

# The Silver Horde

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## 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 silvered 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 between 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 faint. 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 Hillard 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 Hillard 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 Marlotte stirred and shifted her gaze uncertainly to the gleaming bay. Ahead 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

much in Chicago as I know now 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 Hillard."

"Marsh isn't in the mood to listen to arguments," he 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-

surances. 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 Hillard 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'd 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 ludicrous 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?"

"Nome—the year of the big rush."

"During the mining troubles, eh?"

"Sure."

"What was she doing?"

"Mining 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?"

to surround our still netters, and we ain't got enough boats to protect our selves." He looked up meaningfully from under his heavy brows and inquired:

"How much longer are we going to stand for this?"

"What do you mean? I've got men out hunting for new hands."

"You know what I mean," the giant 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, 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 bodied Aleuts. These 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 imposing 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 added salmon piled waist high to a tall man. All through the cool, dim lit hours the ranks of Chinese butchers hacked and slit 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.

It seemed to Boyd 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 delivery 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?"

Marsh?"

"He knew him long time."

"Do you like him?"

A flicker ran over the fellow's copy face as he replied:

"Yes. Him good man."

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

"Yes."

"Why did you quit?"

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 fine 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 member."

"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

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:

"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."

He marched the natives in a body to the storehouse, where he saw to it that they received what provisions they needed and assisted them in loading their canoes.

But his amusement at the episode gave way to uneasiness on the following morning when the Aleuts failed to report for work, and by noon his anxiety resolved itself into strong suspicion.

Balt had returned from the banks earlier in the morning with news of a struggle between his white crew and Marsh's men. George's boats had been surrounded during the night, nets had been cut and several encounters had occurred, resulting in serious injury to his men. The giant, in no amiable mood, had returned for reinforcements, stating that the situation was becoming more serious every hour. Hearing of the desertion of the natives, he burst into profanity, then armed himself and returned to the banks, while Boyd, now thoroughly alarmed, took a launch and sped up the river to Cherry's house in the hope that she could prevail upon her own recruits to return.

He found the girl ready to accompany him, and they were about to embark when Chakawana came running from the house as if in sudden fright.

"Where you go?" she asked her mistress.

"I am going to the Indian village. You stay here."

"No, no! I no stay here alone. I go long too." She cast a glance over her shoulder.

"But, Chakawana, what is the matter? Are you afraid?"

"Yes." Chakawana nodded her pretty head vigorously.

"What are you afraid of?" Boyd asked, but she merely stared at him with eyes as black and round as orchard cherries, then renewed her ap-

proach. When she had received permission and had hurried back to the house her mistress remarked, with a puzzled frown:

"I don't know what to make of her. She and Constantine have been acting very strangely of late. She used to be the happiest sort of creature, always laughing and singing, but she has changed entirely during the last few weeks. Both she and Constantine are forever whispering to each other and skulking about until I am getting nervous myself." Then, as the Indian girl came flying back with her tiny baby brother in her arms, Cherry added: "She's pretty, isn't she? I can't bear ugly people around me."

At the native village, in spite of every effort she and Boyd could make, the Indians refused to go back to work.

"Since they can't use your money at the store, they don't seem to care whether it is good or not," Cherry announced after a time. "Oh, but it's maddening!" She stamped her foot angrily. "And I was so proud of my work. I thought I had really done something to help at last. But I don't know what more we can do. I've reached the end of my rope."

"So have I," he confessed. "Even with those fifty Aleuts we weren't running at more than half capacity, but we were making a showing at least. Now!" He hung up his hands in a gesture of despair. "George is in trouble, as usual. Marsh's men have cut our nets, and the yacht may arrive at any time."

"The yacht! What yacht?"

"Mr. Wayland's yacht. He is making a tour of this coast with the other officers of the trust and—Mildred."

"Is—she coming here?" demanded Cherry in a strained voice.

"Yes."

"Why didn't you tell me?"

"I don't know; I didn't think you would be interested."

"So she can't wait? She is so eager that she follows you from Chicago clear up into this wilderness. Then you won't need my assistance any more, will you?" Her lids drooped, half hiding her eyes, and her face hardened.

"Of course I shall need your help. Her coming won't make any difference."

"It strikes me that you have allowed me to make a fool of myself long enough," said Cherry angrily. "Here I have been breaking my heart over this enterprise, while you have known all the time that she was coming. Why, you have merely used me—and George, and all the rest of us, for that matter." She laughed harshly.

"You don't understand," said Boyd.

"Miss Wayland—"

"Oh, yes, I do. I dare say it will gratify her to straighten out your troubles. A word from her lips and your worries will vanish like a mist. Let us acknowledge ourselves beaten and beg her to save us."

Boyd shook his head in negation, but she gave him no time for speech.

"It seems that you wanted to pose as a hero before her and employed us to build up your triumph. Well, I am glad we failed; I'm glad Willis Marsh showed you how very helpless you are. Let her come to your rescue now, I'm through. Do you understand? I'm through!"

Emerson gazed at her in astonishment, the outburst had been so unexpected, but he realized that he owed her too much to take offense.

"Miss Wayland will take no hand in my affairs. I doubt if she will even realize what this trouble is all about," he said, a trifle stiffly. "I suppose I did want to play the hero, and I dare say I did use you and the others, but you knew that all the time."

"Why won't she help you?" queried Cherry. "Doesn't she care enough about you? Doesn't she know enough to understand your plight?"

"Yes, but this is my fight, and I've got to make good without her assistance. She isn't the sort to marry a failure, and she has left me to make my own way. Besides, she would not dare go contrary to her father's wishes even if she desired. That is part of her education. Oh, Wayne Wayland's opposition isn't all I have had to overcome. I have had to show his daughter that I am one of her own kind, and she hates weakness."

"And you think that woman loves you? Why, she isn't a woman at all. She doesn't know what love means. When a woman loves, do you imagine she cares for money or fame or success? If I cared for a man do you think I'd stop to ask my father if I might marry him or wait for my lover to prove himself worthy of me? Do you think I'd send him through the hell you have suffered to try his metal?" She laughed outright. "What?"

"I'd become what he was, and with him. I'd give him all I had—money, position, friends, influence. My people objected I'd tell them to hang. I'd give them up and join him. I'd use every dollar, every wife, every feminine device that I possessed, in his service. When a woman loves she doesn't care what the world says. A man may be a weakling or worse, but he is still her lover, and she will go to him."

The words had come tumbling forth, until Cherry was forced to pause for breath.