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The Silver Horde

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Synopsis of Previous 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 canneries.

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

Emerson kisses Cherry goodbye. Balt, 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 Kadiak and are soon en route for Chicago. Emerson seeks Miss Mildred Wayland.

(Cintinued From Yesterday.)

She gazed up at him with a puzzled little frown. "What bothers me is that you understand me and my life so well, while I scarcely understand you or yours at all. That seems to tell me that I am unsuited to you in some way. Why, when you told me that story of your hardships and all that I listened as if it were a play or a book, but really it didn't mean anything to me or stir me as it should. I can't understand my own failure to understand. Do you see what I am trying to convey?"

"Perfectly," he answered, releasing her with a little unadmitted sense of disappointment at his heart. "I suppose it is only natural."

"I do hope you succeed this time," she continued. "I am growing deadly tired of things. Not tired of waiting for you, but I am getting to be old; I am, indeed. Why, at times I actually have an inclination to do fancy work—the unfailing symptom. Do you realize that I am twenty-five years old!"

The portieres parted, and Wayne Wayland stood in the opening.

He advanced to shake the young man's hand, his demeanor gracious and

WAYNE WAYLAND STOOD IN THE OPENING.

hearty. "Welcome home. You have been having quite a vacation, haven't you? Let's see, it's two years, isn't it?"

"Three years!" Emerson replied.

"Impossible! Dear, dear, how time flies when one is busy!"

"Boyd has been telling me of his adventures," said Mildred. "He is going to dine with us."

"Have you come home to stay?" asked the father.

"No, sir. I shall return in a few weeks."

Mr. Wayland's cordiality seemed to increase in some subtle manner.

"Well, I am sorry you didn't make a fortune, my boy. But, rich or poor, your friends are delighted to see you, and we shall certainly keep you for dinner. I am interested in that northwestern country myself, and I want to ask some questions about it."

It was well on toward midnight when Emerson reached his hotel, and, being too full of his visit with Mildred to sleep, he strolled through the lobby and into the Pompeian room.

"Boyd Emerson! By Jove, I'm glad to see you!" He turned to face an anaemic youth whose colorless, gas bleached face was wrinkled into an expansive grin.

"Hello, Alton!"

They shook hands like old friends, while Alton Clyde continued to express his delight.

"So you've been roughing it out in Nebraska, eh?"

"Alaska."

"So it was. I always get those places mixed. Come over and have a drink. I want to talk to you. Funny thing, I just met a Klondiker myself this evening. Great chap too! I want you to know him; he's immense. His name is Froelich, but he isn't a Dutchman. Come on, you'll like him."

Clyde led his companion toward a table.

Mr. Froelich shoved back his chair and turned, exposing the face of "Fingerless" Fraser, quite expressionless save for the left eyelid, which drooped meaningly.

"'Froelich!'" said Boyd angrily; "good heavens, Fraser, have you picked another? I thought you were going to stick to 'Frobisher.'" Turning to Clyde, he observed: "This man's name is Fraser. One of his peculiarities is a dislike of proper names. He has never found one that suited him."

"I like 'Froelich' pretty well," observed the imperturbable Fraser. "It sounds distanguay and"—

"Don't believe anything he tells you," Boyd broke in, seating himself. "He is the most circumstantial liar in the northwest, and if you don't watch him every minute he will sell you a hydraulic mine or a rubber plantation or a sponge fishery. Underneath his eccentricities, however, he is really a pretty decent fellow, and I am indebted to him for my presence here tonight."

Alton Clyde made his astonishment evident by inquiring incredulously of Fraser, "Then that scheme of yours to establish a gas plant at Nome was all"—

"Certainly!" Emerson laughed. "The incandescent lamp travels about as fast as the prospector. Nome is lighted by electricity and has been for years."

"Is it?" demanded Fraser, with an assumption of the supremest surprise. "You know as well as I do."

"H'm! I'd forgotten. Just the same, my plan was a good one. Gas is cheaper." He reached for his glass, at which Clyde's eye fell upon his missing fingers, and the young clubman exploded:

"Well, if that's the kind of pill you are, maybe you didn't lose your mitt in the Boer war either."

