

# THE INVERTED PYRAMID

BY  
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Author of "North of Fifty-three"

## CHAPTER XXIV

"I have seen some financial muddles in my time and some manipulation that was on the borderline of pure theft," Charlie Hale said to Rod, "but this is a little the worst mess I ever had to do with."

They were going over the situation in Hale's private office, which had once been Grove's sanctum, sitting by the same table upon which Grove had leaned his elbows long ago, when he remonstrated with Rod. Beyond its walls the faint murmur of voices arose, and the remote tapping of typewriters. "Take this Spruce Supplies Limited for an example," Hale continued. "One of the apparently honest failures that left the Norquay Trust in the lurch. Spruce Supplies was organized by Richston and Wall. There were other stockholders—all dummies. Once incorporated, Wall and Richston apparently disposed of all interest in the company. Then Spruce Supplies proceeds to issue three hundred thousand dollars' worth of five-year, seven per cent bonds against their holdings, which consist of timber limits, camp equipment, and logging machinery, valued at seven hundred thousand dollars. The Norquay Trust takes these bonds as security for a loan of three hundred thousand, recommended and authorized by Wall, Richston, etc., in their capacity as directors. The concern is supposed to create a sinking fund to retire these bonds at maturity. They begin timber operations with a flourish. For two years they pay the bond interest. But after two years they cease payments. In the fullness of time the Norquay Trust forecloses and acquires all the assets. But in my investigation of these assets, I discovered that Spruce Supplies operated on a tremendous scale while they did work. The timber is practically all cut, the equipment is pretty well worn out. The men who cruised the limits for me estimate seven or eight hundred thousand dollars' worth of timber removed—prices went rocketing for airplane spruce, you know. A liberal estimate of what we have to show for three hundred thousand cash is less than sixty thousand in real value."

"There were seven shareholders. Five owned two shares apiece. Two were clerks who disappeared in the draft. Three are bond salesmen—forty-dollar-a-week men. The two who owned the bulk of the stock—well, one's a sort of confidential man in Richston's office. The other was for ten years in Wall's employment. They're both out of the country; with a few thousand dollars apiece, I imagine. Dummies—pure and simple. You can guess who got the money. But you can't prove anything. I doubt if you could take legal action against those foxey old birds if you had proof that the party had looted Spruce Supplies. It was ostensibly a legal transaction. The Norquay Trust Company should have protected itself, you see."

"And that's only one of several such," Hale concluded. "They made a milk cow of this business. They saw that funds were invested where they would do the most good for them. They simply made a goat of Grove."

Rod stared at the figures on a sheet of paper before him.

"Liabilities practically four hundred thousand in excess of available assets," he murmured. "That's a hump to get over. How long can we reasonably expect to go on—I mean how much grace will we have to meet everything without going into forced liquidation?"

"With a fair amount of revenue from some outside source—say eighty or a hundred thousand every six months—we can go right along as usual," Hale replied. "There's no immediate call for funds. All the pressing obligations your father provided funds to meet. There's only a dead loss that this concern can't shake off by its own efforts. We can't have—cut operating expenses to the bone. But as a trust company we can't—legitimately—make money fast enough ever to get even."

"There's only one outside source of revenue available, you know," Rod reminded.

"Is it wise to go any farther?" Hale shifted uneasily. "You'll beggar yourself."

"Between begging myself and begging other people, there doesn't seem to be much choice," Hale said earnestly.

"Do you consider yourself personally responsible for Grove's actions?" Hale asked earnestly.

"You know what the governor's idea was," Rod answered. "Grove put this over pretty much on the strength of the family standing. So we were tacitly involved. We'll be a public stink if we sit back. We aren't legally responsible; we are morally. That was his idea. I'm inclined to agree."

"That's drawing it pretty fine," Hale responded. "Grove was his son. Individually you are not to blame at all. It's easy to make a grand gesture and go down. Heroic sort of thing. But once you're down everybody'll walk on you."

"What are you getting at?" Rod demanded impatiently. "Do you want me to cut and run with the swag—like a burglar? It amounts to pretty much the same. I keep the state intact, and these people all lose their money. I don't quite see why you should try to dissuade me."

"I'm rather anxious to know just how far you will go with it," Hale returned. "Suppose you change your mind when it's going gets rough? I've got involved in this myself through connection by marriage."

