

The Silver Horde

By REX BEACH

Author of "The Spoilers" and "The Barrier"

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SYNOPSIS OF PRECEDING CHAPTERS.

self to think"—

CHAPTER XXI.

WHAT NOT?" the girl asked. "It is nothing to you. You have lived, and so have I. I made mistakes—what girl doesn't—who has to fight her way alone? But my past is my own. It concerns no body but me." She saw the change in his face, and her reckless spirit rose. "Oh, I've shocked you! You think all women should be like Miss Wayland. Have you ever stopped to think that even you are not the same man you were when you came fresh from college? You know the world now; you have tasted its wickedness. Would you change your knowledge for your earlier innocence? You know you would not, and you have no right to judge me by a separate code. What difference does it make who I am or what I have done? I didn't ask your record when I gave you the chance to win Miss Wayland, and neither you nor she have any right to challenge mine."

"I agree with you in that." "I came away from the mining camps because of wagging tongues, because I was forever misjudged. Whatever I may have been, I have at least played fair with that girl. It hurts me now to be accused by her, I saw your love for her, and I never tried to rob her. Oh, don't look as if I couldn't have done differently if I had tried. I could have injured her very easily if I had been the sort she thinks me. But I helped you in every way I could. I made sacrifices. I did things she would never have done."

She stopped on the verge of tears. "Why did you do all this?" he asked. "Don't you know?" Cherry gazed at him with a faint smile. "Then, for the first time, the whole truth burst upon him. The surprise of it almost deprived him of speech, and he stammered: "No, I— I— Then he fell silent. "What little I did I did because I love you," said the girl in a throbbing voice. "You may as well know, for it makes no difference now."

"I—I am sorry," he said, gripped by a strong emotion that made him go hot and cold. "I have been a fool." "No; you were merely wrapped up in your own affairs. You see, I had been living my own life and was fairly contented till you came. Then everything changed. For a long time I hoped you might grow to love me as I loved you, but I found it was no use. When I saw you so honest and unselfish in your devotion to that other girl I thought it was my chance to do something unselfish in my turn. It was hard, but I did my best. I think I must love you in the same way you love her, Boyd, for there is nothing in all the world I would not do to make you happy."

The girl stood for a moment with her eyes turned toward the river. Then she said: "I must think. I—I want to go away. Goodby." "Goodby," he returned and stood watching her as she hurried away, half suspecting the tears that were trembling amid her lashes.

It was not until supper time that Boyd saw "Fingerless" Fraser and questioned him about his quest for the heiress. "Nothing doing in the heiress business," replied the adventurer. "I couldn't stand the exposure." "They were cold, eh?" "Yep! They weathered me out." "Did you really meet any of those people?" "Sure! I met 'em all, but I didn't catch their names. I made one before I'd gone a mile—tall, slim party with cracked ice in her voice."

Boyd looked up quickly. "Did you introduce yourself?" "As Chancy De Benville, that's all. How is that for a drawing room moniker? She fell for the name all right, but there must have been something phony about the clothes. That's the trouble with this park barnum. If I wore my 'soup and fish' and my two gallon evening hat I'd have passed for a gentleman sure. I'm strong for those evening togs. I see another one later—a little maduro colored skirt with a fat nose."

"Miss Berry." "I'm glad to meet her. I offered her out of a rowboat and told her I was Mr. Yonkers of New York. We was breezing along on the bit till Clyde broke it up. He called me Fraser, and it was cold in a minute. Fraser is a cheap name anyhow. I'm sorry I took it."

"Do you mean to say it isn't your real name?" asked his companion in genuine bewilderment. "Naw! Switzer is what I was born with. Say it slow and it sounds like an air brake, don't it? I never won a bet as long as I packed it around, and Fraser hasn't got it beat by more than a lip."

"Well!" Boyd breathed deeply. "You are the limit." "Speaking of clothes, I notice you are dressed up like a fruit salad. What is it—the yacht?"