Emerson answered for the adventurer: "Hardly! He got blood poisoning from a hangnail."

Clyde began to laugh uncontrollably. "Really, that's great! Oh, that's lovely!"

Clyde said he was in poor health and wanted a chance to regain lost appetite and lost money.

"I'll give you a chance to recoup," said Boyd. "I am here to raise some money on a good proposition."

The younger man leaned forward eagerly. "If you say it's good that's all I want to know. I'll take a chance. I'm in for anything from pitch and toss to manslaughter."

"I'll tell you what it is and you can use your own judgment."

"I haven't a particle," Clyde confessed. "If I had I wouldn't need to invest. Go ahead, however; I'm all ears." The other outlined the plan. To Clyde, Boyd Emerson had ever represented the ultimate type of all that was most desirable, and time had not lessened his admiration.

"It looks as if there might be a jolly rumpus, doesn't it?" he questioned.

"It does."

"Then I've got to see it. I'll put in my share if you'll let me go along."

"You go! Why, you wouldn't like that sort of thing," said Emerson, considerably nonplused.

"Oh, wouldn't I? I'd eat it! It's just what I need. I'd revel in that outdoor life." He threw back his narrow shoulders. "I'm a regular scout when it comes to roughing it. Why, I camped in the Thousand Islands all one summer, and I've been deer hunting in the Adirondacks. We didn't get any—they were too far from the hotel. But I know all about mountain life."

"This is totally different," Boyd objected, but Clyde ran on, his enthusiasm growing as he tinted the mental picture to suit himself.

Clyde was lost in an exposition of his fitness as a fisherman when Fraser burst out:

"Hello! There's George."

CHAPTER VII.

EMERSON turned to behold Balt's huge figure all but blocking the distant door.

"Call him in," said Clyde quickly. "I want to meet him. He looks just my sort." And accordingly Emerson motioned to the fisherman. Seeing there was no help for it, Big George composed himself and ventured timidly across the portal.

"Gimme a lemonade, quick; I'm all het up," he ordered. "I can't get no footholt on these fancy floors, they're so dang slick."

"Mr. Clyde offers to put $10,000 into the deal if he can go to Kalvik with us and help run the cannery," explained Emerson.

George looked over the clubman carefully from his curly crown to his slender, high heeled shoes, then smiled broadly.

"It's up to Mr. Emerson. I'm willing if he is." Whereupon, vastly encouraged, Clyde proceeded to expatiate upon his own surpassing qualifications. While he was speaking a party of three men approached and seated themselves at an adjoining table. As they pulled out their chairs Big George chanced to glance in their direction, then put down his lemonade glass carefully.

"What's the matter?" Boyd demanded in a low tone, for the big fellow's face had suddenly gone livid, while his eyes had widened like those of an enraged animal.

"That's him!" George growled. "That's the dirty hound!"

"Sit still!" commanded Emerson. "Don't make a fool of yourself," he cautioned.

"That's him!" repeated George, his eyes glaring redly. "That's Willis Marsh."

"Where?" Emerson whirled curiously, but there was no need for George to point out his enemy, for one of the strangers stood as if frozen, with his hand upon the back of his chair, an expression of the utmost astonishment upon his face. A smile was dying from his lips.

Boyd beheld a plump, thickset man of thirty-eight in evening dress. There

"DON'T OFFER ME YOUR HAND; IT'S DIRTY."

was nothing distinctive about him except, perhaps, his hair, which was of a decided reddish hue. He was light of complexion; his mouth was small and of a rather womanish appearance, due to the full red lips. He was well groomed, well fed; in all ways he was a typical city bred man. Raising his brows in recognition, he nodded pleasantly to Balt, then, as if on second thought, excused himself to his companions and stepped toward the other group.

"How do you do, George? What in the name of goodness are you doing here? I hardly recognized you." Marsh's voice was round and musical, his accent eastern. With an assumption of heartiness, he extended a white gloved hand, which the big, uncouth man who faced him refused to take. The other three had risen. George seemed to be groping for a retort. Finally he blurted out hoarsely:

"Don't offer me your hand. It's dirty! It's got blood on it!"

