

# THE INVERTED PYRAMID

BY **Bertrand W. Sinclair**  
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(Continued from last issue.)

Rod's eyes swept the table and came to rest on his grandfather. A lean old patriarch with a thatch of hair white as the table cover, a mustache waxed to spiky points, a thin curved nose between deep-set, faded blue eyes. He was past eighty. He could still relish a glass of port, find pleasure in sitting beside a pretty woman, upon whom he would bestow a blend of compliment and reminiscence. For now the old man lived almost wholly in the past. When he walked slowly about the grounds leaning on his stick, he never spoke of what was to be, only of what had been. Rod looked at him and wondered if he would live as long and see so many changes. He was sitting beside Mrs. Wall, a plump well-groomed woman of forty-five. Above the murmur about the table Rod could hear him telling her of the gold rush to the Cariboo in '58. He had a crisp incisive manner of speech. He had been the first Norquay to attend McGill. He was an educated man, almost a scholar, one, in spite of an active life. He had builded well and widely on the fur-trading foundation.

"He was the last of the constructive period," Rod mused. "The governor has merely stood pat. Grove will likely go backward. We're a rum lot."

He had to give over these inturning reflections and be polite. He was seated between Isabel Wall and a Miss Sherburne, a darkly handsome creature whose fascinations were too precious to waste on a mere youth. Miss Sherburne's profile slanted eagerly to the left, toward Phil. But Isabel had no such reservations. Rod was nearest her own age. He was fair game. He proceeded casually to divulge to Isabel such information as she sought about running the rapids in a canoe, about Mary Thorn. She appeared to have a considerable curiosity about Mary. Presently Rod began to wish her deaf and dumb. Outwardly he remained patiently courteous. It was a relief when coffee and cigarettes ended the meal.

It took him some time to escape from Isabel. Normally he would not have minded her chatter, nor her appropriation of himself. But just now his mind held tenaciously to something which had been nagging him ever since that interview in the library. When he saw Phil give over a palpable attempt to segregate Laska and saunter off toward the boat landing, he excused himself and followed.

They walked down the slope together, out on the slip, seated themselves on a bench.

"Give me a cigarette," Rod demanded abruptly, as his first utterance.

Phil handed over his case. Rod took one.

"Getting real devilish," Phil bantered.

"Was Grove aboard the Haida when you came through the rapids this afternoon? I didn't see him."

"Down below, I suppose," Phil replied. "I didn't notice. But he was with us. Why?"

"I thought so. What a skunk he is. Yes in this family he's the little tin god on wheels. He thinks everybody is as rotten as himself, too."

"You shouldn't talk like that," Phil remonstrated mildly.

"It's true. You know it is."

For a second Phil said nothing to this. "One can't go about shouting unpleasant truths," he observed then.

"What's wrong anyhow?"

"I'm to be packed off to McGill day after tomorrow."

"But the term doesn't begin for weeks yet."

"Oh, I'm to visit Aunt Maïda and explore the historic city which has justified its existence by containing the seat of learning where my forefathers absorbed the knowledge and culture which has enabled them to lead such eminently successful and praiseworthy lives," Rod drawled.

"Well, that's no great grief," Phil replied. "Nothing to get fussed up over."

"It was generally understood I was to begin next year. I'm being packed off as a punishment. It seems the family dignity is being compromised by my running rapids in a dugout with a girl."

"Well?" Phil waited patiently.

"Grove put a bug in the governor's ear," Rod dropped allusion for plain facts. "The governor wouldn't have thought of disciplining me. Grove's a damned snob. He has his gang here. He thinks I ought to spend my time entertaining them. He imagines it is a reflection on him that I prefer to play with Mary Thorn. Out of his own messy mind he takes it for granted—the governor would never of his own accord have suggested that I was—that I might—oh, damn! I don't like Grove's filthy insinuations, Phil. And I couldn't talk back to the governor. If it weren't for all these people here, I'd beat Grove up for his pains."

"You're hardly up to that yet," Phil smiled indulgently.

