THE USURPER

"It was best," he said. "I did it for the best. When those scoundrels seized her and left me for dead, they robbed me of every penny I possessed. Luck was dead against me. I heard she had fallen into the hands of a kind-hearted lady and a nobleman who would take care of her, and I—I'm a proud man, Lord Lorrimore, and I could not be a burden to her," and he hung his head.

"Y-es," said Lorrimore, "You are proud, I see. But did it never occur to you that the young lady might suffer somewhat at the loss of her brother, as we thought you."

Neville started.

"No," he said, "Poor Sylvia, did she—did she grieve much?"

Lorrimore laughed grimly.

"Great heaven, he asks me that!" he remarked, ironically. "Did she grieve? Why, my good friend, she nearly died; we had to light death inch by inch, hour by hour, for days; and as to grieving, why—but I think I'd better stop. A proud man's bad enough, but a conceited one is worse, and I should make you conceited."

Neville held his face in his hands.

"My dear, dear darling!" he murmured. "And she's in there!" he exclaimed, dropping his hand to Lorrimore's arm. "In there! Think of it, my lord! And I shall see her directly."

Lorrimore sighed.

"Yes," he said, hanging his head. "You are a happy man! So is the woman I love in there, and I shall probably see her directly; but it will be for the last time—the last time!" and with a sigh he rose.

Neville, biting his lips, looked at him.

"I—I wouldn't give up all hope, Lord Lorrimore," he said.

Lorrimore faced round and started, then shook his head.

"There can be no hope for me, Mr. Lynne," he said. "Miss Audrey is engaged to your brother."

Neville groaned.

"Look here!" he said, in his abrupt, backwoods fashion. "Don't you go off to Africa yet. You can't tell what may turn up. Look at my case! Here am I sneaking in this garden to get a glimpse of an old friend, Audrey, and I hear the voice"—his own broke—"of the girl I love, the girl I've been parted from forever, as I thought. Take courage by my luck."

"Yes! But your girl is not engaged to another man—at least, I don't think so; I don't know!"

"What!" gasped Neville, at the mere idea of a doubt. "Sylvia engaged!"

"You see!" said Lorrimore, with a sad smile. "You can imagine how I feel! Hopeless!"

"No, I can't!" said Neville, his hands clinched at his side, his broad chest heaving. "If I found Sylvia, my little Sylvia, engaged, I'd——"

"Fling the other man out of the window," said Lorrimore, with a laugh and a sigh. "Yes, that's all very well for the backwoods of Australia, but——" he shrugged his shoulders, "well, Mr. Lynne, though nothing would give me greater delight than to fling Sir Jordan out of the window—I beg your pardon! I forgot that he is your brother!" he broke off, apologetically.

Neville shook his head and groaned:

"Would to God I could forget it, too!" he said.

Before Lorrimore could ask for an explanation of this singularly unfraternal sentiment Trale came up.

"There's Miss Audrey come out on the terrace, Mr. Neville," he said. "Now—now, I was thinking if his lordship wouldn't mind going and breaking your being here to her, you might go and see her. But you won't say anything about—about—you know what!" he implored.

Lorrimore assented at once.

"Wait here, Mr. Lynne, until I call," he said, and went toward the terrace.

Sylvia had sung twice, and had then run up to see Mercy.

"I'll smoke my cigar on the terrace," said the viscount, "if you'll come, Audrey. The signorina will join us when she comes down, I hope—that is, if she is not afraid of the night air."

"I'm afraid of nothing!" responded Sylvia, with a laugh, as she left the room.

"Lovely night, isn't it?" said the viscount, as he lit his cigar.

Audrey did not reply, but leaned her head on her hand and gazed into vacancy dreamily.

"How strange it is that your young friend does not get married. If I were unattached——" and he laughed.

"It is very fortunate for you that her ladyship is not here to hear you," said Audrey, with a smile; then she sighed. "Sylvia is very young, much younger than she looks—and why should she get married? Why should it be considered necessary that a woman should marry?" she asked, with barely concealed bitterness and irritation.

