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One entered first into a room of fair size, where inviting chairs and a pleasant litter of books and magazines, and a pipe or two, seemed to indicate that the master of the place had just stepped out for a moment, but would come strolling back in a minute or two, yet this was only the outer gate of the citadel. You were here met by a discreet man servant. If you were known your coat was taken, and you were promptly ushered through the archway whose muffling curtains were always drawn by night. If you were strange, and had not the card of a friend to bring Mr. Boyd Oliver out from the room beyond to greet you with pleasant recognition, the chances are ten to one that you saw no one at all, or at best that you did not get beyond that comfortable outer room.

Beyond the curtains was a large room elaborately beautiful in every detail, this, too, with the ever-present suggestion of physical comfort and ease. Here, to-night, half a dozen men sat around a table, with frequently replenished glasses beside them and growing and diminishing piles of chips. What of it? May not a man have a game or two in his own rooms with his friends, even though the stakes may sometimes rise high? It was well within the law, if by chance any inquiring eye should get beyond that ante-room, but beyond this the beautiful hangings on the walls screened other doorways. There were three of these, each leading to a smaller room containing a mysterious device of its own with a presiding genius in charge. Here excited groups clustered, some cool and cautious, some gay and reckless, some haggard with the strain of heavy losses. In short, from being an affable "good fellow" who threw open his rooms for the companionship of others, Mr. Boyd Oliver had cleverly insinuated one change after another, until the suite was nothing more nor less than a luxurious, closely secluded gambling house, operating outside the pale of the law, but conducted so skillfully that the law had never scented its pernicious presence, might never have done so, perhaps, but for the advent of that quiet little man in gray, of whose presence in town Mr. Oliver was quite ignorant.

Boyd Oliver sat at the table in the larger room. He was always ready for a "friendly game," but he never patronized the little rooms beyond. The little spinning wheel, with the watchful croupier above it, was "for the amusement of his friends," he said, but when the lights went out at night, sometimes so far in the morning that dawn had lightened the outer world, when this way of amusing his friends had ceased until another night, it was always he who was the richer. Some of them won, to be sure, and won enormously, while others lost to the desperation point, but Boyd Oliver was living on them all.

Ted Burton sat beside him. His face was flushed and hot; he had been losing steadily, and the glass beside him had been replenished far too often. Presently he flung his hand down on the table and without a word rose and walked toward a curtained archway leading to the one secluded and quiet room of the suite, Oliver's bed-room.

"Oh, I say, Burton, don't desert us!" one of the men called after him, but he paid no attention, and disappeared in Oliver's room.

A light-stepping attendant came in from the outer room, looked the occupants over quickly and laid a card before Oliver with a low-toned word of explanation. He had orders that all cards to strangers should first be submitted to his master, no matter for whom the visitors might inquire.

A momentary frown flickered over the suave mask of Oliver's face. Mr. Thomas Courtney Lethington! Pray what was he doing here, asking for Ted Burton? Why was he following the boy up, and what business had he to come here in his search?

Oliver put the card in his pocket and arose, going a few steps away from the table before he gave instructions to his man.

"Tell Mr. Lethington that Mr. Burton is not here. Get him away as quietly as possible."

Then he strolled after Ted, with a

casual excuse to the men he had left. His fingers played with the little pasteboard in his pocket. What did it mean? This fellow Lethington was getting to be a nuisance. For some weeks past, ever since that overheard interview at the club, angry as it had been, Oliver had felt his hold on the boy slipping. He was getting harder to manage by jocular flattery and good-fellowship, more irritable under the constant drain.

Oliver looked back for a moment at the soft colored, luxurious rooms which he had so cunningly changed into a gambling establishment for his own gain. It was simply coining money for him, but he was beginning to be uneasy. Something—his "lucky imp," he called it—was whispering uneasy premonitions that it was time to "move along." It was like throwing away money, he reflected, regretfully, when he had such an easy thing here and was living royally at the expense of Ted Burton and young fools like him, but Boyd Oliver had all of a gambler's superstition, and never turned a deaf ear to the whispering of the "lucky imp." It was too bad, but he had made a fine roll of money at it, and by next week he would quietly close up and get out of town with his profits. Confound that Lethington! Oliver somehow held him accountable for the turn of fortune which he felt to be coming his way.

Sauntering into the bed-room, he found Ted Burton slouched moodily down in a chair, his hands deep in his pockets, his chin almost touching his chest. The boy was sounding the depths of shamed desperation. The sum he had lost to-night, following on the heels of previous losses, was appalling even to his recklessness. Wealthy as he was, his father's estate was not yet settled, his money was tied up. He had drawn all he could from the executors and had mortgaged his credit until he was overwhelmingly in debt, and nothing remained now but disclosure and disgrace.

He did not know where to turn to pay his losses to-night. Leila? No, he dared not ask Leila for a sum like that. He had been a fool, perhaps a black-guard, but he would at least be man enough to stand for his own debts.

He scarcely looked up as Oliver entered. His feelings toward this man had changed of late. He no longer had the boy's excitable admiration for the world who flattered and led him; he had learned that the bright tissue of the life that Oliver showed him had ugly seams on the hidden side, yet matters had gone so far that there seemed no way out. They were both in the thing so deeply, he argued, that there was nothing to do but to stick together. He did not suspect how completely Oliver was using him, nor how swiftly he would be thrown aside when his use was over, but he was conscious of a growing restlessness and distaste for it all, without being able to get away from it.

"Bad luck to-night, old man?"

Burton nodded, leaned forward with an irritable sigh and propped his chin on his hands. His brain ached with the endless procession of figures marching through it.

"I've reached the end," he said, shortly. "There will be a beautiful scandal in a day or two."

"Oh, nonsense!" protested the older man, mentally congratulating himself that he had decided to get out of it, and concerned only to postpone developments until after his own departure. "Brace up, there's no alley so dark that there isn't light at the other end. You'll pull yourself together inside of a week."

Ted shook his head.

"It's too late. I made my last plunge to-night, and lost. Last week I took a flyer in B. & Q. to pay Halliwell, and to-day that dropped out of sight and left me stranded for thousands. Old Morrison won't advance me another cent, and everybody I owe seems to know that I'm down and is pressing me for money. Money! By the terms of my father's will I can't touch the principal until I am thirty, and it will take every cent of my income for five years to pay what I owe now! No, it's no use, I've reached the limit. It—it's the coming out that I mind," he added,