

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" Frazer 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 blames Cherry goodby. Holt, Frazer 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 on 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 cannery.

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. 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 estranges Cherry by criticizing her friendly relations with Hilliard. Cherry sees Hilliard, who unexpectedly forgives Emerson a loan. Clyde suggests that Cherry can get the loan from Hilliard.

Holt's fishermen fight the strikers. Frazer shoots a striker and impersonates Emerson, for whom a warrant is issued. Emerson escapes to Kalvik. Taffy follows. Frazer 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 stabbed. Emerson is accused.

Salmon begin their run, but Marsh hires Emerson's fishermen. Clyde threatens to sell his stock. Frazer 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.

Emerson's failing crews fight Marsh's. Wayland and Mildred arrive at Kalvik. Emerson tells Mildred his cannery may be a failure. She takes little interest in his work.

"I am tired," he confessed, feeling anew the weariness of the past twenty-four hours. He covertly stroked a fold of her dress, murmuring: "You are here, after all. And you love me, Mildred? You haven't changed, have you?"

"Not at all. Have you?" His deep breath and the light that flamed into his face was her answer. "I want to be alone with you," he cried huskily. "My arms ache for you. Come away from here; this is torture. I'm like a man dying of thirst."

No woman could have beheld his burning eagerness without an answering thrill, and, although Mildred sat motionless, her lids drooped slightly and a faint color tinged her cheeks.

Her idle hands clasped themselves rigidly. "You are always the same," she smiled. "You sweep me away from myself and from everything. I have never seen any one like you. There are people everywhere. Father is somewhere close by."

"I don't care." "I do."

"My launch is alongside. Let me take you ashore and show you what I have done. I want you to see."

"I can't. I promised to go ashore with the Herrys and Mr. Marsh."

"Marsh?" "Now don't get tragic! We are all going to look over his plant and have lunch there. They are expecting me. Oh, dear!" she cried plaintively. "I have seen and heard nothing but canneries ever since we left Vancouver. The men talk nothing but fish and packs and markets and dividends. It's all deadly stupid, and I'm wretchedly tired of it. Father is the worst of the lot, of course."

Emerson's eyes shifted to his own cannery. "You haven't seen mine—ours," said he.

"Oh, yes, I have. Mr. Marsh pointed it out to father and me. It looks just like all the others." There was an instant's pause before she ran on. "Do you know, there is only one interesting feature about them, to my notion, and that is the way the Chinamen smoke. Those funny crooked pipes and those little wands of tobacco are too ridiculous." The lightness of her words dimpled his ardent and brought back the sense of failure.

"I was down with the fishing fleet at the mouth of the bay this morning when you came in. I thought I might see you," he said.

"At that hour? Heaven! I was sound asleep. It was hard enough to get up when we were called. Father might have instructed the captain not to steam so fast."

Boyd stared at her in hurt surprise, but she was smiling at Alton Clyde in the distance and did not observe his look.

"Don't you care even to hear what I have done?" he inquired.

"Of course," said Mildred, bringing her eyes back to him.

Hesitatingly he told her of his disappointments, the obstacles he had met and overcome, avoiding Marsh's name and refraining from pining the blame where it belonged. When he had concluded she shook her head.

"It is too bad. But Mr. Marsh told us all about it before you came. Boyd I never thought well of this enterprise. Of course I didn't say anything against it, you were so enthusiastic, but you really ought to try something big. I am sure you have the ability. Why, the successful men I know at home have no more intelligence than you, and they haven't half your force. As for this—well, I think you can accomplish more important things than catching fish."

"Important!" he cried. "Why, the salmon industry is one of the most important on the coast. It employs 10,000 men in Alaska alone, and they produce \$10,000,000 every year."

"Oh, let's not go into statistics," said Mildred lightly; "they make my head ache. What I mean is that a fisherman is nothing like an attorney or a broker or an architect, for instance; he is more like a miner. Pardon me, Boyd, but look at your clothes." She began to laugh. "Why, you look like a common laborer!"

"I might have slicked up a bit," he acknowledged lamely, "but when you came I forgot everything else."

"I was dreadfully embarrassed when I introduced you to the Herrys and the rest. I daresay they thought you were one of Mr. Marsh's foremen."

Never before had Boyd known the least constraint in Mildred's presence, but now he felt the rebuke behind her careless manner, and it wounded him deeply.

He did not speak, and after a moment she went on with an abrupt change of subject:

"So that funny little house over there against the hill is where the mysterious woman lives?"

"Who?" "Cherry Malotte."

"Yes. How did you learn that?" "Mr. Marsh pointed it out. He said she came up on the same ship with you."

"That is true."

"Why didn't you tell me? Why did not you write me that she was with you in Seattle?"

"I don't know; I didn't think of it." She regarded him coolly.

"Has anybody discovered who or what she is?"

"Why are you so curious about her?" Mildred shrugged her shoulders.

"Your discussion with Willis Marsh that night at our house interested me very much. I thought I would ask Mr. Marsh to bring her around when we went ashore. It would be rather amusing. She wouldn't come out to the yacht and return my call, would she?" Boyd smiled at her frank concern at this possibility.

