

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."

"Yes."

"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 can 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. Anyhow, she would not let me grow disheartened if she were here. She wouldn't let me quit. She isn't that sort."

Cherry Malotte stirred and shifted her gaze uncertainly to the gleaming bay. Abreast of them the fleet of fishing boats were drifting with the tide. In the distance others were dotted clear away to where the opal ocean lay. A tug was passing, and she saw the sun flash from the cargo in its tow, while the faint echo of a song came wafting to her ears. She stood so for a long moment, fighting manfully with herself, then wheeled upon him suddenly. There was a new tone in her voice as she said:

"If you will let me have one of your launches I may be able to help you."

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 he put up was 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.

"Gee! This is fierce, isn't it?" the clubman began, flinging himself into the nearest chair. "They tell me it's all off finally. What are you going to do?"

"Put up what fish I can with a short crew," said Boyd.

"We'll lose a lot of money."

"Probably."

Clyde's tone was querulous as he continued:

"I'm sorry I ever went into this thing. You bet if I had known as much in Chicago as I know now I would have hung on to my money and stayed at home."

"You knew as much as we did," Boyd declared curtly.

"Oh, it's all right for you to talk. You haven't risked any coin in the deal, but I'm a rotten business man, and I'll never make my ante back again if I lose it."

"Don't whine about it," said Boyd stiffly. "You can at least be game and lose like a man."

"Then we are going to lose, eh?" queried Clyde in a scared voice. "I thought maybe you had a plan. Look here," he began an instant later, "Cherry pulled us out once before. Why don't you let her see what she can do with Marsh?"

Boyd scanned the speaker's face sharply before speaking.

"What do you mean by that?"

"I mean she can work him if she tries, the same way she worked Hilliard."

"Marsh isn't in the mood to listen to arguments. I have tried that."

"Who said anything about arguments? You know what I mean."

"I don't care to listen to that sort of talk."

"Why not? I'm entitled to have my say in things." Clyde was growing indignant. "I put in \$10,000 of my own money and \$25,000 besides on your as-

urances. That's \$35,000 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."

"Where?"

"None—the year of the big rush."

"During the mining troubles, eh?"

"Sure."

"What was she doing?"

"Minding her business. She's good at that." Fraser's eyes had become green and fishy, as usual.

"What do you know about her?"

"Well, I know that a lot of fellows would 'go through' for her at the drop of a hat. She could have most anything they've got, I guess. Most any of them miners at Nome would give his right eye or his only child, or any little thing like that, if she asked it."

"What else?"

"Well, she was always considered a right good looking party."

"Yes, yes; of course. But what do you know about the girl herself? Who is she? What is her history?"

"Now, sir, I'm an awful poor detective," confessed "Fingerless" Fraser. "I've often noticed that about myself. If I was the kind that goes snooping around into other people's business, listening to all the gossip I'm told, I'd make a good witness. But I ain't, No, sir! I'm a rotten witness."

Despite this indirect rebuke, Boyd might have continued his questioning

if it had not been for the fact that he had never felt such elation as during the days that followed. He trod upon air; his head was in the clouds. He joked with his men, inspiring them with his own good humor and untiring energy. He was never idle save during the odd hours that he snatched for sleep.

While the daily output was disappearing, Emerson drew consolation from the prospect that his pack would be large enough at least to avert utter ruin.

Up at the trust's headquarters Willis Marsh was in a fine fury. As far as possible his subordinates avoided him.

On the third day after Boyd's deliverance Constantine sought him out in company with several of the native fishermen, translating their demand to be paid for the fish they had caught.

"Can't they wait until the end of the week?" Emerson inquired.

"No! They got no money—they got no grub. They say little baby is hungry, and they like money now. So soon they buy grub, they work some more."

"Very well. Here's an order on the bookkeeper."

Boyd tore a leaf from his notebook and wrote a few words on it, telling the men to present it at the office. As Constantine was about to leave he called to him:

"Wait! I want to talk with you."

The breed halted.

"How long have you known Mr. Marsh?"

"I know him long time."

"Do you like him?"

"A ficker ran over the fellow's copper face as he replied: "Yes. Him good man."

"You used to work for him, did you not?"

"Yes."

"What did you do?"

"I worked for him."

"Where did you go?"

"I went to the Indian village."

"What for?"

"To see the girl."

"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 bused 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 importable 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.

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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 grandpapa, 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.



WITH A STARTLED CRY, CONSTANTINE WHIRLED, HIS FACE CONVULSED.

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: