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Table of Contents

CHAPTER I

Table of Contents

With an ostentatious flourish Mr. "Lucky" Broad placed a crisp ten-dollar bill in an eager palm outstretched across his folding-table.

"The gentleman wins and the gambler loses!" Mr. Broad proclaimed to the world. "The eye is quicker than the hand, and the dealer's moans is music to the stranger's ear." With practised touch he rearranged the three worn walnut-shells which constituted his stock in trade. Beneath one of them he deftly concealed a pellet about the size of a five-grain allopathic pill. It was the erratic behavior of this tiny ball, its mysterious comings and goings, that had summoned Mr. Broad's audience and now held its observant interest. This audience, composed of roughly dressed men, listened attentively to the seductive monologue which accompanied the dealer's deft manipulations, and was greatly entertained thereby. "Three tiny tepees in a row and a little black medicine-man inside." The speaker's voice was high-pitched and it carried like a "thirtythirty." "You see him walk in, you open the door, and—you double your money. Awfully simple! Simpully awful! What? As I live! The gentleman wins

ten more—ten silver-tongued song-birds, ten messengers of mirth—the price of a hard day's toil. Take it, sir, and may it make a better and a stronger man of you. Times are good and I spend my money free. I made it packin' grub to Linderman, four bits a pound, but—easy come, easy go. Now then, who's next? You've seen me work. I couldn't baffle a sore-eyed Siwash with snow-glasses."

Lucky Broad's three-legged table stood among some stumps beside the muddy roadway which did service as the main street of Dyea and along which flowed an irregular stream of pedestrians; incidental to his practised manipulation of the polished walnut-shells he maintained an unceasing chatter of the sort above set down. Now his voice was loud and challenging, now it was apologetic, always it stimulated curiosity. One moment he was jubilant and gay, again he was contrite and querulous. Occasionally he burst forth into plaintive self-denunciations.

Fixing a hypnotic gaze upon a bland, blue-eyed bystander who had just joined the charmed circle, he murmured, invitingly: "Better try your luck, Olaf. It's Danish dice—three chances to win and one to lose."

The object of his address shook his head. "Aye ant Danish, Aye ban
Norvegen," said he.

"Danish dice or Norwegian poker, they're both the same. I'll deal you a free hand and it won't cost you a cent. Fix your baby blues on the little ball and watch me close. Don't let me deceive you. Now then, which hut hides the grain?"

Noting a half-dozen pairs of eyes upon him, the Norseman became conscious that he was a center of

interest. He grinned half-heartedly and, after a brief hesitation, thrust forth a clumsy paw, lifted a shell, and exposed the object of general curiosity.

"You guessed it!" There was commendation, there was pleased surprise, in Mr. Broad's tone. "You can't fool a foreigner, can you, boys? My, my! Ain't it lucky for me that we played for fun? But you got to give me another chance, Lars; I'll fool you yet. In walks the little pill once more, I make the magic pass, and you follow me attentively, knowing in your heart of hearts that I'm a slick un. Now then, shoot, Kid; you can't miss me!"

The onlookers stirred with interest; with eager fingers the artless Norwegian fumbled in his pocket. At the last moment, however, he thought better of his impulse, grunted once, then turned his back to the table and walked away.

"Missed him!" murmured the dealer, with no display of feeling; then to the group around him he announced, shamelessly: "You got to lead those birds; they fly fast."

One of Mr. Broad's boosters, he who had twice won for the Norseman's benefit, carelessly returned his winnings. "Sure!" he agreed. "They got a head like a turtle, them Swedes."

Mr. Broad carefully smoothed out the two bills and reverently laid them to rest in his bank-roll. "Yes, and they got bony mouths. You got to set your hook or it won't hold."

"Slow pickin's," yawned an honest miner with a pack upon his back. Attracted by the group at the table, he had dropped out of the procession in the street and had paused long enough to win a bet or two. Now he straightened himself and stretched his arms. "These Michael Strogoffs is

hep to the old stuff, Lucky. I'm thinking of joining the big rush. They say this Klondike is some rich."