"Nonsense!" Marsh smiled. "Let's be friends again, George. Bygones are bygones."

"You dirty rat!" breathed the fisherman.

"Very well. If you wish to be obstinate"—Willis Marsh shrugged his shoulders carelessly, although in his voice there was a metallic note—"I have nothing to say. Mr. Balt and I had a business misunderstanding," he said smoothly to Emerson, "which I hoped was forgotten. It didn't amount to much"—

At this Balt uttered a choking snarl and stepped forward, only to meet Boyd, who intercepted him.

"Behave yourself!" he ordered. "Don't make a scene." And before the big fellow could prevent it he had linked arms with him and swung him around. The movement was executed so naturally that none of the patrons of the cafe noticed it except perhaps as a preparation for departure. Marsh bowed civilly and returned to his seat. Alton Clyde clamored for enlightenment as to the reason for this eruption.

"That is the fellow we will have to fight," Boyd explained. "He is the head of the cannery combination at Kalvik and a bitter enemy of George's."

Clyde spoke earnestly. "Well, that absolutely settles it as far as I am concerned. This is bound to end in a row."

"You mean you don't want to join us?"

"Don't want to! Why, I've just got to, that's all. The $10,000 is yours."

A month had elapsed when Emerson at last expressed to George the discouragement that had lain silently in both men's minds.

"You've played your string out, eh?"

"Absolutely. I've done everything except burglary, but I can't raise that $100,000. Times are hard, and I've bled my friends of every dollar they can spare."

"It's an awful big piece of money," Balt admitted, with a sigh.

"I never fully realized before how very large," Boyd said. "And yet without that amount the Seattle bank won't back us for the remainder."

"Oh, it's no use to tackle the business on a small scale." Big George pondered. "We'd ought to be on the coast now. We're shy $25,000, eh?"

"Yes."

But the clouds were blown away a few days after when Alton Clyde threw down twenty-five $1,000 bills before Boyd—got from a mysterious source which he refused to name.

Emerson later met the leading suitor (aside from himself) for Mildred Wayland's hand, a personage whose existence he felt as a continued menace. He was visiting Mildred at her home.

Hearing voices outside the library the young man asked hurriedly: "Give me some time alone with you, my lady. I must leave early."

There was time for no more, for Wayne Wayland entered, followed by another gentleman at the first sight of whom Emerson started, while his mind raced off into a dizzy whirl of incredulity. It could not be! It was too grotesque—too ridiculous! What prank of malicious fate was this? He turned his eyes to the door again to see if by any chance there were a third visitor, but there was not, and he was forced to respond to Mr. Wayland's greeting. The other man had meanwhile stepped directly to Mildred, as if he had eyes for no one else, and was bowing over her hand when her father spoke.

"Mr. Emerson, let me present you to Mr. Marsh. I believe you have never happened to meet here." Marsh turned as if reluctant to release the girl's hand, and not until his own was outstretched did he recognize the other.

The two mumbled the customary salutations.

"You two will get along famously," said Mr. Wayland. "Mr. Marsh is acquainted with your country, Boyd."

"Ah!" Marsh exclaimed quickly. "Are you an Alaskan, Mr. Emerson?"

"Indeed, he is so wedded to the country that he is going back tomorrow," Mildred offered.

Marsh's first look of challenge now changed to one of the liveliest interest, and Boyd imagined the fellow endeavoring to link him, through the affair at the restaurant, with the presence of Big George in Chicago.

"Yes," Boyd answered cautiously, "I am a typical Alaskan—disappointed, but not discouraged."

"What business?"

"Mining!"

"Oh!" indifferently.

"Boyd has something far better than mining now," began Mildred. "He was telling me about it as"—

"You interrupted us," interjected Emerson, panic stricken. "I didn't have time to explain the nature of my enterprise."

The girl was about to put in a disclaimer when he flashed a look at her which she could not help but heed. "I am very stupid about such things," she offered easily. "I would not have understood it, I am sure." To her father she continued, leaving what she felt to be dangerous ground, "I didn't look for you so early."

