

Company, gay events being now too expensive for him, but he went to the house with fair frequency, just enough to keep the gossips wondering.

"You may take that back!" Before the wrath in Lethington's eyes the boy shifted his own uneasily. He knew his petulant fling at the older man had been causeless and childish, and it did not make him feel particularly proud of himself. He offered a lame apology.

"You needn't be so infernally touchy," he said, sulkily. "I didn't mean anything, but I don't see why I should stand still and let people row me about my friends."

Lethington put his own anger aside and returned patiently to his first argument. After all, what could he do by harsh measures, if he wished to reclaim Leila's brother? He longed to shake this spoiled boy who was ruining his own life and bringing anxiety and pain to those who loved him, but he knew that it was on the man Oliver that the weight of his wrath should fall. The boy had merely been drawn, as many others had before, under the flattery of being sought by an older man, the fascination of his worldly knowledge and the power of his unscrupulous will, and he had not the strength of character to resist it.

"I have no wish to row you about your friends," he said, quietly, "but I do hate to see you throw yourself away. I have knocked around the world considerably, and I have seen men of his stamp before, and I know the pace he leads you does not pay. It may seem very fine and manly for a time, but in the end you will be ashamed of it, and the very ones who applaud you now will throw you aside like a squeezed lemon when you are no longer profitable. That is all I am going to say, Ted, except just this friendly warning—keep your eye on Oliver, and watch out that he doesn't use you for an easy thing. Good-bye."

Lethington was off immediately. He was no longer a luxurious idler in expensive clubs, and he had only come in here to-day because he had seen Ted Burton enter, and had followed him to give the advice which had seemed to fall on such stony ground. The men who had heard Burton's ill-considered retort looked curiously after Lethington.

"There seems to be trouble brewing," one of them said, casually. "It sounded as though Burton were trying to pick a quarrel with Tom. It was rather low to twit him on his poverty—the young cub ought to be thrashed. He's going a pretty heady pace anyway."

At the end of the room where Lethington had left him, young Burton leaned against the window casement and stared into the street below. He was not in a happy mood, for the interview had left him half sullen, half ashamed. A consciousness that Lethington's strictures on his conduct were not undeserved mingled with the uncomfortable knowledge that his retort at Tom had been unwarranted and cruel. He had grace enough left to feel hot and ashamed for that, half fretful that his "liberty" should be tampered with, but anxious to keep Lethington's good opinion. As a mere youngster he had envied and admired Tom Lethington, then in the full tide of prosperity and popularity, had even copied his clothes, in a boyish way, the crispness of his speech and the easy swing of his walk. That was before Lethington had left, after the financial crash, to take his father abroad to other scenes and spend what little was left from the wreck in a vain attempt to restore mind and health to the shattered old man. Lethington, Senior, had rallied for a time, only to die in a foreign land and be brought home by the son and daughter who had now nothing left but their two selves and their courage. When they came back Oliver and his crowd had gained their influence over Ted Burton, who saw with some wonder

that Tom's popularity still remained, even though he was almost a pauper. The boy could not reconcile this with the ideas of life which his new friends had brought him. This crowd clustered about the most lavish spender, and the cost of their admiration, as the boy craved it, had already made appalling inroads on even his luxurious finances.

There was another thing, too. This was a girl, whose clear blue eyes seemed to look at him reproachfully. He flushed a little as he remembered some earlier passages between them, the dear dream castles they had built, the promises and plans for the future. How was it that the change had come? It was so imperceptible that he had not realized it at first, but she had been away so long, and when she had returned their paths had diverged so widely. He would even now like to go back to her, if he could reconcile his present "liberty" with all that she stood for, but he could not. It made him uncomfortable to meet her, even though in her own pride she calmly ignored all that had gone before, and so he stayed away.

He looked at his watch with sudden resolve. He would cut the crowd to-day and go home and take his sister for a spin in his new Panhard. Poor Leila, he suspected that she had worried over him of late, when he had spent so many nights in Oliver's rooms, instead of returning to the big house in the suburbs. It was so infernally dull, he told himself, to drown out a certain accusing voice. He would go home and cheer her up.

Just back of him was an archway whose partly drawn portiere half concealed, half revealed the room beyond. Here a man had entered while Lethington and Burton were talking. As he caught sight of the two through the archway he halted, surveyed them critically, as though considering the possibilities of the situation, and then with soundless tread crossed the room, took a chair where the folds of the curtain

concealed him from the next room, and listened. Lethington and the boy were not five feet away from him, and although the newcomer was seemingly oblivious of their presence, entirely out of sight and absorbed in a newspaper, his intent ears lost not a word, and his eyes glinted and narrowed unpleasantly as he listened.