"Yes." "You'd better hurry. She sails at high tide." "Sails?" "Alton told me so and said that he was going along." "Thank heaven for that, anyhow, but I don't understand about the other." Boyd voiced the question that was foremost in his mind. "Did you know Cherry to the upper country?" "Nope." "She said you did." "She said that?" "Yes. She thought you had told me who she was." "She might have known I'd never crack. It's her own business, and I've got troubles enough with this canyony on my hands." "I wish you had told me," said Emerson.

Wayne Wayland was by no means sure that Boyd would not make good his threat to visit the yacht that evening, and in any case he wished to be prepared. A scene before the other passengers of the Grande Dame was not to be thought of. Besides, if the young man were roughly handled it would make him a martyr in Mildred's eyes. He talked over the matter with Marsh, who suggested that the sight-seers should dine ashore and spend the evening with him at the plant. With only Mildred and her father left on the yacht there would be no possibility of scandal, even if Emerson were mad enough to force an interview.

"And what is more," declared Mr. Wayland, "I shall give orders to clear on the high tide. That fellow is a menace, and the sooner Mildred is away from him the better. You shall go with us, my boy."

But when he went to Mildred to explain the nature of his arrangements he found her in a furious temper. "Why did you announce my engagement to Mr. Marsh?" she demanded angrily. "The whole ship is talking about it. By what right did you do that?"

"I did it for your own sake," said the old man. "This whelp Emerson has made a fool of you and of me long enough. There must be an end to it." "But I don't love Willis Marsh!" she cried. "You forget I am of age."

"Nonsense! Willis is a fine fellow. He loves you, and he is the best business man for his years I have ever known. If it were not for this foolish boy and girl affair you would return his love. He suits me, and—well, I have put my foot down, so there's an end of it."

"Do you intend to force me to marry him?" Mr. Wayland recognized the danger signal. "Absurd! Take all the time you wish. You'll come around all right. That reprobate you were engaged to defied me and defied that woman."

He told of his stormy interview with Boyd, concluding: "It is fortunate we found him out. Mildred, I have guarded you all my life. I have lavished everything money could buy upon you. I have built up the greatest fortune in all the west for you. I have kept you pure and sweet and good—and to think that such a fellow should dare— Mr. Wayland choked with anger. "The one thing I cannot stand in a man or a woman is immorality. I have lived clean myself, and my son shall be as clean as I."

"Did you say that Boyd threatened to come aboard this evening?" questioned the girl. "Yes. But I swore that he should not."

"Then he'll come," said Mildred. It was twilight when Willis Marsh was rowed out to the yacht. He found Mr. Wayland and Mildred seated in deck chairs enjoying the golden sunset while the old man smoked. Marsh explained that he had excused himself from his guests to go whither his inclination led him and drew his seat close to Mildred, rejoicing in the fact that no one could gainsay him this privilege. Moreover, he had won the unflinching loyalty of Wayne Wayland, the dominant figure of the west. Nothing could keep him now from the success his ambition demanded.

His complaint enjoyment was interrupted at last by the approach of the second officer, who announced that a lady wished to see Mr. Wayland. "A lady?" asked the old man in surprise.

"Yes, sir. She came alongside in a small boat just now with some natives. I stopped her at the landing, but she says she must see you at once." "Ah, that woman again!" Mr. Wayland's jaws snapped. "Tell her to begone. I refuse to see her."

"Very well, sir." The mate turned, but Mildred said suddenly: "Wait! Why don't you talk to her, father?" "That creature? I have nothing to say to her."

Mildred leaned forward and called to the ship's officer: "Show her up. I will see her." "Mildred, you mustn't talk to that woman!" her father cried. "It is very unwise," Marsh chimed in apprehensively. "She isn't the sort of person—"

Miss Wayland chilled him with a look and waved the mate away, then sank back into her chair. "I have talked with her already. I assure you she is not dangerous." Willis Marsh squirmed uncomfortably in his seat. He fixed his eyes upon the knot of men at the starboard rail. Then, with a sharp indrawing of his breath, he leaped up and darted down the deck.

(To be continued.)

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