"You don't know the kind of girl she is," he said. "She isn't at all what you think. I don't believe you would be able to meet her in the way you suggest."

"Indeed!" Mildred arched her brows. "Why?"

"She wouldn't fancy being 'brought around,' particularly by Marsh."

From her look of surprise he knew that he had touched on dangerous ground, and he made haste to leave the conversation back to its former channel. He wished to impress Mildred with the fact that if he had not quite succeeded he had by no means failed, but she listened indifferently, with the air of humoring an insistent child.

"I wish you would give it up and try something else," she said at last. "This is no place for you. Why, you are losing all your old wit and buoyancy; you are actually growing serious, and serious people are not at all amusing."

Just then Alton Clyde and a group of people, among whom was Willis Marsh, emerged from the cabin, talking and laughing. Mildred arose, saying:

"Here come the Herrys, ready to go ashore."

"When may I see you again?" he inquired quickly.

"You may come out this evening."

His eyes blazed as he answered, "I shall come!"

As the others came up she said:

"Mr. Emerson can't accompany us. He wishes to see father."

"I just left him in the cabin," said Marsh. He helped the ladies to the ladder, and a moment later Emerson waved the party adieu, then turned to the saloon in search of Wayne Wayland.

CHAPTER XVIII.

IN Mr. Wayland's stiff greeting there was no hint that the two men had ever been friendly, but Emerson was prepared for coolness and seated himself without waiting for an invitation, glad of the chance to rest his tired limbs.

"I have a great deal to say to you, Mr. Emerson," he began, "and I would like you to hear me through."

"Go ahead."

"I am going to tell you some things about Mr. Marsh that I dare say you will disbelieve, but I can verify my statements. I think you are a just man, and I don't believe you know or would approve the methods he has used against me."

"If this is to be an arraignment of Mr. Marsh I suggest that you wait until he can be present. He has gone ashore with the women folks."

"I prefer to talk to you first. We can call him in later if you wish."

"Before we begin may I inquire what you expect of me?"

"You remember our agreement?" "I don't want assistance; I want relief."

"Whatever the distinction in the words, I understand that you are asking a favor?"

"I don't consider it so."

"Very well. Proceed."

"When you sent me out three years ago to make a fortune for Mildred it was understood that there should be fair play on both sides."

"Have you played fair?" quickly interposed the old man.

"I have. When I came to Chicago I had no idea that you were interested in the Pacific coast fisheries. I had raised the money before I discovered that you even knew Willis Marsh. Then it was too late to retreat. When I reached Seattle all sorts of unexpected obstacles came up. I lost the ship I had chartered; machinery houses refused deliveries; shipments went astray; my bank finally refused its loan, and every other bank in the northwest followed suit. I was harassed in every possible way. And it wasn't chance that caused it; it was Willis Marsh. He set spies upon me; he incited a dock strike that resulted in a riot and the death of at least one man; moreover, he tried to have me killed."

"How do you know he did that?" "I have no legal proof, but I know it just the same."

Mr. Wayland smiled. "That is not a very definite charge. You surely don't hold him responsible for the death of that striker?"

"I do, and for the action of the police in trying to fix the crime upon me. You know, perhaps, how I got away from Seattle. When Marsh arrived at Kalvik he first tried to sink my boilers; failing in that, he ruined my iron Chinks; then he 'corked' my fish trap, not because he needed more fish, but purely to spoil my catch. The day the run started he bribed my fishermen to break their contracts, leaving me short handed. He didn't need more men, but did that simply to cripple me. I got Indians to replace the white men, but he won them away by a miserable trick and by threats that I have no doubt he would make good if the poor devils dared to stand out."

"His men won't allow my fellows to work. We have had our nets cut and our fish thrown out. Last night we had a bad time on the banks, and a number of people were hurt. The situation is growing worse every hour, and there will be bloodshed unless this persecution stops. All I want is a fair chance. There are fish enough for us all in the Kalvik, but that man has used the power of your organization to ruin me not for business reasons, but for personal spite. I have played the game squarely, Mr. Wayland, but unless this ceases I'm through."

"You are through?"

"Yes. The run is nearly a week old, and I haven't begun to pack my salmon. I have less than half a boat crew, and of those half are laid up."

The president of the trust stirred for the first time since Boyd had begun his recital. The grim lines about his mouth set themselves deeper, and, staring with cold gray eyes at the speaker, he said:

"Well, sir, what you have told me confirms my judgment that Willis Marsh is the right man in the right place."

Completely taken back by this unexpected reply, Boyd exclaimed:

"You don't mean to say that you approve of what he has done?"

"Yes, of what I know he has done. Mr. Marsh is pursuing a definite policy laid down by his board of directors. You have shown me that he has done his work well. You knew before you left the east that we intended to crush all opposition."

Emerson's voice was sharp as he cried, "I understand all that, but am I to understand also that the directors of the N. A. P. A. instructed him to kill me?"

(To be continued.)

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