

# THE INVERTED PYRAMID

BY  
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(Continued from last issue.)

It was easy for men like Hall to lubricate the wheels of industry, or to set up frictions that produced minor disasters. Men like Andy thought in terms beyond themselves, beyond their personal ends. They rose up out of the low ground of their origins, looming above the common ruck like tall trees above a thicket. Rod was very glad to have Andy Hall's paid services. But he appreciated even more Andy's instant grasp of a difficult situation met in the only possible fashion.

A murmur of voices sounded in the living room. Rod was a trifle surprised to see Isabel Wall's piquant face turn to him over the back of a Chesterfield. She had been in the south all winter. Almost five years had left Isabel unchanged in appearance, except that her fair hair was thicker and bobbed in the prevailing mode so that it stood out around her head like a fluffy aureole, making her seem, with her big blue eyes and delicate pink-and-white skin, more like a charming doll than a woman. Rod's mind revived that embarrassing scene under a high moon among the great tree shadows on Big Dent. He had not seen Isabel since. She put out her hand now with frank friendliness. It was all a little unexpected. Isabel so patently belonged in the camp of the enemy. Yet she seemed very sure of her ground here in his house, very much at home.

He introduced Andy to his wife, to Isabel, to a plump matron with two chins and a positive, not to say emphatic manner of speaking; a Mrs. Emmert whom Rod vaguely remembered.

He fell into conversation with Isabel, or rather Isabel talked and he listened. Isabel prattled as of old. Rod lost himself in speculation as to how any one could possibly talk so much and say so little. It was an art. He came out of this semi-absorption. Isabel ceased talking. Her face turned aside with a new quality of fixed attention. Rod looked and became aware that Andy was speaking to Mrs. Emmert with a bitter, gibing note in his usually pleasant voice. The whimsical, good-natured expression of his face had vanished. His eyes had hardened; his eyes had narrowed.

"You may consider it a notable distinction," he was saying. "But possibly you son has his doubts."

The lady made a sound in the nature of a gasp.

"You see," Andy continued in that frozen tone, "people whose knowledge of war is based on what they read in the papers don't know anything about war at all. The front-line men do. Most of 'em don't care to talk much about it. Being a person of no discrimination, I do talk about it. There is no glory in war—particularly this war—for the men who actually carry on the war. All the benefits of this nation (if there are any benefits, which I doubt) are derived by people who stayed at home and did their patriotic duty by knitting socks and buying bonds and selling supplies to the War Department. You can't tell a soldier that it was anything but a dirty, dangerous job which he hated."

"That's the most unpatriotic thing I ever heard," Mrs. Emmert spluttered.

"I paid two fingers and a hole in one leg for the privilege of saying things like that," Andy observed tartly. "They are true. Your attitude is common enough. You've got one of these hermetically sealed minds that conceives of war as some sort of international game played by young men with guns; a game in which your son distinguished himself by winning a medal. A medal!" he snorted, and plunged his good hand into an inner pocket.

"Look, madam," he said ironically. "Three of 'em, Military Medal, Military Cross, Croix de Guerre. They don't give you these trinkets for looking wise and talking about other people's patriotic duty. They give them to you for killing men as a rule. That's all war is, just killing. For the stunt by which I earned this French thing I should be execrated in any civilized community. And I didn't do it to earn a decoration, nor in any spirit of heroism. I can assure you. I was caught like a rat in a trap. I was responsible for the lives of other men. I was frantic with rage and fear. I won't atone for my describing what I did. It made me sick afterwards. I tell you I have a strong stomach and it made me sick to think about it. And they gave me a medal. Pah! he snorted contemptuously. "People like you talking about the great privilege of having participated in the war. You're as bad as the Germans. Go to some slaughterhouse and watch pigs and sheep die with squeals and bleats and blood spurting out of their throats. Substitute men for pigs and sheep, and you have war. Of course, if you have a butcher's instincts, you take to it as a pastime."

Mrs. Emmert was evidently making one of those formal calls which do not permit the visiting female to lay aside her wraps. She rose now, fully caparisoned in her furs and her dignity.

"I have never been so insulted in my life," she declared. "I consider your remarks to be positively seditious."

And with that she swept majestically to the door—not, however, without a sidelong glance at Isabel Wall. That young lady, to Rod's surprise merely smiled, shook her head, and murmured: "Sorry. But it doesn't arouse my righteous indignation."

The door closed with a slam. Mary, who had risen, resumed her seat and smiled. Andy Hall stood up. He pocketed the decorations. His face was slightly flushed.

"I expect," he said, "I'd better be on my way. You see, when I come across such persons, I blow up. I can't help it. I'm on one side of the fence. People like that are on the other. When some silk-upholstered fool starts drooling sentimental tosh about the war and mouthing intell'ctual h c's as positive wisdom, I simply get red-eyed. I don't really belong on your side of the fence, and I'm just bone-headed enough to be glad I don't, if many people like that graze in your pastures."