Inasmuch as there were no strangers in sight at the moment, the proprietor of the deadfall gave up barking; he daintily folded and tore in half a cigarette paper, out of which he fashioned a thin smoke for himself. It was that well-earned moment of repose, that welcome recess from the day's toil. Mr. Broad inhaled deeply, then he turned his eyes upon the former speaker.

"You've been thinking again, have you?" He frowned darkly. With a note of warning in his voice he declared: "You ain't strong enough for such heavy work, Kid. That's why I've got you packing hay."

The object of this sarcasm hitched his shoulders and the movement showed that his burden was indeed no more than a cunning counterfeit, a bundle of hay rolled inside a tarpaulin.

"Oh, I got a head and I've been doing some heavy thinking with it," the Kid retorted. "This here Dawson is going to be a good town. I'm getting readied up to join the parade."

"Are you, now?" the shell-man mocked. "I s'pose you got it all framed with the Canucks to let you through? I s'pose the chief of police knows you and likes you, eh? You and him is cousins, or something?"

"Coppers is all alike; there's always a way to square 'em —"

"Lay off that 'squaring' stuff," cautioned a renegade crook, disguised by a suit of mackinaws and a week's growth of beard into the likeness of a stampeder. "A

thousand bucks and a ton of grub, that's what the sign says, and that's what it means. They wouldn't let you over the Line with nine hundred and ninety-nine fifty."

"Right!" agreed a third capper. "It's a closed season on broken stiffs. You can't monkey with the Mounted Police. When they put over an edict it lays there till it freezes. They'll make you show your 'openers' at the Boundary. Gee! If I had 'em I wouldn't bother to go 'inside.' What's a guy want with more than a thousand dollars and a ton of grub, anyhow?"

"All the same, I'm about set to hit the trail," stubbornly maintained the man with the alfalfa pack. "I ain't broke. When you boys get to Dawson, just ask for Kid Bridges' saloon and I'll open wine. These woollys can have their mines; me for a hootch-mill on Main Street."

Lucky addressed his bevy of boosters. "Have I nursed a serpent in my breast, or has the Kid met a banker's son? Gimme room, boys. I'm going to shuffle the shells for him and let him double his money. Keep your eye on the magic pea, Mr. Bridges. Three tiny tepees in a row—" There was a general laugh as Broad began to shift the walnut-shells, but Kid Bridges retorted, contemptuously:

"That's the trouble with all you wiseacres. You get a dollar ahead and you fall for another man's game. I never knew a faro-dealer that wouldn't shoot craps. No, I haven't met no banker's son and I ain't likely to in this place. These pilgrims have sewed their money in their underclothes, and they sleep with their eyes open. Seems like they'd go blind, but they don't. These ain't Rubes, Lucky; they're city folks. They've seen three-ringed circuses and three-shell games,

and all that farmer stuff. They've been 'gypped,' and it's an old story to 'em."

"You're dead right," Broad acknowledged. "That's why it's good. D'you know the best town in America for the shells? Little old New York. If the cops would let me set up at the corner of Broad and Wall, I'd own the Stock Exchange in a week. Madison and State is another good stand; so's Market and Kearney, or Pioneer Square, down by the totem pole. New York, Chicago, 'Frisco, Seattle, they're all hick towns. For every city guy that's been stung by a bee there's a hundred that still thinks honey comes from a fruit. This rush is just starting, and the bigger it grows the better we'll do. Say, Kid, if you mush over to Tagish with that load of timothy on your spine, the police will put you on the wood-pile for the winter."

