

THE INVERTED PYRAMID

BY **Bertrand W. Sinclair**

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CHAPTER VII

Grove's guests danced, drank, sang, hummed, gossiped and played cards during their waking intervals for forty-eight hours. Then the white yacht sailed down the sea lanes to bring her owner to his mahogany deck on Monday morning rejuvenated by a quiet week-end at his country house, as the special page of the Vancouver "Province" duly chronicled.

Perhaps the item was correct enough on one particular. Possibly Mr. Grove was rejuvenated, or refreshed, or reinvigorated, but he would not have restored his business to the normal state of affairs. Next to display, Grove liked action. Whatever else he might lack, he was endowed with abundant energy. He was a big man, like most of the Norquays, handsome, with an engaging manner. It was scarcely correct for Phil to say that Grove never fooled himself. If he did not fool them he had a quality of influencing them favorably to himself. That faculty had made men like Arthur Richston and John P. Wall willing to let him stir the financial pot in which their money bubbled as well as his own. A young man in search of a career would not have commended himself to them simply by reason of his prestige behind him; he would still need that indescribable quality which is called magnetism for lack of a more definite term—that personal power of persuasion which successful motor-car salesmen and old-world diplomats alike endeavor to secure signatures on the dotted line. Good men have that persuasive quality, that ability to compel confidence, and bad ones also. To which category Grove Norquay belonged it would be difficult to say. There is the blind power of circumstance to consider.

In this year of our Lord 1911, Grove was a brilliantly successful young man in a city where success was most completely estimated by the noise he made and his money made. Grove was as well satisfied with himself as any young man could be whose career was assuming meteoric aspects. Everything he touched turned out well. The Norquay Trust Company seemed to exercise a magic drawing power over investors with loose funds. There was a speculative movement in land rising to a climax in Vancouver; a something that was to assume gigantic proportions in the following eighteen months. Already the clerks were beginning to go with lunch to make payments on plots of land in distant suburbs, and to go about their duties dreaming of the quick turn-over and the long profit.

All of which, when it occurs in a sea-port in conjunction with the building of two transcontinental railway terminals, in expansion of shipping, an upturn in mining and timber, and that phenomenon of Western America, the "boom," is great is the confidence of the participants—and the entire community participates. For the time being it is forgotten that whatever goes up must come down. It is a great game while it lasts. Better than draw poker. Better than playing the ponies. It is legitimate, respectable, as well as thrilling. It isn't gambling. It isn't even speculation. It is investment.

Of course a trust company with a well-defined and legally restricted field of operations was not actively participating in this frantic exchange of land titles, notes, mortgages, options and hand-to-hand agreements of sale. But the rapidity and number of such transactions created a business which Grove's company absorbed so thrifly that its growth shamed the furious beanstalk.

The Norquay Trust occupied the first two floors of a new building named after itself, on the roof of which rose a steel skeleton covered with incandescent bulbs, the sign Rod had marked on his return.

Here Mr. Grove Norquay appeared to feel that he moved at last in his proper sphere. He loved the sound and echo of huge sums, of complicated transactions, of facing men over a massive desk and deciding matters that involved much money. He liked noise, action—it gave him a sense of power, of irresistibility—just as he liked being master on his own yacht and host to a crowd of people who talked a little faster and drank a little more abundantly than was really necessary. He could have a "whale of a time" with a lively crowd, whether the party was stag or mixed. On dead ones, either social or financial, Grove wasted no moment of his valuable time. A man with money and a sporting inclination and a woman with any pretensions to youth and beauty, could be reasonably sure of Grove Norquay's consideration—at any rate for a time. He esteemed the good mixers as the salt of the earth, but they had to be the "right" sort of people. By his birth, training and antecedents Grove held himself duly qualified to judge of that beyond dispute.

He was attempting to convey the weight of this mature judgment to Rod one forenoon some days later. Rod and Phil had come down with the Haida to meet their father on his return from a trip South. A mild curiosity to see a shop had led Rod into the Norquay Trust Building. Grove had shown him about and explained the scope of the undertaking with what interested Rod as ill-concealed pride. "I believe you're all puffed up about this thing," he said amusedly, when they sat down at last in Grove's private office.