"Please ask me another," remarked the viscount. "Most women think it the great aim and end of their lives to enslave some wretched, unhappy man for—Hullo! who's this coming across the lawn By Jove! it's Lorrimore! Now look out for squalls, young lady!" and he whistled softly.

"Lord Lorrimore!" said Audrey, and she blushed and looked over her shoulder as if she meant to beat a retreat.

"No, you don't!" said the viscount. "No running away, Miss Audrey! Hallo, Lorrimore, where did you come from? How are you?"

Lorrimore came up the steps and shook hands with them, his eyes just glancing at the viscount, and fixing themselves sadly and wistfully on Audrey's downcast face.

"I came down this afternoon," he said, rather tamely. "The fact is, I'm off to Africa."

"To where?" exclaimed the viscount.

"Africa. And I thought I should like to say good-bye to Miss Hope before I went, as I shall be away some time."

Poor Audrey's heart beat heavily, and her bosom heaved.

"Good heavens! what a man you are for rushing about!" said the viscount, reproachfully. "You don't seem as if you could stop more than five minutes in one place. Africa, too! What's the use of spending your time among savages? Besides, if you're so fond of 'em, you might as well stay at home; we've got plenty of 'em here. Have a cigar?" Have some wine—I hope you've dined?"

Lorrimore said falsely that yes, he had dined, and accepted the cigar.

"We've got your friend, the famous Signorina Stella, in the house," said the viscount. "She'll be delighted to see you, I dare say, and I'll set her on to dissuading you from this absurd African idea; eh, Audrey?"

"Sylvia will be very sorry," she said, almost inaudibly.

"I'll go and see about some wine," said Lord Marlow.

The two left alone were silent for a moment or two, Audrey's heart beating too fast to allow of her speaking at first, and Lorrimore wondering how on earth he should break the news of Neville's proximity. At last he said:

"I'm afraid I have made my visit at an unconventionally late hour, Miss Hope, but I meant starting to-morrow."

"You meant," she said, keeping her voice steady by an effort.

"Yes, I may be a day or two later now. The fact is——" Then, like most men engaged in "breaking" the news, he blurted it out, "Audrey, I have heard of Neville Lynne."

She started, but did not look overcome with joy. She was too much engaged thinking of another man—the Earl of Lorrimore, to wit—to be very much moved, even by the return of her old friend.

"Neville!"

"Yes! He—well, the fact is, that he is

"Well," replied Lorrimore. "I should if Sylvia had not been here."

here——"

"Here! Where! Oh!" and she looked round.

"Yes," said Lorrimore. "I met him to-night, by the most singular chance, and I have only just left him."

"Left him? Where? Oh, why did you not bring him with you?" said Audrey.

"Sylvia! What has Sylvia to do with him or he with her?" demanded Audrey.

Lorrimore was a bad hand at telling a story, and he looked round helplessly.

"The long and short of it is," he said, "that they know each other—that they are both friends."

"Sylvia and Neville Lynne!"

"Yes."

And in as few words as possible he told her the story, or as much as he knew of it, Audrey's eyes growing larger and larger as she listened and gazed at him.

"All the while the poor girl was lying at Wildfall, as near death as she could be, and thinking him dead, he was at Lorn Hope Camp, within a few miles of her. It's the most exasperating, aggravating business aht the mind of man can conceive," he said, grimly. "Actually within a few miles of him and not to know of it."

"I—I am so sorry," faltered Audrey. "If I had known the terribel trouble you would have, I—I never, no, never, would have asked you——"

"Oh, I wasn't thinking of myself, not at all," he said, simply, "but of poor Sylvia. And now the question is, how am I going to bring him to her without scaring her out of her senses? She thinks him dead—dead, don't you see?"

"I see," said Audrey, slowly and thoughtfully. "Yes, I see!" And she indeed saw more than Lorrimore had put to her. She understood, now, why Sylvia was not married, why she received men's homage and admiration with such coldness and reserve. "Oh, the poor girl!" she muttered, "and to think it is Neville Lynne. Oh, I am so glad! So glad!" and in her joy at her prospects of her friend's happiness, she turned to him with tears glistening in her eyes, and looking so lovely that poor Lorrimore's head swam.