While Mr. Lucky Broad and his business associates were thus busied in discussing the latest decree of the Northwest Mounted Police, other townsmen of theirs were similarly engaged. Details of this proclamation—the most arbitrary of any, hitherto—had just arrived from the International Boundary, and had caused a halt, an eddy, in the stream of gold-seekers which flowed inland toward the Chilkoot Pass. A human tide was setting northward from the States, a tide which swelled and quickened daily as the news of George Carmack's discovery spread across the world, but at Healy & Wilson's log-store, where the notice above referred to had been posted, the stream slowed. A crowd of new-comers from the barges and steamers in the roadstead had assembled there, and now gave voice to hoarse indignation and bitter resentment. Late arrivals from Skagway, farther

down the coast, brought word of similar scenes at that point and a similar feeling of dismay; they reported a similar increase in the general excitement, too. There, as here, a tent city was springing up, the wooded hills were awakening to echoes of unaccustomed life, a thrill and a stir were running through the wilderness and the odor of spruce fires was growing heavier with every ship that came.

Pierce Phillips emerged from the trading-post and, drawn by the force of gravitation, joined the largest and the most excited group of Argonauts. He was still somewhat dazed by his perusal of that Police edict; the blow to his hopes was still too stunning, his disappointment was still too keen, to permit of clear thought.

"A ton of provisions and a thousand dollars!" he repeated, blankly. Why, that was absurd, out of all possible reason! It would bar the way to fully half this rushing army; it would turn men back at the very threshold of the golden North. Nevertheless, there stood the notice in black and white, a clear and unequivocal warning from the Canadian authorities, evidently designed to forestall famine on the foodless Yukon. From the loud arguments round about him Phillips gathered that opinion on the justice of the measure was about evenly divided; those fortunate men who had come well provided commended it heartily, those less fortunate fellows who were sailing close-hauled were equally noisy in their denunciation of it. The latter could see in this precautionary ruling nothing except the exercise of a tyrannical power aimed at their ruin, and in consequence they voiced threats, and promises of violence the which Phillips put down as mere resentful mouthings of no actual

significance. As for himself, he had never possessed anything like a thousand dollars at one time, therefore the problem of acquiring such a prodigious sum in the immediate future presented appalling difficulties. He had come north to get rich, only to find that it was necessary to be rich in order to get north. A fine situation, truly! A ton of provisions would cost at least five hundred dollars and the expense of transporting it across summer swamps and tundras, then up and over that mysterious and forbidding Chilkoot of which he had heard so much, would bring the total capital required up to impossible proportions. The prospect was indeed dismaying. Phillips had been ashore less than an hour, but already he had gained some faint idea of the country that lay ahead of him; already he had noted the almost absolute lack of transportation; already he had learned the price of packers, and as a result he found himself at an impasse.

One thousand dollars and two hundred pounds! It was enough to dash high hopes. And yet, strangely enough, Phillips was not discouraged. He was rather surprised at his own rebound after the first shock; his reasonless optimism vaguely amazed him, until, in contemplating the matter, he discovered that his thoughts were running somewhat after this fashion:

"They told me I couldn't make it; they said something was sure to happen. Well, it has. I'm up against it—hard. Most fellows would quit and go home, but I sha'n't. I'm going to win out, somehow, for this is the real thing. This is Life, Adventure. It will be wonderful to look back and say: 'I did it.

Nothing stopped me. I landed at Dyea with one hundred and thirty-five dollars, but look at me now!'"

Thoughts such as these were in his mind, and their resolute nature must have been reflected in his face, for a voice aroused him from his meditations.

"It don't seem to faze you much, partner. I s'pose you came heeled?"

Phillips looked up and into a sullen, angry face.

"It nearly kills me," he smiled. "I'm the worst-heeled man in the crowd."

"Well, it's a darned outrage. A ton of grub? Why, have you seen the trail? Take a look; it's a man-killer, and the rate is forty cents a pound to Linderman. It'll go to fifty now—maybe a dollar—and there aren't enough packers to handle half the stuff."

"Things are worse at Skagway," another man volunteered. "I came up yesterday, and they're losing a hundred head of horses a day—bogging 'em down and breaking their legs. You can walk on dead carcasses from the Porcupine to the Summit."

A third stranger, evidently one of the well-provided few, laughed carelessly. "If you boys can't stand the strain you'd better stay where you are," said he. "Grub's sky-high in Dawson, and mighty short. I knew what I was up against, so I came prepared. Better go home and try it next summer."