"Don't you fool yourself," Rod declared hotly. "I weigh a hundred and fifty-five stripped. I'm as hard as a rock—and he's the mush. You know it, Phil. He's lapped up too much hard liquor, and dabbled too much with that woman he keeps in the Bute Street flat to—to stand the gaff very long."

"Good Lord; nothing gets by you," Phil grunted. "How do you know these things?"

"I have eyes and ears," Rod answered. "And I'm not asleep when I'm in town. He had a little blonde in his harem last year. The latest, I understand, is a voluptuous brunette. He has more light loves than some people have servants. By jove, he's the last one that ought to hint to the pater that I need looking after."

"Maybe it was old Spence," Phil observed thoughtfully. "The three of them were confabbing when the governor asked me to find you. Old Spence is rather strait-laced, and you're his especial charge, you know."

"No, Spence is only an echo," Rod said scornfully. "An echo of other men's thoughts, book history, languages. Old Spence is decent, and he considers me so. Besides, he wouldn't talk I'm

"Run on. Vacation will end soon enough. I don't suppose your father will go," Mrs. Thorn said. "Better put up a lunch. The chances are Rod didn't think of it."

"I thought of it," Rod came back in time to overhear, "but there was no time. I had to make a get-away."

"Playing hooky?" Mrs. Thorn teased. "Yes. From our honored guests. They can't do anything without being personally conducted. And as it isn't my show, I'd rather let some one else do the conducting."

In ten minutes they were swinging uphill from the narrows, on a path that rose steeply through heavy timber, turning aside here and there for great trees. They moved silently, saving their breath for the climb. High overhead rifts of blue sky showed through interlocked branches. Dew still clung to the bordering thickets. They walked in cool shadow, on ground the sun never touched except in narrow shafts between the canopy of leaf and bough. They bore on up until they came out on a height of land bare of timber, where only moss carpeted the granite ridge. On their right Little Dent and Big Dent and the twin Gillards lay like dusky green blobs in the shining race of the tide. The red roof of Hawk's Nest was a flaming dot against paler green. The channel below was a still paler shade. The mainland receded to height after height, mountain after mountain, the farther peaks faint blue cones on a ragged horizon.

"What a look. Air's clear as crystal this morning." They walked a hundred yards along the open back-bone. To the left blue-black water mirroring the shore trees, the distant hills, walled on three sides with bold, ravine-spilt cliffs, gleamed in a deep hollow. They plunged downward through dense thickets. The path discovered itself anew, panting a little with the speed of their descent, they stood on a rock shelf thrusting into the Granite Pool, a little lake hidden in the Valdez hills. There was neither inlet nor outlet. It was half a mile broad, mysteriously fed by hidden springs, fed by cool trout waters. Except Indians and timber cruisers, rarely disturbed in their aqueous heaven.

In the Granite Pool Rod Norquay and Mary Thorn had a special, proprietary interest, quite apart from the fact that one side of Oliver Thorn's land touched its shore, and elsewhere its cliff borders were ringed about by the Norquay holdings. Their interest was not one of physical ownership. They had discovered it for themselves. They were the first, so far as they knew, to cast a line in those deep, still waters. They had given it a fitting name. Even the trail, cleverly hidden, had been the work of their hands, assisted by Mary's father.

Except Indians and timber cruisers, a ubiquitous and taciturn clan, few people knew that such a lake nestled in the hills so close to the Euclataw. These two, who had haunted it through the summers of four years, kept their knowledge to themselves. The Granite Pool was their own; the way thereto and the angle's joy therein a secret they refused to share. Oliver Thorn humored them in this; it pleased him that two children should have such a sanctuary. Rod evaded divulging the source of the baskets of trout he carried home—justifying himself by the sure knowledge that if all Hawk's Nest knew, vandal parties under Grove's leadership would invade trail and lake, make fish hogs of themselves in the Granite Pool, profaning its beautiful solitude in the name of sport.

A raft was moored to the shelving rock. They got aboard and cast loose. Joining up their rods as the raft drifted down on a patch of lily pads among which faint splashes sounded intermittently, followed by concentric ripples that spread away till they were lost on the surface of the dark water.