"Well, why not?" Grove conceded "I organized it. It's a pretty big show, and it's my show."

"After all, it's only a money-making scheme, isn't it? You don't make anything or do anything, do you? You handle sums of money and grab a percentage. Eh?" Rod said innocently. He was thinking of Phil's phrase, glorified pawnbroking.

"Oh, tush—you don't understand," Grove dismissed that.

Then he proceeded to fraternal advice, slightly tinged with remonstrance. "Didn't see you walking along Beach Avenue with that Thorn girl

after dinner last night? I understand she's down here going to school."

"Probably you did," Rod answered indifferently.

Grove frowned.

"It's hardly the thing for you to cultivate her publicly," he observed. "A fellow can't carry on these country kid acquaintances in town. Aren't there girls enough in your own crowd for you to stroll along the beach with?"

"Look here," Rod challenged earnestly, "with your record in the female line you're barking up the wrong tree when you start advising me to keep within bounds. My own taste and judgment are quite as good as yours."

Grove eyed him coolly.

"My record in the female line," he murmured, "I didn't know I had one."

"No? You mean you didn't know I knew. Do you think I've been deaf, dumb and blind for the last six years? Even if I had been, you must remember you went to McGill before me. There are still a few lingering odors of you on the campus, and in some of the downtown joints."

"Well, well," Grove said cynically. "You aren't so slow as you seem, after all. So far as Mary Thorn is concerned your taste is good enough—but your judgment is damned poor. I always told the papers she kept you cloistered too much, Rod. If you have a crush on the Thorn person, go to it. But do keep her out of sight. Saves talk. These nobodies from nowhere always mess things up by trying to horn into your own crowd if they get half a chance. You understand?"

Rod looked at him soberly.

"You're a piggy sort of creature, d'ye know it, Grove?" he said with icy deliberation. "I sometimes wonder what induced Laska Wall to marry you."

A faint tinge of color crept into Grove's face.

"Sometimes wonder myself," he said slowly, as if the thrust had set him thinking. "However, that's beside the point. If I made an ass of myself on certain occasions, that's no reason you should. Of course," he waxed sarcastic, "if you are like Phil, a youth of virginal purity, all I need to say is that it's advisable for you to seek your chemically pure companionship in your own class, on the streets or off."

"Your idea of virginal purity doesn't interest me," Rod said as he rose. "If Phil and I happen to have certain ideas about common decency which you can't understand, why, that's your misfortune. But if you want to get along with me, eldest brother, you'll leave my moral and social training alone. If you don't like my associates, you can ignore them. Keep your homiletics for your customers."

"All right, kiddo," Grove agreed ironically. "You're a Norquay and you can do no wrong. But I can tell you from experience, Roderick old kid, that these poor men's daughters generally figure on getting something out of travelling with fellows like us. Believe me, they do."

Rod didn't answer. He was angry, both at Grove's advice and insinuation. In another second he would have been ready to blow up. So he walked to the door. In a square mirror let into a panel he got a glimpse of Grove, half-turned in his chair, looking after him with a slightly puzzled expression.

Laska had asked Rod to luncheon at the house. Grove lunched at his club; Phil had declined about his own affairs after vanishing, Laska's invitation. He wondered if Phil suffered from constancy; if love were a thing that endured beyond hope. He couldn't say. There was a difference in Phil. But there was a subtle sort of change manifest in everything Rod knew. At any rate he, himself, had no reason to find anything but pleasure in lurching with his sister-in-law.

So he went alone. He walked the twenty blocks that lay between the downtown traffic roar and Grove's home in the West End, thinking of his brother's cynical advice. In so far as it bore upon Mary Thorn, Rod dismissed it contemptuously. He had met Mary by such chance as brings people together in any town. She was on her way to keep an engagement and he had walked with her the length of the beach along English Bay. But Rod had foresightedly provided himself with her telephone number. Now in a spirit closely akin to defiance he stopped at a pay station and called her up. Yes, she was free that afternoon. Yes, she would go for a walk with him.