The first speaker, he of the sullen visage, turned his back, muttering, resentfully: "Another wise guy! They make me sick! I've a notion to go through anyhow."

"Don't try that," cautioned the man from Skagway. "If you got past the Police they'd follow you to hell but what they'd

bring you back. They ain't like our police."

Still meditating his plight, Pierce Phillips edged out of the crowd and walked slowly down the street. It was not a street at all, except by courtesy, for it was no more than an open waterfront faced by a few log buildings and a meandering line of new white tents. Tents were going up everywhere and all of them bore painful evidence of their newness. So did the clothes of their owners for that matter—men's garments still bore their price-tags. The beach was crowded with piles of merchandise over which there was much wrangling, barges plying regularly back and forth from the anchored ships added hourly to the confusion. As outfits were dumped upon the sand their owners assembled them and bore them away to their temporary camp sites. In this occupation every man faced his own responsibilities single-handed, for there were neither drays nor carts nor vehicles of any sort.

As Phillips looked on at the disorder along the water's edge, as he stared up the fir-flanked Dyea valley, whither a steady stream of traffic flowed, he began to feel a fretful eagerness to join in it, to be up and going. 'Way yonder through those hills towered the Chilkoot, and beyond that was the mighty river rushing toward Dawson City, toward Life and Adventure, for that was what the gold-fields signified to Phillips. Yes, Life! Adventure! He had set out to seek them, to taste the flavor of the world, and there it lay—his world, at least—just out of reach. A fierce impatience, a hot resentment at that senseless restriction which chained him in his tracks, ran through the boy. What right had any one to stop him here at the very door, when just inside great things were happening? Past that white-and-purple

barrier which he could see against the sky a new land lay, a radiant land of promise, of mystery, and of fascination; Pierce vowed that he would not, could not, wait. Fortunes would reward the first arrivals; how, then, could he permit these other men to precede him? The world was a good place—it would not let a person starve.

To the young and the foot-free Adventure lurks just over the hill; Life opens from the crest of the very next divide. It matters not that we never quite come up with either, that we never quite attain the summit whence our promises are realized; the ever-present expectation, the eager straining forward, is the breath of youth. It was that breath which Phillips now felt in his nostrils. It was pungent, salty.

He noted a group of people gathered about some center of attraction whence issued a high-pitched intonation.

"Oh, look at the cute little pea! Klondike croquet, the packer's pastime. Who'll risk a dollar to win a dollar? It's a healthy sport. It's good for young and old—a cheeild can understand it. Three Eskimo igloos and an educated pill!"

"A shell-game!" Pierce Phillips halted in his tracks and stared incredulously, then he smiled. "A shell-game, running wide open on the main street of the town!" This WAS the frontier, the very edge of things. With an odd sense of unreality he felt the world turn back ten years. He had seen shell-games at circuses and fairgrounds when he was much younger, but he supposed they had long since been abandoned in favor of more ingenious and less discreditable methods of robbery. Evidently, however, there were some gulls left, for this device appeared to be well patronized. Still doubting the evidence of his ears, he joined the group.

"The gentleman wins and the gambler loses!" droned the dealer as he paid a bet. "Now then, we're off for another journey. Who'll ride with me this time?"

Phillips was amazed that any one could be so simple-minded as to squander his money upon such a notoriously unprofitable form of entertainment. Nevertheless, men were playing, and they did not seem to suspect that the persons whom the dealer occasionally paid were his confederates.

The operator maintained an incessant monologue. At the moment of Pierce's arrival he was directing it at an ox-eyed individual, evidently selected to be the next victim. The fellow was stupid, nevertheless he exercised some caution at first. He won a few dollars, then he lost a few, but, alas! the gambling fever mounted in him and greed finally overcame his hesitation. With an eager gesture he chose a shell and Phillips felt a glow of satisfaction at the realization that the man had once more guessed aright. Drawing forth a wallet, the fellow laid it on the table.

"I'll bet the lump," he cried.

The dealer hesitated. "How much you got in that alligator valise?"

"Two hundred dollars."