"What would you do if you were in my place?" Rod asked softly.

"I don't know," Hale twisted uneasily in his seat. "I'd hate to be faced with such a decision. Rod, your family has cut quite a figure in this country for a long time. Hate to see it pitter out. Money is essential. Without money," he made a gesture of dismissal. "I went over the whole thing with your father. Probably take your last dollar to see it through."

"Are you thinking about Dorothy's share of the estate?" Rod asked his brother-in-law point-blank.

Hale didn't resent the question. He answered frankly.

"Well, yes and no. I wasn't a rich man to begin with and four years in the army didn't improve my finances. Still, I can get by comfortably on my pension. I didn't marry Dot for her inheritance. It would be convenient to her income. But that is not what disturbs me. I don't like to think of the family fortune all shot to pieces, the old place up the coast passing into the hands of some damned profiteer—some pot-bellied swab who makes a barrel of money by building useless ships or selling bacon to the government. The rallying point of the whole clan will be gone. You'll be like a feudal baron without a castle, without a single man-at-arms."

"Still, you see my position, don't you?" Rod persisted.

"Surely," Hale admitted. "I'm not dense or unsympathetic. Noblesse oblige. Only it's a pity. People won't care one way or the other a year after it's over. Everybody's too busy whipping his own particular devil around the stump. When your wife has to wear cotton stockings and do her own cooking, the very people you're protecting will only think of you with contemptuous pity."

"I would rather incur their contempt than my own," Rod answered that the last had stung him a little. "Well, I'll keep in touch. So long."

He went home, back to the rented house which they kept on for convenience. Six weeks at Hawk's Nest had revived the old feeling of its being the only place he could ever truly regard as home. That fierce possessive pride rose stronger than ever in his breast when he walked about the grounds, when he stood among those massive trees rising in brown-trunked ranks over Big Dent, when he lay in his bed at night and looked drowsily up at the high, beamed ceiling. It was as permanent as the hills—or it should be made so. And it was his, his own, to keep and pass on to another generation of Norquays—if he could. If he could? There had never been a question of that nature to harass a Norquay since the cornerstone was levered into place in 1809. If he could!

Why shouldn't he? It was simply a sure thing. He had only to stand back with his hands in his pockets, aloof, unmoved, while Grove's white elephant died for lack of the nourishment he alone could supply. Hadn't his father done enough? The figures had staggered Rod at the time. Although every active productive undertaking of the estate had stopped for the duration of the war, yet their fortune had not shrunk appreciably. Not until Rod's father began to pour it into those looted coffers. Every liquid asset, bonds, gilt-edged securities, real estate—all hypothecated to raise funds.

Hopless to think of ever redeeming them. But there was still timber which with labor and machinery he could transform into money. He owned that clear of all encumbrance, thousands of acres of it, the finest virgin timber on the Pacific coast. With Hawk's Nest and standing timber he still had firm grasp of the old, comfortable security for himself and all the collateral branches of the Norquay clan.

Why should he voluntarily give that up?

To organize his forces, to live under the pressure of a struggle for more and more revenue, to drive labor, to watch markets and prices with a feverish intensity, to live and breathe and think in terms of money and more money was hateful to him. To whip up a sick heart day after day. Suppose it laid down on him? Who would carry on?

He looked back from his own doorstep at the square roof and the skeleton sign of the Norquay Trust looming on the jagged downtown skyline. It was like an inverted pyramid resting on his shoulders, crushing him.

He walked through the living room with a glance. He knew Mary would be upstairs where she had arranged a workshop for herself with a desk, a shelf of books, a typewriter. She sat there making aimless marks on the margin of a pad on which she had written a few sentences.

He had explained the situation to her roughly long ago. Now he sat down to explain in detail, to outline his personal relation to an inherited problem.

"There it is," he concluded. "What do you think? I can go through with it, or I can let it go. It may beat me even if I do my best. At most we'll only have Hawk's Nest and some machinery. I can hardly hope to salvage more than that."

She looked at him for a second with an enigmatical smile.

"Why ask me, Rod?" she said finally. "You're going to do what one would naturally expect you to do. You've made up your mind. You don't really consider that you have much choice, do you?"

"No," he admitted. "I can't see that I have. I hate the job. I don't like cutting my own throat. I don't like paying for a dead horse that somebody else killed. But I simply can't do the other thing."