Rod went on, more placidly. She was the same Mary Thorn who used to run the rapids with him, but a little taller. She had attained womanhood and bore herself accordingly. Rod had never been able to make invidious class distinctions between himself and her. He couldn't now. Along with Phil she had a place in his affection which she had preempted long before either was aware of sex. Rod's active and analytical mind had lately come to the conclusion that of all the people young and old in this land of his birth there were only two who could stir him to any warmth—Phil and Mary. That puzzled him. He supposed he must be an emotional freak. He had chums in Montreal. He knew men, women and girls by the score here in Vancouver. He regarded girls here and elsewhere with sophomoric condescension. He never missed them when they were absent. And he had missed Mary Thorn. How much he didn't realize until he met her again, after two years. It was very odd. The emotional and intellectual experience of twenty couldn't account for such facts.

Rod soon gave over trying. He found himself turning in at Grove's gate, and Laska coming forward in a hall to greet him.

Late June had ushered in a burst of heat. Their luncheon was served on a porch screened by wisteria. The purple clusters of bloom scented the cool shade. A seven-foot ivy-grown wall enclosed the grounds, shutting away everything but the neighboring upper stories and the high, green timber of Stanley Park on the west. It was almost as quiet there as in the woods.

The downtown rumble was a far surflike mutter that made a tonal background for the hum of bees foraging in the wisteria.

Laska talked at intervals. She had grown up in Montreal. She asked Rod about places and people there, grew briefly reminiscent about her childhood. Curled in a hammock after luncheon, she was silent for a time.

"Rod," she said abruptly, "when your father comes—he's due to-morrow, isn't he?—do something for me, will you?"

"Of course," Rod answered. "What shall it be?"

"Suggest to him that it would be pleasant to have me up at Hawk's Nest for a few weeks."

She regarded him thoughtfully, her lips slightly parted. Rod was puzzled. He hesitated.

"Will you, Rod?"

"Certainly. But—but why don't you just come? Simply say you want to—and come."

"It isn't quite so simple as that," she explained. "I couldn't go unless your father rather made a point of it to Grove. Grove's funny. He isn't at all keen on me going there, except when we cruise up on a week-end. And I'd like to go there and stay awhile, quietly. I'm fed up with Vancouver. I'm tired. I want to rest."

"You can't think what a giddy wair we live in," she went on presently. "Dinner parties, general hilarity; just one thing after another. One has to go whether one feels up to it or not. One gets so weary of it. Get your father to have me come to Hawk's Nest, Rod dear."

Rod promised.

She went off on another tack after that. With a touch of malice she brightly recounted the quasi-scandal pertaining to certain people in their set, people Rod knew slightly. It seemed to afford her ironic amusement.

"But," Rod observed in comment on a rather piquant anecdote concerning a pretty widow and a man of family who cut a big figure in local industry, "that's pretty raw if it's true. And if it's just gossip, it's rotten nasty gossip."

"I shouldn't be surprised if it were quite true," she said indifferently. "Some people do what they like. Others have to toe the line. It's a queer, queer world, Rod."

He left about two-thirty. Striding up Robson Street to Mary's boarding place, he shook off a half-formed impression that Laska was bored and discontented, that she found the only world she knew a rather hollow affair. There was a vague fretfulness about her. It was just an impression. And it was not his concern. Mary Thorn was decidedly his concern, for that afternoon at Laska's. Grove—the Norquay—had vanished out of his mind at sight of Mary Thorn.

For, as he walked beside her along a street which led to the sandy foreshore and green reaches of Stanley Park, Rod found himself stirred by a strange procession of fancies. They trooped that nearest disturbing? Rod's brain. What was there about a girl (a pretty girl, but of no great beauty compared to other girls he knew) in a white organdie dress, with a rather immobile face shadowed under the floppy brim of a leghorn hat, to stir him so, to make him desire nearness to her and to find that nearest disturbing? Rod's brain. What was there about a girl (a pretty girl, but of no great beauty compared to other girls he knew) in a white organdie dress, with a rather immobile face shadowed under the floppy brim of a leghorn hat, to stir him so, to make him desire nearness to her and to find that nearest disturbing? Rod's brain. 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