"Two hundred berries on one bush!" The proprietor of the game was incredulous. "Boys, he aims to leave me cleaner than a snow-bird." Seizing the walnut-shell between his thumb and forefinger, he turned it over, but instead of exposing the elusive pellet he managed, by an almost imperceptible forward movement, to roll it out from under its hiding-place and to conceal it between his third and fourth fingers. The stranger was surprised, dumfounded, at

sight of the empty shell. He looked on open-mouthed while his wallet was looted of its contents.

"Every now and then I win a little one," the gambler announced as he politely returned the bill-case to its owner. He lifted another shell, and by some sleight-of-hand managed to replace the pellet upon the table, then gravely flipped a five-dollar gold piece to one of his boosters.

Phillips's eyes were quick; from where he stood he had detected the maneuver and it left him hot with indignation. He felt impelled to tell the victim how he had been robbed, but thought better of the impulse and assured himself that this was none of his affair. For perhaps ten minutes he looked on while the sheep-shearing proceeded.

After a time there came a lull and the dealer raised his voice to entice new patrons. Meanwhile, he paused to roll a cigarette the size of a wheat straw. While thus engaged there sounded the hoarse blast of a steamer's whistle in the offing and he turned his head. Profiting by this instant of inattention a hand reached across the table and lifted one of the walnut-shells. There was nothing under it.

"Five bucks on this one!" A soiled bill was placed beside one of the two remaining shells, the empty one.

Thus far Phillips had followed the pea unerringly, therefore he was amazed at the new better's mistake.

The dealer turned back to his layout and winked at the bystanders, saying, "Brother, I'll bet you ten more that you've made a bad bet." His offer was accepted. Simultaneously Phillips was seized with an intense desire to beat this sharper at his own game; impulsively he laid a

protecting palm over the shell beneath which he knew the little sphere to lie.

"I'll pick this one," he heard himself say.

"Better let me deal you a new hand," the gambler suggested.

"Nothing of the sort," a man at Phillips' shoulder broke in. "Hang on to that shell, kid. You're right and I'm going down for the size of his bankroll." The speaker was evidently a miner, for he carried a bulky pack upon his shoulders. He placed a heavy palm over the back of Phillips' hand, then extracted from the depths of his overalls a fat roll of paper money.

The size of this wager, together with the determination of its owner, appeared briefly to nonplus the dealer. He voiced a protest, but the miner forcibly overbore it:

"Say, I eat up this shell stuff!" he declared. "It's my meat, and I've trimmed every tinhorn that ever came to my town. There's three hundred dollars; you cover it, and you cover this boy's bet, too." The fellow winked reassuringly at Phillips. "You heard him say the sky was his limit, didn't you? Well, let's see how high the sky is in these parts!"

There was a movement in the crowd, whereupon the speaker cried, warningly: "Boosters, stand back! Don't try to give us the elbow, or I'll close up this game!" To Pierce he murmured, confidentially: "We've got him right. Don't let anybody edge you out." He put more weight upon Phillips' hand and forced the young man closer to the table.

Pierce had no intention of surrendering his place, and now the satisfaction of triumphing over these crooks excited him. He continued to cover the walnut-shell while with his

free hand he drew his own money from his pocket. He saw that the owner of the game was suffering extreme discomfort at this checkmate, and he enjoyed the situation.

"I watched you trim that farmer a few minutes ago," Phillips' companion chuckled. "Now I'm going to make you put up or shut up. There's my three hundred. I can use it when it grows to six."

"How much are you betting?" the dealer inquired of Phillips.

Pierce had intended merely to risk a dollar or two, but now there came to him a thrilling thought. That notice at Healy & Wilson's store flashed into his mind. "One thousand dollars and a ton of food," the sign had read. Well, why not bet and bet heavy? he asked himself. Here was a chance to double his scanty capital at the expense of a rogue. To beat a barefaced chater at his own game surely could not be considered cheating; in this instance it was mere retribution.