"Sit down, Andy, and be calm," Rod laughed. "There isn't any fence so far

as we're concerned. Sit down and have a cigarette. Dinner will be ready soon. Forget the fat woman. She doesn't know any better."

"Room for one more at the festive board?" Isabel inquired.

"Of course," Mary replied. "There always is."

"I wonder," Isabel turned her bland, childlike prettiness on Andy Hall. "I wonder if Mr. Hall knows how fierce he looks when he is angry? Is that an expression you cultivate in the army, Mr. Hall?"

"No," Andy replied with unexpected acidity. "I cultivated it to protect myself against idiotic questioning by London flappers."

"Entirely useless here," Isabel said sweetly. "This isn't London, and I'm not a flapper. Or at least, I'm a sort of a graduate flapper, if anything."

Andy stared at her in some slight puzzlement.

"I'm afraid," he said more politely, "that I don't quite get your drift."

"Oh, you will presently," she assured him with mock gravity. "It's really important that you should. You see, you certainly did browbeat Mrs. Emmert. And when I find a man browbeating my sex, I consider it my duty to subjugate him."

"You speak a language I don't understand," Andy retorted, but he said it with a smile.

"I'd be pleased to teach you," Isabel replied demurely. "I'm sure you wouldn't be a backward pupil."

Rod leaned over the back of a chair silent, amused. Mary sat on a low stool, her hands clasped over her knees, egging them on with brief sentences. And the other two, who had never seen each other before, whose orbits were as diverse as the separate paths of the Dog Star and Halley's comet, turned upon each other batteries of light-hearted chaffing. They ended up on the Chesterfield together, comparing their favorite drinks, dances and cigarettes, in all three of which they seemed to have had a comprehensive experience. They were at an easy congenial banter. Mary drew her husband out of the room on some pretext.

"Is that your revolutionary rigging-slinger?" she asked.

"Yes. He is going to be my superintendent of works."

"I like him," Mary said. "Apparently so does Isabel."

"Everybody who knows Andy Hall likes him," Rod informed her. "But that little feather-brain is only interested in him as a new specimen. She probably never encountered anybody quite like him."

"Feather-brain? You don't know Isabel," Mary declared.

"I know her better than you do," "Oh, no," Mary smiled. "You may have known her longer. But not better. Isabel outgrew the fluffy-ruffles stage while you were away at the war."

### CHAPTER XXV

Across the channel, in the green bank of timber bisected by the path that ran from Oliver Thorn's old house to the Granite Pool, rose white puffs of steam, intermittent, like sporadic geysers. Those were donkey engines at work. They tooted shrill response to the signal pull. The woods were full of prodigious shuddering and rumblings. The powerful machines snaked fallen trees, sawn to lengths, from where they were felled to the last splashing plunge into the tidal booming ground close by a group of new camp buildings not far from Oliver Thorn's abandoned house. A "sky line" lifted its long, aerial cable far up that hill. Down this cable came at the rate of two hundred a day. The shore was lined with floating logs, new cut exhaling the odor of pitch, a pleasant pungent smell. The Granite Pool itself echoed the clack of axes and the thin twanging of saws and mirrored the downward swoop of great trees. The falling crews were stripping the shores about the Pool, destroying its seclusion shattering its restful silence, obliterating its cool shade. Farther east the Valdez camp, in which Rod had served his apprenticeship, bit deep into these heavy woods. Three hundred and fifty men, a dozen donkey engines, a logging railway in the making, miles of steel cable were chewing the heart out of the forest. Far beyond a sight and sound of Hawk's Nest another crew slashed at the last of their timber on Harwicke Island.

There was no picking of prime trees and care to conserve the younger growth, nor far-sighted culling of the forest crop. It was complete destruction. Within the boundaries of each limit the earth was stripped to its primal nakedness. Sky-line and high-lead gear ripped strings of logs over the surface, plowing deep furrows in the scant soil, tearing up saplings, shoulering aside rotten trunks and small boulders, bursting into dusty clouds the leafy snags in the way. When the loggers shifted to a fresh stand they left desolation behind. Timber great and small was money. Every stick landed in a river went for something: number one export, number two, the broken cedar for shingles, the poorer grades of spruce and hemlock for pulpwood that the mills chewed up and spat forth in tons of news print.

Rod sat over his breakfast at Hawk's Nest one morning in early summer of '19. The far, faint sounds of tone machinery he had set in motion reached now and then into that quiet room. But he was not thinking particularly of this organized effort which filled the woods over there with crashings and rumblings and whining cables. He was watching the tall, somewhat stooped figure of the butler. "I had served in that house ever since Rod could remember, and he was thinking that in connection with this man he faced another of the many disagreeable tasks he must perform.