"I don't like poverty," Mary said presently. "I've known comparative poverty, though, and I'm not much the worse for it. I'm confident that between us we could manage very well if we had nothing but the clothes we stand in. One can sometimes turn dreams into dollars. No, I'm not much afraid of anything the world can do to us. Rod junior will manage to grow up into something of a man on considerably less than a thousand a year. If you feel that something more vital to you than money is involved in this, one has to be guided in such matters by one's convictions. A profound conviction, right or wrong, is a tremendous driving force. If you throttle it to grasp a material advantage—People do sometimes. And they suffer for it."

She sat tapping the pad with her pencil.

"Queer complications crop up over such a question," she said at last. "I wonder if you know that practically all my father's money is in the Norquay Trust. The few thousands that are to keep him and mamma in comfort while

they live—all he saved out of a lifetime of work."

"Good Lord, no, I didn't know that," Rod said. "He didn't get it out when the scramble was on?"

She shook her head.

"He laughed when I asked him. I did. I telephoned him when you told me what was happening downtown. He hasn't even thought of revoking the trust. You see," she explained, "he made a trust fund of it and draws only the income. He said that people could make damned fools of themselves on the strength of a rumor, but that he was sure anything the Norquay family backed was as solid as Gibraltar."

"Well, you have the key to why Grove shot himself, and to why my father used of grief as much as of the flu," he said quietly. "It may be a small price, but by God it's a reality I have to abide by. If we go down, we go down with our flag flying."

"But we won't go down," she said cheerfully. She came and put her arms encouragingly about him. "We may lose materially, but there are precious things that can't be taken away from us. Only you'll have to relax. You've been strung up for weeks, brooding over this mess. I don't like that. You mustn't. We'll play the cards we hold, and if we lose, why we'll have played without cheating. Eh? Smile, Roderick Dhu."

"You're a jewel," Rod whispered. "I won't brood any more. Won't have time. I'm going to get under way. May I have a man in to dinner if I can get hold of him?"

"Half a dozen, if you like," Mary smiled.

They went downstairs. Rod called a regimental headquarters at Hastings Park. He got some information there, and called another number. Yes, Mr. Hall was in. In another minute Rod had him on the wire. Yes, he could come out to the house.

In the broad mirror of Rod's imagination, as he sat waiting, there stood forth successive images of what he meant to accomplish and how. His mind had a faculty of projecting ways and means, not as vivid ideas, but as extraordinarily clear pictures of the actual proceeding. He meant to make Andy Hall labor staff.

His program took form in flashes, glimpses of men, machinery, stretches of forest, booming grounds—all energized, dynamic. There was a simplicity that he appreciated in such an undertaking. It was not a matter of finessing, of juggling with pawns and tokens on the commercial chessboard. It was honest, productive effort, men and machinery moving purposefully under a directing force to supply human need.

He liked that aspect of what he meant to do.

Hall was ushered in by Yick Sing. He was in civilian clothes, a small bronze button in his left lapel. Rod led him upstairs to Mary's den.

"How long since you were demobbed?" "About two weeks," Hall answered. "Good. I'm going to start a pretty extensive logging show. Will you help me organize it?"

"Why pick on me?" Andy inquired languidly.

"I know you," Rod replied. "You know logging and loggers. I want a man who will understand what I'm driving at; a man I can trust."

"How do you know you can trust me?" "I don't know it. I feel it."

A queer expression flickered across Andy's face.

"A rebel like me?" he said. "You know what I think about your class—your masters of my class. You people who have control of all the sources of power. Who give us jobs or take them away, according to the dictates of your interest. You understand and believe in class distinctions, don't you?"

"I understand them, yes. But character is more important than class."

"What is character?" Hall demanded. "Indefinable in most cases. But it's recognizable. Whatever your situation in life, without this thing we call character you're a dud. It exists independent of class. A leisurely environment, quickened intelligence, liberal education, a tradition of uprightness, is supposed to form it. But it crops out, regardless of all these things. It's inherent in some people. It's an individual quality, not a class hallmark. But I'm getting away from the point. Your social and economic theories have very little to do with your individual function."

"I understand that. You don't imagine there's a working-class movement for general betterment on foot in this country that will be imperiled by your working for me as a well-paid assistant in a job I'm undertaking? Do you?"