"They're still feeding, thank goodness," Rod observed.

Mary nodded, busy with her gear. She rose, flicked a Royal Coachman forty feet on her third cast and struck a twelve-inch trout. Whereupon they both became galvanized by that curious suppressed excitement which is a heritage from remote periods when man secured his daily food with his own hands, or went hungry.

At four in the afternoon they had taken their leave of the Pool, climbed to the ridge, and were sitting on a downed tree trunk, looking from that vantage at a stream tug far below with a great boom of logs trailing astern. She passed through the lower rapids in the brief slack. Rod's creel lay at his feet, heavy with their catch. He watched the raft of logs move slowly up the channel. Then his eyes turned to the girl, rested upon her with definite appraisal.

Rod had been looking at Mary Thorn more or less casually ever since he was a leggy boy in knickers and she a slim elf in abbreviated gingham dresses. But he had never been so conscious of her as now. So late as yesterday he had regarded her without personal awareness of sex. How was it, he wondered, that a few words from his father, a cryptic hint or two, could make everything different? Nothing had happened. Yet he knew that a different quality had entered their companionship. A boy and a girl could play together without thinking of themselves as male and female. A man and a woman couldn't. His father had warned him that he was a man and should comport himself accordingly. As if a man's natural instinct was to run amuck!—Perhaps that was the truth. Rod smiled uneasily at the notion. He was not precisely an unsophisticated youth, but he could scarcely comprehend that there is only a shadowy border between the frank, sexless affections of childhood and the uneasy glow of maturing passion. He had never nursed a libidinous thought about Mary Thorn. And yet—

His eyes rested on her with a new sort of gaue. She sat staring down Cardero Channel, her hands in her lap, not so much intent on some distant object as deep in one of those long, thoughtful silences into which she now and then retired—a characteristic that Rod liked because it was something he himself often did. Her hair was a brown smoothness about her head, tied back with a narrow ribbon. She was very pretty, Rod decided critically, prettier than any girl he knew. But something more than superficial prettiness attracted him. He didn't know what. It eluded him. She had a woman's bosom and neck. Her body was made up of harmonious contours. Her expression absent, reflective, gave him the feeling that he looked at maturity and wisdom. It surprised him to think that such an aspect of her had never struck him before.

Looking at her, he suddenly felt a queer, constricted feeling in his breast. He desired all at once to touch her, to rest his fingers lightly on that delicately tinted skin. She would laugh at him. He wondered if she would. He wondered what she thought about, locked up in herself like that. What went on in her mind that brought tiny puckers of concentration in her forehead? Was she as suddenly acutely conscious of him, in a disturbing physical sense, as he was of her? And he wondered futilely why he should be troubled by

such unaccustomed thoughts and sensations now, when so late as yesterday they two had sprawled together on the mossy benches of Little Dent, laughing and chattering like two boys bent on innocent adventure in the world of boyish action.

Now there was certainly a mischief working in his blood that was not innocent. He knew it. It made him quiver. There was a ferment in his mind as well as in his body. Was this what Spence meant when he discoursed solemnly on the arrival of youth at man's estate? The pitfalls of uncontrolled passion. The ineradicable animal in man. Spence always spoke of the most intimate relations between a man and a woman in guarded terms. He conveyed the idea that it should be a matter of rational choice, on the man's side. Spence never discussed the woman's part; he ignored the woman. The man, then, according to the Spencian ethic, carried on his sexual life according to his innate character. If he was inherently brutish he sought sexual satisfaction promiscuously. The ideal, sanctioned by society, therefore ethically sound, was love, matrimony, the ultimate family, achieved progressively with mature deliberation to bring emotion. Mr. Spence did not inform Rod that this ideal progression depended on a great many uncertain factors. Perhaps he did not know. But Rod had accepted his tutor for several years as an oracle on culture in general, as

well as in its specific branches, and it was difficult for him to burn a deaf ear when the oracle spoke of ethics, in spite of the fact that Rod's own observation, the conclusions of a fairly acute if youthful mind stirred doubts.

(To be continued)

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