He rose, walked to the door, turned back. It was no great matter, and still — Like a modern Atropos he must go on snipping threads. If the hand that held the shears shook a little now and then, it could not for that reason be stayed. He had not much choice. He was too deeply committed.

"Come up to the library in a few

minutes, Stagg," he said.

"Yes, sir."

Rod sat down by a window that overlooked Mermaid Bay. A Kern lug lay against one shore beside a million boards feet of Norway cedar, waiting for the fierce tidence to go slack before she eased her boom through the south narrow for the long Gulf tow. In a little while she would pass out dragging astern a brown comet's tail of slaughtered trees.

His eyes turned back to the interior of the room, came to rest on a portrait of his great-grandfather—the Norway who had prophesied that Hawk's Nest would some day hatch out an eagle.

"Even an eagle could hardly hold his own against a flock of buzzards," Rod muttered.

No. One slip was sufficient to invalidate, even to destroy such families as his, in this day and age. Perhaps there had been a time when people of the equivalent class would have seen in the Norway difficulty something besides a chance to participate in the loot. Out of his intimate knowledge of the family history as revealed in sundry documents and half-recalled conversations, Rod knew that his father had put out his hand and opened his purse to save other men from ruin, sometimes out of friendship, sometimes out of generosity, often from a clear sense of class interest. At least friendship and social intimacy had bred something more than mere lip-fealty. Other generations did not break bread and drink wine under each other's roofs to go forth planning how they could filch each other's possessions. The generation to which his father belonged would have understood quite clearly the Norway obligation in regard to Grove's blundering.

His, Rod's generation, didn't understand. At least, if it understood, it cynically denied his code. It laughed at him behind his back, looked with disbelief on the course he was taking. It was, they held, purely quixotic to sacrifice so much, to risk all in repairing a misguided man's folly. Childishness. What were bankruptcy laws for? Why had sound commercial brains devised the Limited Liability Act if not to save the enterprising bourgeois from loss when one of his undertakings failed? What simpleton would unhesitatingly accept a moral responsibility when no legal compulsion existed?

Rod smiled grimly. He had become more closely acquainted with the ethics of modern business. It struck him that if corporations were in the nature of things soulless and dehumanized in matters of money, that attribute tended to spread to individuals. He wondered if that were possible. It was a disagreeable conclusion; one he hesitated to accept. But he knew this; that both his father and himself had aroused a strange combination of antagonism and contempt by merely doing what they felt in honor bound to do.

The antagonism was the fiercer for being grounded in cupidity. It smoldered under the surface, ready to blaze out if he left an opening. There were those who would like to pick his bones. He was aware of this attitude. It burgeooned forth in many aspects of his affairs.

If he had looked the Norway Trust within the law and let the plucked victims pick themselves bewildered out of the ruin, while he sat back with his share of the plunder and the great Norway estate still firm in his grasp, these contemporaries of his would have esteemed him as a clever man, almost a great man certainly a man with a genius for affairs. A man of affairs; a man who could safely and expeditiously get possession of large sums of money. What was the difference?

He might have been execrated by some who lost their money. The losers, they said cynically, always accused. But if he had shrugged his shoulders and stood aside, his own class would have backed him to a man. They would have upheld him in the press, socially, by every means within their power. Their admiration would have been tinctured with envy. They would have understood so clearly that genuine greatness was involved in making such a coup and getting clear when the crash came. His own people,—no, by God, the Walls and Dcanes and Richstons were not his kind of people, not one of the whole pushing caravan, the petty tradesmen swollen to greatness with one generation of a rich country's development, grown greater with exorbitant profits derived from a war which had been fought for them but not by them. They were Grove's kind of people. And Grove had been a —

Well, he didn't like to ponder on Grove. There was no encouragement in that. He found his brother's memory depressing. Grove reminded him of a joyous diver plunging headfirst into the troubled waters of life and coming up, not with a pearl but with a handful of slimy ooze. Grove, he reflected, would probably not have given a second thought to discharging Stagg. And he was compelled to give several regretful thoughts to that unfortunate necessity.

To be continued.

### THE IRISHMAN'S DOG

"Hullo, Pat, I hear that your dog is dead?"

"It is."

"Was it a lap dog?"

"Yes it would lap up anything."

"What did it die of?"

"It died of a Tuesday."

"I mean how did it die?"

"It died on its back."

"No, no, I mean how did it meet its death?"

"It didn't meet its death; its death overtook it."

"I want to know what was the complaint?"

"No complaint; everyone for miles around seemed satisfied."

"I wish to know, how did it occur?"

"The dog was no cur; he was a thorough-bred animal."

"Tell me, what disease did the dog die of?"

"He went to fight a circular saw."

"What was the result?"

"The dog only lasted one round."



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