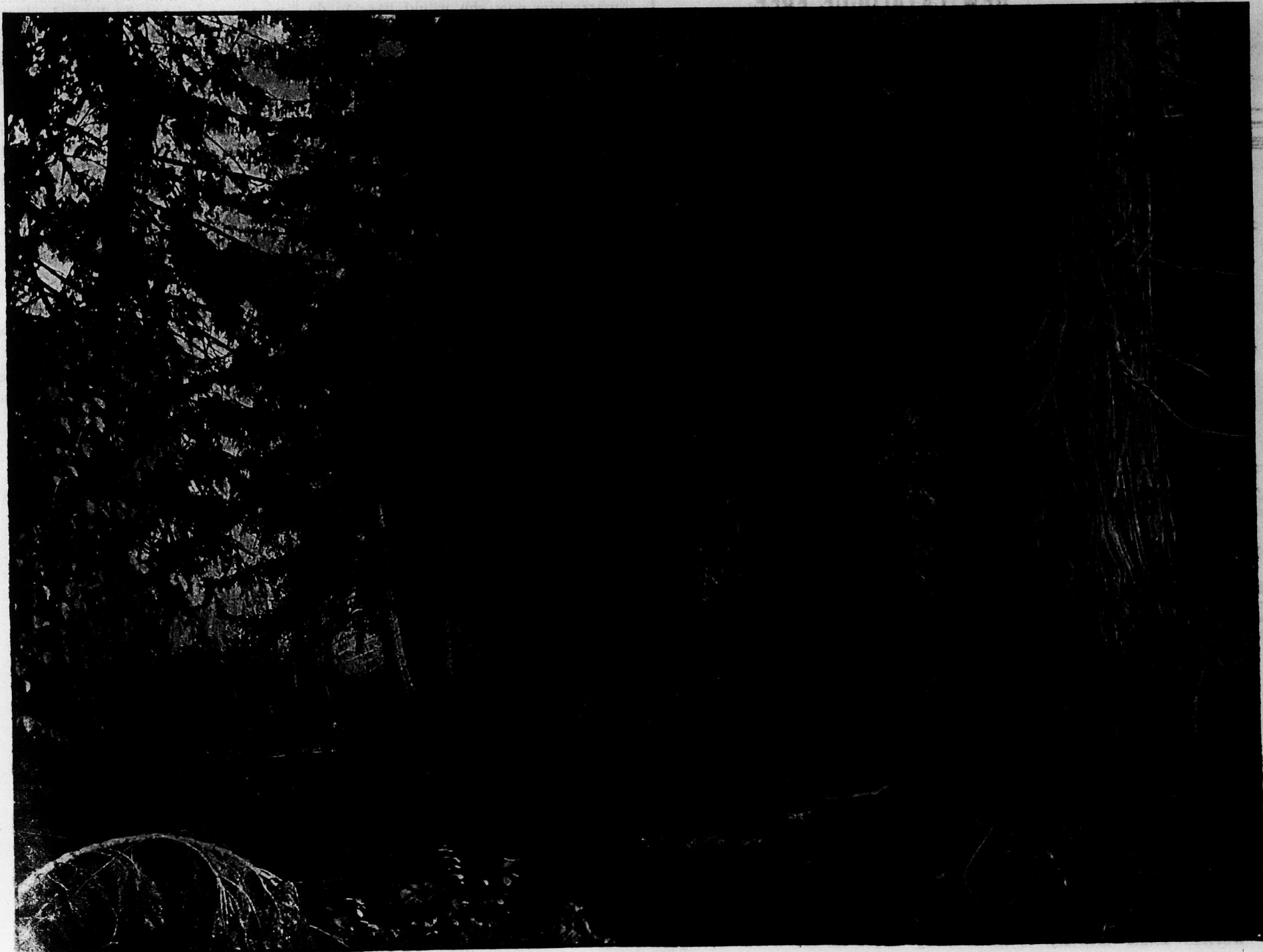
He was a man about forty, dressed with most careful precision, his smoothly brushed brown hair showing a faint trace of gray, the face a little more than good-looking, though lacking in fineness of cut. The mouth was a little loose, the heavy-lidded eyes were handsome, and a calculating gleam in them.

This was Boyd Oliver, the man who had appeared in town less than a year before, taken expensive bachelor apartments and introduced himself with a certain easy grace as a chronic wanderer who was almost a stranger to his own country, having spent most of his time between Paris and Vienna. It was Ted Burton and a few others of the younger men who had gotten him into this exclusive club, although it was whispered that he had had a narrow escape from being blackballed.

The listener's face darkened into an angry sneer. When he heard Lethington's good-bye he shrank still further out of sight behind the curtain.

"So you'll interfere, will you?" he ruminated, the handsome eyes narrowing into gleaming slits. "It's fortunate that I happened along just now. I haven't any intention of letting go of a good thing when I get it, so if my young prig wants to reform Burton he'll have to work. I think I can win out on this game."

He permitted himself a satisfied smile, looked cautiously into the next room and saw Ted Burton in the act of consulting his watch. In a moment he guessed Ted's frame of mind and prepared to mould it to his own. He walked out and laid a friendly hand on the boy's shoulder.



Giant Cedars at Mara, Northern end of the Okanagan Valley, B.C.