

## *Eleven Thousand Pounds*

“Take care of it, Hugh.”

“All right, Sir; good-morning.”

“Good-morning;” and Mr. Hugh Randall put on his hat, and, passing through the bank, took his way into the town with £11,000 under his charge.

Oh, Hugh, Hugh, did it never occur to you that pockets *have* been picked before now, and that some such trifle as a few odd thousands might not come amiss to any one who, with limited means of his own, was desirous of increasing them at his neighbors’ expense? Whether the thought of danger entered his mind or not, Hugh risked it, and went leisurely on his way, for Mr. Hugh was one of those people who make a point of never being unduly excited. He was frequently employed in the execution of such transactions as the present between his uncle’s bank and the other banks of the city; consequently he felt much at home when, on reaching his destination, he marched up to that portion of the bank counter which was appropriated to the business transactions of a multitude of people whose surnames happened to fall within the bounds marked out by the letters “L to R.”

The elderly and precise clerk who occupied the high stool on the opposite side of the counter was almost shaken out of his propriety by Hugh’s start and confused exclamation, as, after searching vainly in the depths of his pockets for the precious notes, the fact dawned upon him that they were gone, unmistakably gone.

“What’s the matter, Mr. Hugh?” “What is it?” was repeated more than once before his scattered senses were recalled, and then the query was only met by another, and one which, alas! was not to be so easily answered. “What *am* I to do?” were the words which he at last stammered out. Had any one kindly suggested some plan by which he might, without loss of time, have shipped himself for the antipodes, no doubt Hugh would gladly have adopted it; and perhaps his gratitude would have been quite as great had the floor opened and swallowed him up, hiding from his bewildered eyes the inquiring faces around, which seemed to be dancing waltzes with the green lamp-shades, to the sound of the sovereigns clinking in the little scales. Unfortunately, neither of these favorable openings presented itself, and, in default of either, he returned in the most crest-fallen condition, as fast as a Hansom cab could carry him, to the room which he had left so complacently less than an hour before.

How Hugh managed his confession he could never afterward remember; but nothing could efface the recollection of the grave kindness which, amidst his extreme annoyance, his uncle showed toward himself, and which was harder to bear than the sternest reproofs. Half unconsciously, Hugh felt that even then the uncle, who had been as a father to him, had not forgotten the young brother, whose dying message from a field of battle had commended the baby-boy whom he had never seen, to a care scarcely less kind and watchful than his own might have been. Once in possession of the facts of the loss, Mr. Randall’s views instantly shaped themselves into the definite form of “the police station,” whither the hapless steed of the patent Hansom was urged by every inducement that could be afforded by the driver’s whip, to which,

but for a lingering sense of propriety, Hugh would fain have added the strokes of his umbrella.

As he and his uncle were ushered into the inspector's presence, Hugh experienced, to an uncomfortable degree, a return of the feelings which years ago possessed him, when the discipline of school life brought him into unpleasantly close communication with the head-master. The inspector was a gentleman who had seen many days since that eventful one on which he rose from the inferior position which called for the exhibition of his prowess in whatever field might be afforded by the streets for its display; consequently his personal appearance had now assumed a portly dignity much in accordance with his more domestic, but doubtless immeasurably more elevated, sphere of labor. He had apparently been aroused from an afternoon doze by the entrance of his visitors; but the air of dull business which he had contrived to assume very soon gave place to an excitement which he could scarcely conceal under a veil of decorous sorrow for Mr. Randall's loss. Rubbing his hands, he took up his position behind an official-looking desk, and proceeded to subject Hugh to a rigorous cross-examination upon every particular of the theft. Poor Hugh! he began to feel as if the thumb-screw itself would be a mild form of treatment compared with the neatly-turned questions by which the inspector made him confess himself guilty of the most egregious carelessness in the presence of his uncle, and one or two attendant policemen, who he *felt* were standing behind him open-mouthed with wonderment, in contemplation of the phenomenon of a man who, having come to years of discretion, had been so devoid of common-sense as to walk down a crowded thoroughfare, in the busiest part of the afternoon, with eleven thousand pounds in his coat-tails. The examination—which indeed elicited little else—being ended, an ominous silence ensued, broken after a few minutes by the inspector, who, striking his hand on the desk, ejaculated, "I have your man!" with a warmth which almost made the two gentlemen expect to see the flattened form of the thief lying upon the desk when the official hand was withdrawn. Further explanations put them in possession of the fact that a celebrated detective was at the moment in the city, nay, in the very police-station itself, having come down from London in the course of an investigation in which he was engaged; "and," added the inspector, "if any one can find your money, he's the man."

