

THE SILVER HORDE.

CHAPTER XV.

THE main body of salmon struck into the Kalvik river on the first day of July. For a week past the run had been slowly growing while the canneries tested themselves. But on the opening day of the new month the horde issued boldly forth from the depths of the sea, and the battle began in earnest.

At times they swam with cleaving fins exposed. Again they churned the placid waters until swift combers raced across the shallow bars like tidal waves, while the deeper channels were shot through with shadowy forms or pierced by the lightning glint of silver bellies. They streamed in with the flood tide to retreat again with the ebb, but there was neither haste nor caution in their progress. They had come in answer to the breeding call of the sea, and its exultation was upon them, driving them relentlessly onward. They had no voice against its overmastering spell.

The time had come for man to take his toll. At Emerson's cannery there fell a sudden panic, for fifty fishermen quit. Returning from the banks on the night before the run started, they stacked their gear and notified Boyd Emerson of their determination. Then, despite his utmost efforts to dissuade them, they took their packs upon their shoulders and marched up the beach to Willis Marsh's plant. Larsen, the day foreman, acted as their spokesman, and Boyd recognized too late the result of that conversation he had interrupted on the night of his visit to Cherry.

This defection diminished his boat crew by more than half, and, while the shoremen stoutly maintained their loyalty, the chance of putting up a pack seemed lost. Boyd swallowed his pride and went straightway to his enemy. He found Marsh well recovered from his flesh wound of a week or more before, yet extremely cautious for his safety, as he evidenced by conducting the interview before witnesses.

"We are short handed, and I gave instructions to secure every available man," he announced at the conclusion of Emerson's story. "It is not my fault if your men prefer to work for me."

"Then you force me to retaliate," said Boyd. "I shall hire your men out from under you."

Marsh laughed provokingly. "Try it! I am a good organizer, if nothing else. If you send emissaries to my plants it will cause certain violence, and I think you had better avoid that, for we outnumber you ten to one."

Emerson left in disgust. Nor had he hit upon any method of relief when Cherry came down to the plant on the following morning. She inquired straightway:

"What are you doing about it? You can't afford to lose an hour."

"I have sent a man to each of the other plants to hire fishermen at any price, but I have no hope that they will succeed. Marsh has his crews too well in hand for that."

Cherry nodded. "They wouldn't dare quit him now. He'd never let them return to this country if they did. Meanwhile the rest of your force is on the banks, I presume."

"How many boats have you?"

"Ten."

"Heavens! And this is the first day of the run! It looks bad, doesn't it? Has the trap begun to fill?"

"No. George is down there now. I guess Marsh succeeded in corking it. Meanwhile all the other plants are working while my Chinks are playing fantan. I seem to bring misfortune upon every one connected with me, don't I?" he added. "I'm afraid I'm a poor sort."

How boyish he was, the girl thought tenderly, yet how splendidly brave he had been throughout the fight! There was a voiceless, maternal yearning in her heart as she asked him gravely:

"If you fall now it will mean—the end of everything, will it not?"

"Yes." He squared his tired shoulders. "But I am not beaten yet. You taught me never to give up, Cherry. If I have to go back home without a catch and see Hilliard take this plant over, why—I'll begin once more at something new, and some day I will succeed. But I shan't give up. I'll catch what salmon we catch and then begin all over again next season."

"And—suppose you don't succeed? Suppose Hilliard won't carry you?"

"Then I shall try something else. Maybe I shall go to mining again. I don't know. Anyway, she would not let me grow disheartened if she were here. She wouldn't let me quit. She isn't that sort."

abruptly before noon, in the course of his dissatisfied meanderings, he found his friend in the office, lost in somber thought. It was the first time in many weeks that he had seen this mood in Boyd, and after a fruitless effort to make him talk he fell into his old habit of imaginary reading, drowsing away to himself as if from a printed page:

"Your stay among us has not been very pleasant, has it? Mr. Emerson inquired.

"Not so that you could notice it," replied our hero. "I don't like fish, and I never did."

"That is the result of prejudice; the fish is a noble animal," Mr. Emerson declared.