"We finished sooner than I expected." Mr. Wayland answered, "so I drove Willis to his hotel and waited for him to dress. I was afraid he might disappoint us if I let him out of my sight. My dear, I have effected a wonderful deal today," went on her father. "With the help of Mr. Marsh I closed the last details of a consolidation which has occupied me for many months."

"Another trust, I suppose."

"Certain people might call it that," chuckled the old man. "Willis was the inspiring genius and did most of the work; the credit is his."

"May I inquire the nature of this merger?" Emerson ventured.

"Certainly," replied Wayne Wayland. "There is no longer any secret about it. I have combined the packing industries of the Pacific coast under the name of the North American Packers' association."

Boyd felt himself growing numb.

"What do you mean by 'packing industries?'" asked Mildred.

"Canneries—salmon fisheries! We own 60 per cent of the plants of the entire coast, including Alaska. That's why I've been so keen about that north country, Boyd. You never guessed it, eh?"

"No, sir," Boyd stammered.

"Well, we control the supply, and we will regulate the market. We will allow only what competition we desire. It was a beautiful transaction."

Was he dreaming? Boyd wondered. His mouth was dry, but he managed to inquire:

"What about the independent canneries?"

Marsh laughed. "There is no sentiment in business! There are about 40 per cent too many plants to suit us. I believe I am capable of attending to them."

"Mr. Marsh is the general manager," Wayland explained. "With the market in our own hands and sufficient capital to operate at a loss for a year or two years, if necessary, I don't think the independent plants will cost us much."

Now for the first time Emerson realized the impropriety of his own present position. He was here in the Wayland home under false pretenses; they had bared to him secrets not rightly his with which he might arm himself. When this, too, became known to the financier he would regard him not only as a presumptuous enemy, but as a traitor. Boyd knew the old tyrant too well to doubt his course of action; thenceforth there would be war to the hilt.

The announcement of dinner interrupted his dismayed reflections, and he walked out in company with Mr. Wayland, who linked arms with him as if to afford Willis Marsh every advantage, fleeting though it might prove.

"He is a wonderful fellow," the old gentleman observed sotto voce, indicating Marsh—"one of the keenest business men I ever met."

"Yes?"

"Indeed he is. He is a money maker, too; his associates swear by him. If I were you, my boy, I would study him; he is a good man to imitate."

At the dinner table the talk at first was general and of a character appropriate for the hour, but Miss Wayland, oddly enough, displayed such an unusual thirst for information regarding the North American Packers' association that her father was moved to remark upon it.

"What in the world has come over you, Mildred?" he said. "You never cared to hear about my doings before."

"Please don't discourage me," she urged. "I am really in earnest. I should like to know all about this new trust of yours. Perhaps my little universe is growing a bit tiresome to me."

"So far it has been all hard work," Wayne Wayland at length announced, "but in the future I propose to derive some pleasure from this affair. I am tired out. For a long time I have been planning a trip somewhere, and now I think I shall make a tour of inspection in the spring and visit the various holdings of the North American Packers' association. In that way I can combine recreation and business."

"How far will you go?" questioned Boyd.

"Clear up to Mr. Marsh's station."

"Kalvik?"

"Yes; that is the plan." Marsh chimed in. "You see, I am selfish in urging it, Miss Wayland. I expect you to join the party."

"I am sure you would like it, Mildred," the magnate added.

Boyd could scarcely believe his ears. Would they come to Kalvik? Would they all assemble there in that unmapped nook? And, supposing they should, had he the courage to continue his mad enterprise? It was all so unreal! He was torn between the desire to have Mildred agree and fear of the influence Marsh might gain during such a trip. But Miss Wayland evidently had an eye to her own comfort, for she replied:

"No, indeed! The one thing I abhor above land travel is a sea voyage; I am a wretched sailor."

"But this trip on a yacht would be worth while," urged her father. "Why, it will be a regular voyage of discovery. I am as excited over it as a country boy on circus day."

(To Be Continued.)

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