"Yes, I'm glad he's turned up, and—and I wish I'd found him," and he turned his head away.

Audrey's eyes fell.

"But now we've got to break the news to her," he said. "You see what a splendid hand I am at that kind of thing, and I'm afraid you will have to do it."

"Yes," said Audrey, softly. "I will do it. Where is he?"

"Out there in the shrubbery," he said. "Waiting for me to call him. Shall I do so?"

"No, no; not yet. He must not come yet, in case she should come out suddenly and see him, without being prepared—ah, here she is!" she broke off, as Sylvia's voice was heard singing as she came. "Here's Lord Lorrimore, Sylvia," said Audrey, trembling a little.

Sylvia utered an exclamation of pleasure.

"Oh, I am so glad!" and her soft little palm clung round his. "And how unexpected—isn't it, Audrey?"

"Yes," said Audrey. "Lord Lorrimore has come on—on business—business of yours."

"Of mine?" said Sylvia, smiling. "Has anything gone wrong at the opera? Has the manager refused to give me another engagement? What is it? Why do you all look so grave? You can't bring me very bad news, Lord Lorrimor, for—for I have had all my bad news, you see, and all those I love, Audrey, and Mercy, and you—if I may say so—are here near me, and safe. What is it?"

"It's—it's good news," stammered Lorrimore, but Audrey motioned him to keep silent.

"Yes, dear," she said, stealing her arm round her, "it is good news. Lord Lorrimore has come to-night with a strange, a wonderful story, so strange and wonderful as to seem unreal and impossible. Do you think you could bear to hear it, Sylvia." Her voice grew lower, tenderer. "Sometimes great joy is as hard to endure as great sorrow; sometimes to find that those we have lost, lost forever, as we though, are still liv——"

She stopped, terrified by the look that came into Sylvia's face; it was a look as of one who hopes, yet dares not believe.

"What—what —is it?" she panted, loking from one to the other, her face growing whiter each moment.

"Such wonderful things happen—truth is stranger than fiction," stammered Lorrimore, getting near her in case she should faint and fall. "We've read stories of people who've—who've—been supposed to be killed on—on the field of battle—you know, and—and turned up again, safe and sound after all——"

Sylvia started, her eyes closed for a moment, and they thought she would fall; she swayed lightly, but she caught Audrey's arm.

"It—is—Jack!" she breathed. "You—you have heard that—that he is not dead—not dead. Oh, God, don't keep me in suspense!" she pleaded. And she wrung her hands and looked from one to the other with an expression in her eyes that made Lorrimore turn his head away. "Don't keep me—not a moment—I can bear it! I dreamed that he was alive—ask Mercy—she will tell you that I did. Oh, Jack! Jack!"

"My dear," blurted out Lorrimore, "that—that jacket we brought you was his, right enough, but another man wore it, and—and you see——"

"Jack!" breathed from her parted lips.

"Call him," whispered Audrey, down whose cheeks the tears were running.

Lorrimore sprang to the steps and shouted, "Neville!"

A stalwart figure came running across the lawn, and in another moment Sylvia was lying in his arms, weeping, laughing, murmuring his name brokenly, her small, trembling hands patting his broad shoulders that she might convince herself that he was flesh and blood, her Jack and not a ghost.

Lorrimore led Audrey away.

"I wish to Heaven I were half as happy as those two!" he murmured.

(To be continued.)

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McKAY'S Great October Sale of Housefurnishings and Carpets

This is beyond a doubt one of the best October sales ever carried on in our splendid Housefurnishing and Carpet Sections. The first day of this great sale beat all previous selling records. You will find every line on sale is stamped by the highest perfection of design and quality, and a chance to beautify your home for little money. Come to-morrow, the second day of the sale.

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White Satin Quilts, October Sale Price, $1.59

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