she coming here?" demanded Cherry in a strained voice.

"Yes."

"Why didn't you tell me?"

"I don't know; I didn't think you would be interested."

"So she can't wait? She is so eager that she follows you from Chicago clear up into this wilderness. Then you won't need my assistance any more, will you?" Her lids drooped, half hiding her eyes, and her face hardened.

"Of course I shall need your help. Her coming won't make any difference."

"It strikes me that you have allowed me to make a fool of myself long enough," said Cherry angrily. "Here I have been breaking my heart over this enterprise, while you have known all the time that she was coming. Why, you have merely used me—and George, and all the rest of us, for that matter." She laughed harshly.

"You don't understand," said Boyd. "Miss Wayland—"

"Oh, yes, I do. I dare say it will gratify her to straighten out your troubles. A word from her lips and your worries will vanish like a mist. Let us acknowledge ourselves beaten and beg her to save us."

Boyd shook his head in negation, but she gave him no time for speech.

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