

## The Club of Knaves

(Concluded from page 6.)

and homeward journey made but a vague impression on his mind.

But as he crawled into bed—at about 3.30—he realized that he must choose between becoming a member of the Club of Knaves, and taking the chance of a trip to Sing Sing; or braving the vengeance of Dr. Orand.

It was a choice of two evils, and a case when he who hesitates is lost.

One might be safe in saying that the club had gained a new member.

NOTHING that we do seems particularly extraordinary at the time. It is only on looking back that a man wonders how he could have taken certain events as coolly as he did.

A few weeks after he had felt Dr. Orand's influence, Barry became aware that he had fallen under the sway of his personality to such an extent that he didn't even dream of opposing him in the slightest degree. Indeed, the chief had made no mistake in choosing his man. Barry craved excitement as some men do strong drink, and the thrills experienced in the first few nocturnal excursions in quest of other people's money made him eager for more.

On the surface no difference could be detected in his character, but underneath had sprung up a certain recklessness. Strangely enough, his conscience, which had once been extraordinarily active, did not trouble him in the slightest.

Three weeks later, to be exact, after Barry had joined, there was to be a meeting of the Club of Knaves. It was the rule that no member should put in appearance before twelve o'clock, so he had bought a ticket for a play which was taking Broadway by storm. One of the characters develops a wonderful hypnotic power, and exercises it widely. The audience seemed to be convinced of the plausibility of it all; Barry thought the idea absurd. Of course, a man gifted with a strong mentality could influence one with a weak will, but to carry the thing further than that seemed to him out of the question.

It was with a sigh of relief that he arose from his seat when the curtain had dropped on the last act. Broadway was crowded, and he strolled slowly along, studying the faces on all sides which were as alike to him as a number of volumes of a minor poet. As he reached Herald Square he noticed that it was about the same time of night when chance had first played him into Dr. Orand's hands. What a difference a few weeks had made!

To-night, he told himself, he was keeping an appointment at the man's house; and furthermore expected to enjoy himself in the company of a number of fellow criminals. It was far from a dull crew.

Five minutes' walk, more or less, and Barry had arrived at his destination. As usual, the doorway of the house was as dark as a tomb; but he had grown accustomed to that, by now. Groping in the gloom he rapped several times with his knuckles—the signal for admission—and the door was immediately swung open by a servant. To him he entrusted his hat and overcoat, and proceeded to join the company.

As he entered the meeting room he was the target of a number of good-natured remarks from the assembled group. The room was filled with tobacco smoke, but he managed to make his way to an empty seat by Kirke, the secretary of the club.

"Where's Dr. Orand?" he asked, for conversation's sake.

Kirke shook his head. "I haven't the slightest idea, and to tell the truth

I'm worried. The chief is always on time, and told me he'd show up by eleven. It's after twelve now; and I can't think of anything that could have detained him."

"Guess he'll drop in any minute."

The secretary said nothing, but there was a dubious expression on his thin face; and as time passed without Dr. Orand putting in an appearance, it deepened. Barry noticed that he began to fidget in his seat, and look continually at his watch. Following on the heels of the conviction that something was wrong came the voice of a man yelling an extra from the street.

His disjointed exclamations conveyed the news that there had been a train wreck, and that the paper would give full details.

Kirke jumped to his feet and started to leave the room. Obeying an impulse of curiosity, Barry followed suit. He wanted to be in on anything that might take place.

Together they left the house, and stopped a newsboy. Both secured a paper at the same time and saw headlines glaring at them from the top of the sheet.

"Great Train Wreck! Fifty Killed!"

Barry ran his eye over the list of dead. Among them was the name of Dr. Orand!

For the moment he was too dazed to do anything save show the paper to his companion.

So the chief had ceased to be a factor in his life?

KIRKE read the news without a change of expression.

"I felt something had happened to the chief," he said slowly, "and now I see it wasn't an idle fancy."