He had no time to analyze the right or the wrong of his reasoning—at best the question would bear debate. Granting that it wasn't exactly honest, what did such nice considerations weigh when balanced against the stern necessities of this hour? A stranger endeavored to shove him away from the table and this clinched his decision. He'd make them play fair. With a sweep of his free arm. Phillips sent the fellow staggering back and then placed his entire roll of bills on the table in front of the dealer.

"There's mine," he said, shortly. "One hundred and thirty-five dollars.
I don't have to count it, for I know it by heart."

"Business appears to be picking up," murmured the proprietor of the game.

Phillips' neighbor continued to hold the boy's hand in a vicelike grip.

Now he leaned forward, saying:

"Look here! Are you going to cover our coin or am I going to smoke you up?"

"The groans of the gambler is sweet music in their ears!" The dealer shrugged reluctantly and counted out four hundred and thirty-five dollars, which he separated into two piles.

A certain shame at his action swept over Phillips when he felt his companion's grasp relax and heard him say, "Turn her over, kid."

This was diamond cut diamond, of course; nevertheless, it was a low-down trick and—

Pierce Phillips started, he examined the interior of the walnut-shell in bewilderment, for he had lifted it only to find it quite empty.

"Every now and then I win a little one," the dealer intoned, gravely pocketing his winnings. "It only goes to show you that the hand—"

"Damnation!" exploded the man at Phillips' side. "Trimmed for three hundred, or I'm a goat!"

As Pierce walked away some one fell into step with him; it was the sullen, black-browed individual he had seen at the trading-post.

"So they took you for a hundred and thirty-five, eh? You must be rolling in coin," the man observed.

Even yet Pierce was more than a little dazed. "Do you know," said he,
"I was sure I had the right shell."

"Why, of course you had the right one." The stranger laughed shortly. "They laid it up for you on purpose, then Kid Bridges worked a shift when he held your hand. You can't beat 'em."

Pierce halted. "Was he—was THAT fellow with the pack a booster?"

"Certainly. They're all boosters. The Kid carries enough hay on his back to feed a team. It's his bed. I've been here a week and I know 'em." The speaker stared in surprise at Phillips, who had broken into a hearty laugh. "Look here! A little hundred and thirty-five must be chicken feed to you. If you've got any more to toss away, toss it in my direction."

"That's what makes it so funny. You see, I haven't any more. That was my last dollar. Well, it serves me right. Now I can start from scratch and win on my own speed."

The dark-browed man studied Phillips curiously. "You're certain'y game," he announced. "I s'pose now you'll be wanting to sell some of your outfit. That's why I've been hanging around that game. I've picked up quite a bit of stuff that way, but I'm still short a few things and I'll buy—"

"I haven't a pound of grub. I came up second-class."

"Huh! Then you'll go back steerage."

"Oh no, I won't! I'm going on to Dawson." There was a momentary silence. "You say you've been here a week? Put me up for the night—until I get a job. Will you?"

The black-eyed man hesitated, then he grinned. "You've got your nerve, but—I'm blamed if I don't like it," said he.

"My brother Jim is cooking supper now. Suppose we go over to the tent and ask him."

CHAPTER II

Table of Contents

The headwaters of the Dyea River spring from a giant's punch-bowl. Three miles above timber-line the valley bottom widens out into a flinty field strewn with boulders which in ages past have lost their footing on the steep hills forming the sides of the cup. Between these boulders a thin carpet of moss is spread, but the slopes themselves are quite naked; they are seamed and cracked and weather-beaten, their surfaces are split and shattered from the play of the elements. High up toward the crest of one of them rides a glacier—a pallid, weeping sentinel which stands guard for the great ice-caps beyond. Winter snows, summer fogs and rains have washed the hillsides clean; they are leached out and they present a lifeless, forbidding front to travelers. In many places the granite fragments which still encumber them lie piled one above another in such titanic chaos as to discourage man's puny efforts to climb over them. Nevertheless, men have done so, and by the thousands, by the tens of thousands. On this particular morning an unending procession of human beings was straining up and over and through the confusion. They lifted themselves by foot and by hand; where the slope was steepest they crept on all-fours. They formed an unbroken, threadlike stream extending from timberline to crest, each

individual being dwarfed to microscopic proportions by the size of his surroundings. They flowed across the floor of the valley, then slowly, very slowly, they flowed up its almost perpendicular wall. Now they were lost to sight; again they reappeared clambering over glacier scars or toiling up steep, rocky slides; finally they emerged away up under the arch of the sky.

