

Young Man Adventure

It was a feeling of extreme satisfaction to Barry Parker, to be young and free and expectant; and, as he sat in a comfortable armchair in his apartments in Curzon Street, he thought back over the past two weeks. In that short space of time a lot had happened to Barry. He had come away from New York where things had begun to get too hot for him, and was now settled in his former apartments in London. Barry had known he could never corner enough courage to go up home to Manchester, so here he was in London. He was infinitely contented. The fact that he had been the most notable foreign criminal in America was part of a natural sequence to Barry because he always made a point of being best at whatever he was engaged in, even if it were infamous. But he felt that he was through with all that now, and ready to settle down as an honest gentleman with his yearly income. He was a fascinating young man and although he constantly remarked to his friends, in his uniquely jocular way, that he wasn't to be trusted for an instant, still, they all loved him as a brother. He had that mixture of culture and quiet personality which is the most sparkling quality of a young Englishman's character.

Barry was rudely jerked out of his reverie by the insistent jangling of his telephone. He reached for it and put the receiver to his ear. A nervous voice at the end of the wire announced that it was Fields, the banker's son.

"Just heard you were in the city Parker, old man—I—I—well, could you see me right away?"

"All right, old man, replied Barry, "you may come up immediately."

Fields was a wild young rotter, thought Barry, probably in some scrape or other.

Twenty minutes later Fields arrived and, after smoking one of Barry's cigarettes to steady his nerves, launched his troubles at him in short, nervous sentences.

"I'm in for it, Barry, . . . drew on the old man again . . . forged his cheque . . . he says he's through with me this time if I don't get five thousand pounds before to-morrow morning's audit at the bank."

Barry considered. He liked young Fields and had done him a favor before.

"Well," he said, "I haven't got five thousand pounds, but there's just a chance . . . let me see, . . . yes! I'll have it for you to-morrow. Now run along and get some sleep, and let me think this over."

An hour later, as Big Ben sonorously announced the hour of two o'clock through the fog, Barry was walking across Berkley Square. He was wondering if old Schofield still had this beat and how long he would have to wait. He relaxed, standing on the corner. He asked himself why he should do this for that young rotter, and smash all his good resolutions. But then, the kid deserved another chance, perhaps he would want one himself some day. Quickly he jammed his hat down over his face and in the casual operation of lighting a cigarette, examined the figure of the policeman across the street. The figure was around the corner now, and, after waiting until he had gotten out of sight, Barry approached the object of his interest. It was a low, plain, brick building of evidently none but respectable pretensions. Its stark, cold appearance reminded Barry of old P. J. Carver himself, who had been robbing the people of London for years through his management of a gang of "sympathy workers." His crippled and innocent-looking blind men were on every big corner of the city, and all these came from behind the front of this apparently respectable wholesale house.

Parker gave the building a careful scrutiny and then disappeared into the alley-way on the side. A small flash-lamp came out of his pocket and its beam played along the brick walls and iron gratings over the tower-floor windows. He picked his way around to the rear of the building and stood for a moment studying the back entrance. All was in darkness. There was an adventurous glitter in his eyes now and something of a smile hovered about his lips as he stealthily crept down the three steps and tried the door, which he found to be locked. He took a little jimmy from his vest pocket and worked with the lock.—Ah! it opened easily. Now he was inside and locking the door after him. He could not see much of the room from the light let in by the one dirty window, so, putting his scarf over the end of his own light, he turned it on. Out it went sharply! He stiffened. There was some one else in that room. Barry heard, seemed to feel, the breathing, hard breathing. He sighed inwardly, and on went the dim light again. The person

was asleep. Yes, it was Carver himself on the cot over in that corner. Barry smiled. He had just imagined him like this, sleeping with his money; for he was sure that it was in this room that Carver kept his safe. In a moment he had found that too, and was examining it. A rather large safe in a curtained alcove. But Barry had cracked the very best safes and knew how to go about this job. Down on his knees he was working at the dial with his ear against the safe door, listening, listening, slowly turning the dial, click, click, click. Then suddenly he was on his feet, the flashlight out and the curtains drawn in front of him. He waited. It came again; three soft knocks on the door. Barry's thoughts were racing now, he would wait for a minute or two, see who this was. A key slid into the lock, the door opened and a man limped down into the room and across to Carver. He awakened Carver, who sat up sleepily and demanded who it was.

Is that you Crutch?" he mumbled, "you're awful late, how did you make out?"

"Good, boss," squeaked the Crutch, "wait till I turn on a light and take off this infernal thing."

Barry saw him in the light of the lamp now and he was unstrapping something from his body, something that gave him a distorted twist.

"I caught the theatre crowd," he was saying, "and a party bunch up on Essex Street. That's what kept me so late."

"How much," demanded Carver belligerently.

"Five pounds, about, boss in change."

All this Barry heard and saw through the slit in the curtain. His mind worked fast now. They would soon become aware of his presence. He felt for his automatic and stepped out from behind the curtain.

"Gentlemen," he said casually, "would you mind obliging me by opening this safe."

Carver wheeled around, the Crutch shrank before the automatic. Barry decided to simplify matters by throwing a scare into Carver. "Listen, Carver," he said snappily, "I know all about you and if you can't see your way clear to opening that safe, I can just fire a shot and bring Schofield in here on the run. The evidence is here."

Carver was pale now and his hands trembled as he opened the safe. Barry watched him as he handed over the cash box. He covered Carver and the Crutch while he counted out five thousand pounds. Having placed

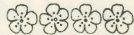
the money in his pocket, he backed towards the door, automatic levelled. From the open doorway Barry smiled a flashing adieu and slammed the door behind him. By the time Carver and Crutch had got the door open again Barry was lost in the shadows of the alley-way.

Two blocks up the street Barry stepped on the sidewalk and strolled nonchalantly towards his waiting two-seater. He opened the car door and then a little cold shiver ran up his spine. There in his car was a figure in brass buttons. He stood for a moment frozen with surprise and terror. Was the law in wait for him? Was he caught now after all this? His heart pounded—Then slowly he realized that the figure did not move. He leaned over, Schofield was asleep.

"Umph! indeed sir" blinked that very embarrassed constable. "Sorry sir, just dropped off sir." He clambered out of the car.

Seconds later Barry was speeding up the deserted boulevard. He relaxed and wiped the perspiration from his forehead. "Whew" he breathed, "after that nightmare it's the 'straight and narrow' for sure."

—J.D.F., '35



If eyes were made for seeing,
Then Beauty is its own excuse for being.

—Emerson

If a man wants to read good books, he must make a point of avoiding bad ones; for life is short, and time and energy limited.—*Schopenhauer*.

