

The Silver Horde

By REX BEACH

Author of "The Spoilers" and "The Harrier"

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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 Bait and she go into partnership. Emerson describes his failure to "make good" in Alaska.

Emerson kisses Cherry goodbye. 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.

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

Bait and Emerson meet Marsh in Chicago. Marsh is a editor for Mildred's band. 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.

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

Emerson escapes to Kalvik. 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 stabbed. Emerson is accused.

Balmán 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.

Bait 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 falling 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.

Wayland approves of Marsh's crooked methods in fighting Emerson and threatens to crush him financially. The salmon fill Emerson's traps. Bait cries, "We've won!"

Chakawana, Constantine's pretty sister, has disappeared. Cherry asks Mildred to help Emerson and denounces Marsh. Constantine learns Marsh wants to marry Mildred. Mildred becomes jealous of Cherry.

"He's as busy as an ant hill. I met him turning in just as I came out for my constitutional."

"Where had he been all night?" Her voice betrayed an interest that Fraser was quick to detect. He answered calmly:

"You can search me! I don't keep cases on him. As long as he does his work I don't care where he goes at quitting time." He resolved that this girl should learn nothing from him.

"There seem to be very few white women in this place," she said after a pause.

"Only one, till you people came. Maybe you've crossed her trail?"

"Mr. Emerson told me about her. He seems quite fond of her."

"I've always said they'd make a swell looking pair."

"One can hardly blame her for trying to catch him."

"Oh, you can make book that she didn't start no lovmaking. She ain't the kind to curl up in a man's ear and whisper. She don't have to. All she needs to do is look natural. The men will fall like ripe persimmons."

"They have been together a great deal, I suppose."

"Every hour of the day, and the days are long," said Fraser cheerfully. "But he ain't crippled. He could have walked away if he'd wanted to. It's a good thing he didn't, though, because she's done more to win this bet for us than we've done ourselves."

"She's unusually pretty," the girl remarked coldly.

"Yes, and she's just as bright as she is good looking. But I don't care for friends." Fraser gazed admiringly at the brown hair before him and rolled his eyes eloquently. "I'm strong for brunettes, I am. It's the creole blood in me."

She gathered up her wild flowers and rose, saying:

"I must be going."

"I'll go with you." He jumped to his feet with alacrity.

"Thank you, I prefer to walk alone."

"Declined with thanks?" he murmured. "I'd need ear muffs and mittens to handle her. I think I'll build me some bonfire and thaw out. She must own the mill."

At the upper cannery Mildred found Alton Clyde with the younger Berry girl. She called him aside and talked earnestly with him for several minutes.

"All right," he said at length. "I'm glad to get out, of course. The rest is up to you."

Mildred's lips were white and her voice hard as she cried:

"I am thoroughly sick of it all! I have played the fool long enough!"

"Now, look here," Clyde objected weakly, "you may be mistaken, and it doesn't look like quite the square thing to do." But she silenced him with an angry gesture.

"Leave that to me. I'm through with him."

"All right. Let's hunt up the governor." Together they went to the office in search of Wayne Wayland.

A day or two later when Clyde rejoined Miss Berry she noticed that he seemed ill at ease, gazing down the bay with a worried, speculative look in his colorless eyes.

Boyd Emerson roused from his death like slumber late in the afternoon, still worn from his long strain and a-bling in every muscle. He was in wretched plight physically, but his heart was aglow with gladness. Big George was still at the trap, and the unceasing rumble from across the way told him that the fish were still coming in. As he was finishing his breakfast a watch man appeared in the doorway.

"There's a launch at the dock with some people from above," he announced. "I stopped them, according to orders, but they want to see you."

"Show them to the office." Boyd rose and went into the other building, where a moment later he was confronted by Wayne Wayland and Willis Marsh. The old man nodded to him shortly. Marsh began:

"We heard about your good fortune. Mr. Wayland has come to look over your plant."

"It is not for sale."

"How many fish are you getting?"

"That is my business." He turned to Mr. Wayland. "I hardly expected to see you here. Haven't you insulted me enough?"

"Just a moment before you order me out, I'm a stockholder in this company, and I am within my rights."

"You a stockholder? How much stock do you own? Where did you get it?"

"I own 25,000 shares outright." Mr. Wayland tossed a packet of certificates upon the table. "And I have options on all the stock you placed in Chicago. I said you would hear from me when the time came."

"So you think the time has come to crush me, eh?" said Emerson. "Well, you've been swindled. Only one-third of the capital stock has been sold, and Alton Clyde holds 25,000 shares of that."

The old man smiled grimly. "I have not been swindled."

"Then Clyde sold out?" exploded Boyd.

"Yes, I paid him back the \$10,000 he put in, and I took over the 25,000 shares you got Mildred to take."

"Mildred?" Emerson started as if he had been struck. "Are you insane? Mildred doesn't own— Why, Alton never told me who put up that money?"

"Don't tell me you didn't know!" cried Wayne Wayland. "You knew all the time. You worked your friends out and then sent that whipper snapper to my daughter when you saw you were about to fall. You managed well. You knew she couldn't refuse."