Looking down from the roof of the pass itself, the scene was doubly impressive, for the wooded valley lay outstretched clear to the sea, and out of it came that long, wavering line of ants. They did, indeed, appear to be ants, those men, as they dragged themselves across the meadow and up the ascent; they resembled nothing more than a file of those industrious insects creeping across the bottom and up the sides of a bath-tub, and the likeness was borne out by the fact that all carried burdens. That was in truth the marvel of the scene, for every man on the Chilkoot was bent beneath a back-breaking load.

Three miles down the gulch, where the upward march of the forests had been halted, there, among scattered outposts of scrubby spruce and wind-twisted willow, stood a village, a sprawling, formless aggregation of flimsy tents and green logs known as Sheep Camp. Although it was a temporary, makeshift town, already it bulked big in the minds of men from Maine to California, from the Great Lakes to the Gulf, for it was the last outpost of civilization, and beyond it lay a land of mystery. Sheep Camp had become famous by reason of the fact that it was linked with the name of that Via Dolorosa, that summit of despair, the

Chilkoot. Already it had come to stand for the weak man's ultimate mile-post, the end of many journeys.

The approach from the sea was easy, if twelve miles of boulder and bog, of swamp and nigger-head, of root and stump, can be called easy under the best of circumstances; but easy it was as compared with what lay beyond and above it. Nevertheless, many Argonauts had never penetrated even thus far, and of those who had, a considerable proportion had turned back at the giant pit three miles above. One look at the towering barrier had been enough for them. The Chilkoot was more than a mountain, more than an obstacle of nature; it was a Presence, a tremendous and a terrifying Personality which overshadowed the minds of men and could neither be ignored at the time nor forgotten later. No wonder, then, that Sheep Camp, which was a part of the Chilkoot, represented, a sort of acid test; no wonder that those who had moved their outfits thus far were of the breed the Northland loves—the stout of heart and of body.

Provisions were cached at frequent intervals all the way up from the sea, but in the open meadow beneath the thousand-foot wall an immense supply depot had sprung up. This pocket in the hills had become an open-air commissary, stocked with every sort of provender and gear. There were acres of sacks and bundles, of boxes and bales, of lumber and hardware and perishable stuffs, and all day long men came and went in relays. One relay staggered up and out of the canon and dropped its packs, another picked up the bundles and ascended skyward. Pound by pound, ton by ton, this vast equipment of supplies went forward, but

slowly, oh, so slowly! And at such effort! It was indeed fit work for ants, for it arrived nowhere and it never ended. Antlike, these burden-bearers possessed but one idea—to fetch and to carry; they traveled back and forth along the trail until they wore it into a bottomless bog, until every rock, every tree, every landmark along it became hatefully familiar and their eyes grew sick from seeing them.

The character of then—labor and its monotony, even in this short time, had changed the men's characters—they had become pack-animals and they deported themselves as such. All labor-saving devices, all mechanical aids, all short cuts to comfort and to accomplishment, had been left behind; here was the wilderness, primitive, hostile, merciless. Every foot they moved, every ounce they carried, was at the cost of muscular exertion. It was only natural that they should take on the color of their surroundings.

Money lost its value a mile above Sheep Camp said became a thing of weight, a thing to carry. The standard of value was the pound, and men thought in hundredweights or in tons. Yet there was no relief, no respite, for famine stalked in the Yukon and the Northwest Mounted were on guard, hence these unfortunates were chained to their grub-piles as galley-slaves are shackled to their benches.

Toe to heel, like peons rising from the bowels of a mine, they bent their backs and strained up that riven rock wall. Blasphemy and pain, high hopes and black despair, hearts overtaxed and eyes blind with fatigue, that was what the Chilkoot stood for. Permeating the entire atmosphere of the place, so that even the dullest could feel it, was a feverish

haste, an apprehensive demand for speed, more speed, to keep ahead of the pressing thousands coming on behind.