"And what are we going to do now?" asked Barry lamely, after he had in a measure recovered from the shock.

"Why, break the news, of course." Taken up with their own thoughts they walked back in silence, and it was not until they were outside of the room where the men were gathered that Kirke spoke.

"I want to have a talk with you after the others go," said he. "Remember!"

Barry nodded, turned the knob of the door, and threw it open.

He was greeted with a chorus of questions.

"What's up?"

"Any news?"

"What has happened?"

As Kirke explained the room became the scene of commotion. Chairs were overturned by some in their eagerness to get a look at the paper, and Barry's was torn out of his hands. Everybody started talking at once; no one had an audience. The men were all too excited to talk sensibly.

Barry suggested to the secretary that he adjourn the meeting. The latter acted on the suggestion as soon as he managed to get a hearing. In five minutes all save them had left, and the members of the Club of Knaves scattered in New York's labyrinth of streets.

Kirke drew his seat up to the fire, which was burning feebly, and Barry did likewise; the while he wondered what was coming.

Although his companion seemed gazing into space, and spoke in a disinterested manner, he listened as if spell-bound.

"You know this is the last meeting of the Club of Knaves, for now that Dr. Orand has suffered a horrible death, and I am sure repented of his misdeeds in that last blinding flash of consciousness before the end, his

influence will pass too. I don't know why I am telling you this—perhaps it is because you interested me from the first. And I know you will be better able to face the future when you know all.

"Dr. Orand told me the circumstances under which you came under his control. Remember that night you saw an old college chum and thought it would be a good joke to pick his pocket?"

Barry nodded in a dazed manner.

"That was suggested to you by Dr. Orand. You may not know that he was one of the greatest hypnotists of modern times, and, as we found, used his power for evil purposes. It is only with his death that his hold on us is shattered. You, for example, have acted in the last few weeks in a way you'd never have even dreamed of a year ago."

"Then I was not responsible for my actions?" gasped Barry.

"No, neither were any of these men. And the chances are that this minute they are wondering how they came to be criminals. To-night is the end of it all."

"And you," said Barry, "how did you get under his control?"

Kirke shrugged his shoulders. "Enough that I would curse the day he came into my life if it were not for the fact that he has been fitly punished by fate."

He arose, walked over to one of the trays scattered around the room, poured out two drinks, and handed one to Barry.

They touched glasses and Kirke gave the toast.

"Let us drink," he said, "to the future, never to be haunted by the coils of the chief, and thank God for our rescue!"

They drank the toast in silence.

## White Elephant

(Continued from page 8.)

variation?"

"No, but—don't you see?—Dad is. He asked me to order them for him, and I was in a dilemma. If I told him the real price, he would think it extravagant for me to get so many operas, while if I said too little he would want me to order a lot of Lauders for him, and I'd have to pay the difference. See?"

"Well, how'd you manoeuvre between your record Scylla and Charybdis?"

"Steered midway between them. Compromised. Told him three-quarters the price. And that nearly bankrupted me. For I am giving Mother the most celestial operas by Melba and Tetrazzini and Farrar and Caruso and Amato. You know poor dear Mother never goes to Grand Opera, and it seems a shame for her not to hear something really good. Of course I am just crazy about them, too, and could not afford to get both them and the Christmas books, jewelry and cigars of the approved edition, karat and brand. So it seemed more sensible to get just records."

"Guess we'll have a record Christmas, all right," chuckled Murray, as they turned in at the gate.

Late that night Mrs. MacNab was awakened by feeling, rather than hearing, music. She sat up in bed. Moonlight flooded the room, revealing that the bed next hers was empty. Through the window she could see the dark, attenuated shadows of the elms etched on the snow, giving the effect of seaweed tide-pressed on Maine beach.

"She is my Daisy . . . She's the sweetest sugar candy," sang a voice—Harry Lauder's.

It was not some passerby going home late from a dance, as she had

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