Mr. Taplin soon added his presence to the council of war. He was a great contrast to his brother official, being rather below the middle height, and of a spare, wiry figure; and was, moreover, possessed of sharply-cut features and a pair of keen gray eyes, which, without the smallest symptom of restlessness, seemed to take in to the full every thing around. As Hugh glanced from the one man to the other, the vision of a bull-dog and a greyhound flashed through his mind, and he instinctively came to a conclusion as to which of the two was the more likely to run down the game. His meditations were brought to a close by the request for "particulars," and once more he went through the meager details, which he felt only sufficed to make him an object of pity to all beholders. Wasn't it enough to have made away with eleven thousand pounds of other people's money, without having perpetually to refresh his memory on the subject? and he felt strongly moved to appropriate to his own case sundry poetical similes of "stags at bay," "hunted lions," and so forth; consequently the detective's assurance of his certainty that the money was on its way either to London or America was rather crossly received.

"I don't see what's the use of your being certain," he answered, somewhat sharply; "better say the North Pole at once; I should be quite as likely to find it."

Mr. Taplin vouchsafed no other reply than the shadow of a smile, showing his pitying sense of the young man's inability to estimate the extent of *his* resources. He was not one of the people who carry on all their mental processes outside their heads, and a silence fell on the whole party for several minutes, during which, with amazing rapidity of thought, the detective laid his schemes, the first step in which was a visit to the post office just before the bags were made up.

By that time Hugh's fit of injured innocence had been succeeded by despondency, and he watched with extreme anxiety while, in accordance with the detective's directions, the registered letters were spread out before them. There was a line which bounded even Mr. Taplin's powers; here he might look, but he might not touch. As he bent over the letters Hugh saw a flash of pleasure in the gray eye as it rested on an envelope addressed, in a scrawling hand, to "Mrs. G. Hopkins, 19 P— Street, London." The detective just laid one finger on it, turned to Hugh, and said, with an emphasis which carried weight with it, "Your money is in that letter, or it's gone beyond our reach. You must come up to town with me to-night."

A few hours later the two were shooting along the line on their way to London. Now, if there was one thing which Hugh Randall hated more than another, it was traveling by night, and with the words "wild-goose chase" running races with each other in his head, he was not likely to look with favor on the present expedition, or to compose himself very tranquilly to sleep. The middle-aged gentleman by his side was soon snoring sonorously; the old lady at the farther end of the carriage began a gentle accompaniment; and Hugh was reduced to watching, with some degree of interest, the young lady whom she chaperoned, while she divested herself of her bonnet, and enveloped her brown hair in a bewitching arrangement of blue wool, such as he now beheld for the first time in perfection, having hitherto only seen the article in a transition state, trussed on the knitting-pins with which his sisters toiled in anticipation of a bazaar which was to come off the following Christmas. But even this little amusement was soon denied; for the wearer, evidently being disposed to follow her chaperon's example and go to sleep, Hugh withdrew his eyes, only to meet the perfectly sleepless ones opposite. He tried a few scraps of conversation, but Mr. Taplin appeared more disposed for meditation, and Hugh sought solace in the contemplation of the same scene reversed, as reflected in the window-pane. He grew provoked as time went on, and sleep, which reigned undisturbed at the other end of the carriage, entirely declined to visit either his companion or himself. "Not that I think he wants it," he soliloquized; "I never saw any thing like those eyes, so terribly wide-awake. I don't believe a fly could stir in that carriage and he not see it. I wonder if he thinks that old lady is a 'case;' how he looks at her!" In a few moments more Hugh was rushing, in his dreams, no more along a material railway, but down a fathomless abyss in pursuit of a Hansom containing a stout old lady in a blue head-dress trimmed with bank-notes, who was being driven to Newgate by Mr. Taplin. He awoke, with a start, to encounter the gray eyes over which no veil of drowsiness had fallen; and when the hours of the weary night had dragged through, and a succession of equally unpleasing dreams had given way to the cold reality of a London station in the early dawn, the detective was as perfectly himself as though he had enjoyed hours of refreshing sleep, and the ringing cheerful voice which proposed a bath and breakfast sounded wonderfully fresh and pleasant.