Pierce Phillips breasted the last rise to the Summit, slipped his pack-straps, and flung himself full length upon the ground. His lungs felt as if they were bursting, the blood surged through his veins until he rocked, his body streamed with sweat, and his legs were as heavy as if molded from solid iron. He was pumped out, winded; nevertheless, he felt his strength return with magic swiftness, for he possessed that marvelous recuperative power of youth, and, like some fabled warrior, new strength flowed into him from the earth. Round about him other men were sprawled; some lay like corpses, others were propped against their packs, a few stirred and sighed like the sorely wounded after a charge. Those who had lain longest rose, took up their burdens, and went groaning over the sky-line and out of sight. Every moment new faces, purple with effort or white with exhaustion, rose out of the depths—all were bitten deep with lines of physical suffering. On buckled knees their owners lurched forward to find resting-places; in their eyes burned a sullen rage; in their mouths were foul curses at this Devil's Stairway. There were striplings and graybeards in the crowd, strong men and weak men, but here at the Summit all were alike in one particular—they lacked breath for anything except oaths.

Here, too, as in the valley beneath, was another great depot of provision piles. Near where Phillips had thrown himself down there was one man whose bearing was in marked contrast to that of the others. He sat astride a bulging canvas bag in a leather harness, and in spite of the

fact that the mark of a tump-line showed beneath his cap he betrayed no signs of fatigue. He was not at all exhausted, and from the interest he displayed it seemed that he had chosen this spot as a vantage-point from which to study the upcoming file rather than as a place in which to rest. This he did with a quick, appreciative eye and with a genial smile. In face, in dress, in manner, he was different. For one thing, he was of foreign birth, and yet he appeared to be more a piece of the country than any man Pierce had seen. His clothes were of a pattern common among the native packers, but he wore them with a free, unconscious grace all his own. From the peak of his Canadian toque there depended a tassel which bobbed when he talked; his boots were of Indian make, and they were soft and light and waterproof; a sash of several colors was knotted about his waist. But it was not alone his dress which challenged the eye—there was something in this fellow's easy, open bearing which arrested attention. His dark skin had been deepened by windburn, his well-set, well-shaped head bore a countenance both eager and intelligent, a countenance that fairly glowed with confidence and good humor.

Oddly enough, he sang as he sat upon his pack. High up on this hillside, amid blasphemous complaints, he hummed a gay little song:

"Chante, rossignol, chante!
Toi qui a le coeur gai!
Tu as le coeur a rire
Mai j'l'ai-t-a pleurer,"

ran his chanson.

Phillips had seen the fellow several times, and the circumstances of their first encounter had been sufficiently unusual to impress themselves upon his mind. Pierce had been resting here, at this very spot, when the Canuck had come up into sight, bearing a hundred-pound pack without apparent effort. Two flour-sacks upon a man's back was a rare sight on the roof of the Chilkoot. There were not many who could master that slope with more than one, but this fellow had borne his burden without apparent effort; and what was even more remarkable, what had caused Pierce Phillips to open his eyes in genuine astonishment, was the fact that the man climbed with a pipe in his teeth and smoked it with relish. On that occasion the Frenchman had not stopped at the crest to breathe, but had merely paused long enough to admire the scene outspread beneath him; then he had swung onward. Of all the sights young Phillips had beheld in this new land, the vision of that huge, unhurried Canadian, smoking, had impressed him deepest. It had awakened his keen envy, too, for Pierce was beginning to glory in his own strength. A few days later they had rested near each other on the Long Lake portage. That is, Phillips had rested; the Canadian, it seemed, had a habit of pausing when and where the fancy struck him. His reason for stopping there had been the antics of a peculiarly fearless and impertinent "camp-robber." With a crust of bread he had tolled the bird almost within his reach and was accepting its scolding with intense amusement. Having both teased and made friends with the creature, he finally gave it the crust and resumed his journey.