"He's not an animal at all, our hero gently corrected. 'He's a biped—a regular wild biped, without either love of home or affection for his children. The salmon is of a low order of intelligence and has a Queen Anne slant to his roof. No person with a retreating forehead like that knows very much. The only other member of the animal kingdom that is as foolish as the salmon is Alton Clyde. The fish has got a shade the best of it over him, but as for friendship and the gentler emotions—why, the salmon hasn't got them at all. The only thing he's got is a million eggs and a sense of direction. If he had a spark of intelligence he'd lay one egg a year, like a hen, and thus live for a million years. But does he? Not on your Sarony! He's a spendthrift and turns his eggs loose a handful at a time. He's worse than a shotgun. And then, too, he's as clumsy as a Harvard graduate and don't associate with nobody out of his own set. No, sir! Give me a warm blooded animal that suckles its young. I'll take a farmer every time."

"These are points I had never considered," said Mr. Emerson, "but every business has its drawbacks, you'll agree. If I have failed as a host, what can I do to entertain you while you grace our midst?"

"You can do most anything," remarked his handsome companion. "You can climb a tree or do anything except fish all the time."

"But it is a dark night without, and I fear some mischief is afoot."

"True! But yonder beautiful geese!"

Roused by the familiarity of these lines, Emerson looked up from his preoccupation and smiled at Fraser's serious pantomime.

"What about that 'beautiful geese' and the mischief that is afoot?"

"Oh, I heard all about your trouble. I just left the pesthouse."

"The what?"

"The pesthouse—Clyde's joint. Ain't he a calamity?"

"In what way?"

"Well, I like silence and quietude. I'm a fool about my quiet, but Clyde—he paused as if in search for suitable expression. "Well, whenever I try to say anything he interrupts me."

"After another pause he went on: 'He's dead sore on this place, too, and whines around like a litter of pups. He says he was misled into coming up here and has a hunch he's going to lose his bank roll.'

"Last night's episode frightened him, I dare say."

"Yes. Ever since he got that wallop on the burr in Seattle a guinea pig could lick him hand to hand. You'd think that ten thousand dollars would be all the wealth of the Inkers."

"The wealth of what?"

"Inkers! That's a tribe of rich Mexicans. However, I suppose I'd hang to my coin the same way he does if I had a mayonnaise head like his. He's an awful shine as a business man."

"So he's homesick, eh?"

"Sure! Offered to sell me his stock." Fraser threw back his head and gave vent to one of his rare laughs. "Ain't that a rave?"

"Here he comes now," Boyd announced, with a glance out the window, and the next instant Alton Clyde entered, a picture of dejection.

surances. That \$25,000 more than you put up."

"Nevertheless it doesn't give you the right to insult the girl."

"Insult her! Bah! You're no fool, Boyd. Why did Hilliard advance that loan?"

"Because he wanted to, I dare say."

"What's the use of keeping that up? You know as well as I do that she worked him, and worked him well. She'd do it again if you asked her. She'd do anything for you."

CHAPTER XVI.

BOYD broke out roughly: "I tell you, I've heard enough of that talk, Alton. Anybody but an idiot would know that Cherry is far too good for what you suggest. And when you insult her you insult me."

"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 indignant 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."

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 contrived his undoing. At thought of this a sort of desperation seemed to master him; he began to mutter aloud.

"What did you say?" queried Balt.

"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 bolted toward the door as Big George leaped 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 importible 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 sided 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.

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

"Why?"

"She good to my little brother. You savvy little children—so big?"

"Yes, I've seen him. He's a One 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 remember."

"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 granted unintelligibly and was about to leave when Boyd reached

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."

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A Letter to Santa Claus.
Dear Old Santa Claus:
Please don't forget us this year. I want a Bible and a doll; Margie, a story book and a doll; Myrtle, a rocking chair and a doll. Johnnie is our baby. She has been sick, but Dr. Glenn has been so good she is well again and just bring something suitable for her, and don't forget some nuts and fruits. Don't forget mama, grandma and grandpa, and just another thing, "Old Santa," don't forget any little children, especially those that are very poor. We would ask for more but want you to divide with all. "God bless you Old Santa Claus." I will say good bye.
MARY STOWERS.
Gastonia, N. C., Dec. 17, 1910.
P. S. I try to be good all the time.

The little six-year-old daughter of Mr. S. R. Wolfe, living on route two, Kings Mountain, was seriously injured on Thursday, the 8th, by being struck by a falling tree, says Friday's Cleveland Star. One leg was broken, an ugly gash was cut on her head, and other painful injuries were sustained.

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"WE CAN GET HIM TONIGHT IF YOU SAY SO."

had not George Balt's heavy step sounded outside. A moment later the big fellow entered.