The curtain next rises upon a trio passing along the streets of London. This trio consisted of our two friends and the postman in whose beat P— Street was situated. By a hasty visit to the district post-office, Mr. Taplin had possessed himself of such information as was necessary for his

purpose, and having given minute directions to the postman, had joined him again when he reached the street. All hopes of seeing the money had faded from Hugh's mind again and again, but his heart beat faster than usual as they turned into the dingy-looking street in which the last scene of the play was to be enacted, and by the time they reached the door of No. 19 it was beating like a sledge-hammer. Taplin desired him to be quite quiet, and by a look enforced on the postman the remembrance of the directions he had given; for the detective was far too canny to risk, by their reiteration, the calmness upon which the chance of their being carried out depended.

The double knock was quickly answered, and Hugh started back almost as if he were the thief when the door opened, only disclosing, however, a rather showy-looking woman. Mr. Taplin stood back, just hidden from her sight, but in the quiet of the dull street every word came distinctly through the frosty morning air.

“Registered letter. ‘Mrs. G. Hopkins.’ Can she sign the paper?”

Then the answer: “I am Mrs. Hopkins. Give it here.”

In accordance with his orders the postman only produced the paper, while apparently searching in his pouch for the letter. Mrs. Hopkins took the bait most satisfactorily, walked away, and after a few moments of suspense the anxious listeners heard her footsteps as she returned with the signed paper and handed it to the postman, who then placed the letter in her hand. In another moment—Hugh scarcely knew how, so rapid was the change—the postman was doubling round the corner of the street, with a well-earned coin in his pocket, and Mr. Taplin was in the narrow passage, and had snatched the letter from its owner's hand. As Hugh pressed up to his side he tore open the seal, and the rustling notes lay in his hand! Hugh could scarcely believe his eyes; but a motion of his companion checked the torrent of wonder that was rushing from his lips. The unhappy woman had realized something of what had happened, and, with a faint cry of “It's all up with us!” fell back against the wall. A feeling akin to reverence took possession of Hugh Randall, as, without a shade of triumph in the success of his work, the detective supported her into the shabby parlor, and laid her on the black horse-hair sofa. It was a daring and perilous move to seize the letter, but his instructions certainly led him to run the risk. With a muttered “Are there no womenkind in the house?” he left the room, and Hugh heard the firm step sounding along the passage, and the clear voice calling at the top of the stairs, “Here, Betty—Susan—whatever your name is, where are you?” A slatternly maid-of-all-work answered the summons, in no small amazement at the sight of two strange gentlemen, and to her charge Mr. Taplin left her mistress, while he and Hugh assured themselves of the identity and completeness of the notes. Mrs. Hopkins soon recovered sufficiently to pour out a flood of tears and bewildered lamentations; but with calm patience the detective at length drew from her the facts which he needed. “Ah,” she cried, bitterly, “he told me he would make our fortune this time, and I should have plenty then. He drank every thing he made before, the wretch! and left me here in this miserable hole. But I'll be revenged on him yet.”

“Ah, poor thing! poor thing!” remarked the detective to Hugh; “there are generally women mixed up in this sort of thing. Money stolen in this sort of way is almost always sent to women. I suppose they think it is not so likely to be suspected.”

As they left the room, when Mr. Taplin had made such arrangements as suited his good will and pleasure, he desired Hugh to look at a photograph hanging in a frame over the chimney-piece, and no sooner were they in the street than, with the wonder with which one watches yards of many-colored ribbon drawn out from a conjuror's ears, Hugh beheld issuing from Mr. Taplin's pocket-book the duplicate of the carte. "That's the man," observed Mr. Taplin at last, with a ring of triumph even in his calm voice, "after whom I came down to your parts. Strange, now, isn't it? That was a little matter which took place weeks ago, and we were altogether off the scent. Well, we got on a new track early this week, and I went down, believing if I caught my bird any where it would be there. Then your business turned up, and, like a flash, it crossed my mind that in finding out the one I should just be carrying on the work I came after. I can't in any way account for it, but that was my impression; and you see how true it was. I knew enough of the fellow I was after to be pretty sure that, if your notes were in his hands, they would either come to town or go direct to America. But it was just a toss up between the two; and I should have been altogether at sea if it hadn't been for seeing this letter at the office. When I saw 'Mrs. Hopkins' I was as sure as that I was a living man that the money was there, for I knew 'Hopkins' was one of my man's *aliases*, though he was going by another name when he did the bit of work about which I went north. It was a queer thing seeing the photograph which I had to trace him by, and which had gone about in my pocket these few weeks till I knew the face as well as my own, hanging up over that poor thing's fireplace."

And so Hugh Randall went home again, not grudging his five hundred miles' journey, inasmuch as he carried with him eleven thousand pounds—but not in his coat-pocket.

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