Andy grinned broadly.

"Hardly. So long as industry sup-

plies jobs at living wages, everything'll be lovely. Give 'em jobs. That's all they want. They're uncomfortable in their minds unless there's somebody to tell 'em what to do. Tchh!"

He shrugged his shoulders.

"A soggy lump of dough," he grumbled. "Still, such as they are, I belong to 'em. I know what they're up against better than they do. And I'm sorry for 'em, without being able to change things."

"You find your people, the workers," Rod said, "a soggy lump of dough that the active brains of the world rather ruthlessly knead into such shapes as they require. And I find greediness, thoughtlessness, arrogance and waste outstanding features among a considerable portion of my own class, which we agree controls and directs industry. Neither of us likes the prospect, but what can we do about it? Not much."

"We do about it? Not much. We didn't create this state of affairs. But our actions are shaped by it. Even if a certain humane instinct in us revolts at being mixed up in an unseemly scramble where everybody is grabbing what he can, we have to accept that condition. If we have to fight for what we want—whether it's merely to exist or to pursue an ideal—why not fight with the best weapon that offers? I'm offering you a commission in industry instead of enlistment in the ranks. It's neither philanthropy, nor a bribe on my part."

"You pay me a compliment," Andy said gravely. "It's true I know logging and loggers. But I don't know that I'd make a good boss—from the employer's point of view. It would not be possible for me to drive men."

"I don't want to drive men," Rod broke out impulsively. "I want to lead 'em, if it can be done. If I can give men just a little more security in their jobs, a little better conditions under which to work, a little more return in wages, that's more to them than all the theory in a thousand books. So long as men must work for wages they'll choose to work where they get the most for their effort. That's the sort of con-

dition I want to create. Circumstances compel me to log for a profit like every other logger. But I'm neither a hog nor a parasite. I'm willing to share profits with the men who make them for me."

"All right, I'm your man," Andy said abruptly. "I never intended to look at a pay check again. I can be a free and unfettered beachcomber and make a living and still be my own boss. But this looks interesting to me. If you don't like my style, or I yours, I can quit on short notice."

"Yes," Rod smiled. "That's where you have the best of the bargain. You can quit. I can't."

"That's rather stretching it a bit," Andy observed dryly. "I can't see that."

"You will presently," Rod informed him.

He sketched for Andy the benefit of the situation in which he stood, the necessity for creating revenue, the obligation which he felt to rest heavily upon him.

"If I can pull out in a couple of years with Hawk's Nest, some machinery and a well-organized crew, I'll be lucky," he said. "If I can do that, men and machinery is all I need to build up a permanent structure of industry that will take care of my wants and the wants of every man in the organization."

"Your own crowd will be saying what a damned fool you are," Andy mused. "You're an idealist, Norquay. And I didn't think there were any left. I didn't believe idealism existed as a practical working force in any possible employer's mind. I'd got so lately that I didn't think there was anybody left in the world to whom a square deal meant anything but a convenient phrase. After all, that's what you're after, isn't it? Trying to live up to your notion of what constitutes a square deal?"

"Yes, I think that's about it," Rod agreed.

"Well, if you don't find the going too hard, if too many practical difficulties don't trip you," Andy prophesied, "I'll say that if you tackle the logging game

in the same spirit you'll go along jolly well. It's a damned scarce sort of spirit. The stupidest husky in the woods can't make a square deal. This is going to be very interesting. When do I start in and what's the program?"

"I want you to begin to-morrow looking up a woods' boss and getting together a crew. We'll shoot 'em up to the old Valdez camp, start the falling gear, and begin overhauling the machinery that's stored at the old camp. There's a watchman in charge, and everything's in good shape. We'll have to frame up a wage schedule. There will have to be some renovating on the camp. All sorts of details arranged. If you can build about nine in the morning, we'll tackle the first arrangements."

"I'll be there," Andy promised.

"Meantime," said Rod, "let's go downstairs where it's more comfortable. If you have no other engagement you may as well stay to dinner."