"How did you find out that she held the stock?"

"She told me, of course."

"Don't ask me to believe that. If she hadn't told you before she wouldn't tell you now. All I can say is that she acted of her own free will. I never dreamed she put up that \$25,000. What do you intend to do now that you have taken over these holdings?"

"What do you think? I would spend ten times the money to save my daughter." The old man was quivering.

"You are only a minority stockholder. The control of this enterprise still rests with me and my friends."

"Your friends?" cried Mr. Wayland.

"That's what brings me here—you and your friends! I'll break you and your friends if it takes my fortune."

"I can understand your dislike of me, but my associates have never harmed you."

"Your associates! And who are they? A lawless ruffian, who openly threatened Willis Marsh's murder, and a loose woman from the dance halls."

"Take care!" cried Emerson in a sharp voice.

The old man waved his hands as if at a loss for words. "Look here! You can't be an utter idiot. You must know who she is."

"Do you? Then tell me."

Wayne Wayland turned his back to disgust. "Do you really wish to know?" Marsh's smooth voice questioned.

"I do."

"She is a very common sort," said Willis Marsh. "I am surprised that you never heard of her while you were in the 'upper country.' She followed the mining camps and lived as such women do. She is an expert with cards. She even dealt faro in some of the camps."

"How do you know?"

"I looked up her history in Seattle. She is very well, notorious."

"People talk like that about nearly every woman in Alaska."

"I didn't come here to argue about that woman's character," broke in Mr. Wayland.

"You have said enough now, so that you will either prove your words or apologize."

"If you want proof, take your own relation with her. It's notorious. Even Mildred has heard of it."

"I can explain to her in a word."

"Perhaps you can also explain that 're with Hilliard. If so you had better do it. I suppose you didn't know anything about that either. I am sure you don't know why he advanced that loan after once refusing it. They have a name for men like you who take money from women of her sort."

Emerson uttered a terrible cry, and his face blanched to a gray pallor.

"Do you mean to say—I sent—her—to Hilliard?"

"Hilliard as good as told me so himself. Do you wonder that I am willing to spend a fortune to protect my girl from a man like you? I'm going to break you. I've got a foothold in this enterprise of yours, and I'll root you out if it takes a million. I'll kick you back into the gutter where you belong."

Boyd stood appalled at the violence of this outburst. The man seemed insane. He could not find words to answer him.

"You did not come down here to tell me that," he said at last.

"No, I came here with a message from Mildred. She has told me to disabuse you once and for all."

"I shall take my dismissal from no one but her. I can explain everything."

"I expected you to say that. If you want her own words read this." With shaking fingers he thrust a letter before Emerson's eyes. "Read it!"

The young man opened the envelope and read in a handwriting he knew only too well:

Dear Boyd—The conviction has been growing on me for some time that you and I have made a serious mistake. It is not necessary to go into details. Let us spare each other that unpleasantness. I am familiar with all that father will say to you, and his feelings are mine; hence there is no necessity for further explanations. Believe me, this is much the simplest way. MILDRED.

Boyd crushed the note in his palm and tossed it away carelessly.

"You dictate well," he said quietly. "but I shall tell her the truth, and she will!"

"Oh, no, you won't. You won't see her again. I have seen to that. Mildred is engaged to Willis Marsh. It's all settled. I warn you to keep away. Her engagement has been announced to all our friends on the yacht."

"I tell you I won't take my dismissal from any one but her. I shall come aboard the Grande Dame tonight."

"Mr. Marsh and I may have something to say to that."

Boyd wheeled upon Marsh with a look that made him recoil.

"If you try to cross me I'll strip your back and lash you till you howl like a dog."

Marsh's florid face went pale. His tongue became suddenly too dry for speech. But Wayne Wayland was not to be cowed.

"I warn you again to keep away from my daughter!" he cried furiously. "And I warn you that I shall come aboard the yacht tonight alone."

The president of the trust turned and, followed by his lieutenant, left the room without another word.

Cherry Malotte, coming down to the cannery on her daily visit, saw Willis Marsh and Mr. Wayland leaving it. Wondering, she hurried into the main building in search of Boyd. The place was as busy as when she had left it on the afternoon before, and she saw that the men had been at work all night. Many of them were sprawled in corners, where they had sunk from weariness, snatching a moment's rest before the boss kicked them back to their posts. The Chinese hands were stolidly performing their tasks, their yellow faces baggard with the strain. At the butchering tables yesterday's crew were still sitting, slushing, hacking at the pile of fish that never seemed to grow less. Some of them were giving up, staggering away to their bunks, while others with more vitality had stood so long in the slime and salt drip that their feet had swelled, and it had become necessary to cut off their shoes.

Boyd was standing in the door of the office. In a few words he told her of Mr. Wayland's threat.

"Do you think he can injure the company?" she inquired anxiously.

"I haven't a doubt of it. He can do very serious harm at least."



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(To be continued.)

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