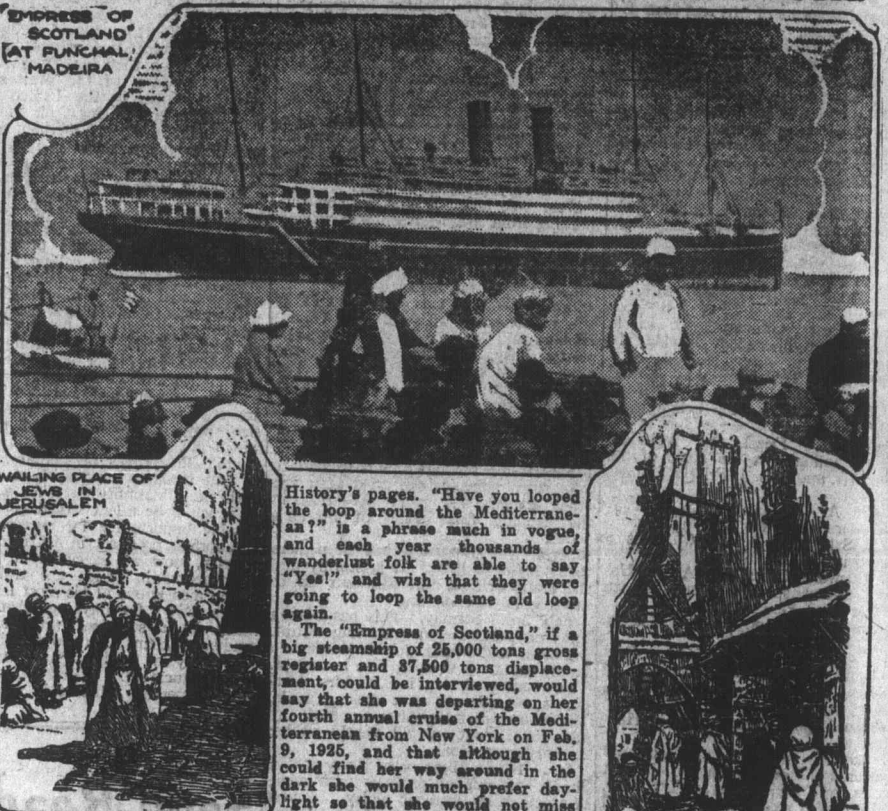
"Thanks, I will," Andy accepted. "You won't mind, I suppose, having the cook serve square peas for me?"

They chuckled and so managed to dissipate the last trace of stiffness between them. Rod considered that had won a minor victory. He knew that Andy Hall was one of those occasional beings who sprang from obscure sources with brains in courage, a pertinacious diligence in whatever he undertook, with infinite capacities for loyalty to either a person or an idea; the sort of man who leads forlorn proletarian hopes and is sometimes crucified by his own kind for fighting their battles. He could trust Andy Hall. Rod would have found it difficult to say, off-hand, just why. But he knew that he could. And he had to have about him men whom he could trust, men who could understand and exploit seeking ruthlessly his own advantage.

(To be continued.)

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## Mediterranean Was Once Whole World



History's pages. "Have you looped the loop around the Mediterranean?" is a phrase much in vogue, and each year thousands of wanderlust folk are able to say "Yes!" and wish that they were going to loop the same old loop again.

The "Empress of Scotland," if a big steamship of 25,000 tons gross register and 37,500 tons displacement, could be interviewed, would say that she was departing on her fourth annual cruise of the Mediterranean from New York on Feb. 9, 1935, and that although she could find her way around in the dark she would much prefer daylight so that she would not miss any of the wonderful scenery of the Mediterranean. Passengers on the "Empress" will see Madeira, then drop in to pay a call upon Lisbon, Portugal, as well as another call upon Cadiz, Spain, with Seville as a side trip. Gibraltar, the famous "Rock" next gets the once over, and then Algiers, capital of the French colony of Algeria is visited. Athens, Greece, Constantinople and the Bosphorus are next, and when the ship visits Beyrouth and Haifa all the famous places of the Holy Land are within a short distance of the vessel. The storied Nile awaits the "Empress" and 12 days are spent in seeing the cities of Alexandria and Cairo, the Pyramids, the Sphinx, etc.; then Naples, Pompeii, Rome, Monaco, Cherbourg, Southampton and other places. One can see a lot in 62 days in and about this cradle of civilization, and that's the job of the big oil-burning "Empress of Scotland," the largest vessel in the whole Canadian Pacific fleet.

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