

# THE USURPER

## CHAPTER II.

Two days passed—four days—and Neville Lyne was still at his claim. He had not been down to the camp, no one had come up to him since the doctor had paid him the visit. He had heard nothing of the death and burial of the man, the stranger; and solitary and alone but for the old woman, Mrs. Meth, he toiled on at his barren claim. Sometimes when the heat and the flies and the dust seemed worse than usual, he pitched the pick and the spade as far as he could, and flung himself on his back and lay with his hands over his eyes—not asleep, but thinking.

Thinking no doubt of his home far away in England; of the relatives and friends he might never see again; of the dear old home in the soft, luscious green fields in Devonshire; he used to think it rather a sloppy place and had been wont to declare that it always rained there. What would he give for a Devonshire downpour now. A young man, a gentleman, dressed in rags, who has had a crust of dry—very dry—bread for breakfast, and is rather uncertain as to whether it will run to quite such an extensive feed for dinner—a young man so utterly and completely down on his luck as Neville Lyne has plenty to think of.

The old hag came up shuffling—nearly everybody shuffled in Lorn Camp, it was found to be less exhausting than walking in the proper Christian manner—and shook an empty meal bag at him. "This yere bag's empty, young 'un," she said, not complainingly, but as if she were stating a matter of fact.

"So it is; so am I; so are you," said Neville, quietly; "and this is the claim."

But he got up and fetched his pick and spade and dropped into the hole again.

This was soon after noon on the fourth day after the doctor's visit. He had grown to hate the sight of the hole, the tools, the very sand and pebbles which he painfully cast up to the surface and after digging for an hour he looked up and laughed.

"Yes," he said, "it's played out, as the Doc said, and I've got it. But where?"

He looked absent round the plain. "To some other camp, I suppose. No use going back to England without money; better stop here where it isn't wicked to wear old clothes and go barefoot. Poverty's a crime in England, and I should be punished. Besides," he wiped the sweat from his brow and his handsome face clouded, "I couldn't take them; couldn't take Jordan's sneer. No! not England!"

Then he sighed. The old woman came down to the hole again, and shook the meal bag.

"This yere's empty as a drum!" she croaked.

Neville got out of the pit slowly, and walked to the hut, unlocked the box and took out a silver pencil-case, value probably two or three pence.

"My last piece of plate, Meth," he said, with a short laugh. "Take it down to the camp and swap it for meal. Somebody who can't write may take a fancy to it."

The old woman clutched at it with her grimy claw—every hand in Lorn Hope was more or less grimy; generally more—and shuffled off toward the camp.

Neville went slowly back to his claim and took up the pick.

"Yes," he said, "the Doc was right; Lorn Hope is played out. I ought to have cut it with my partner. Now, look here, I'll take just six strokes, and then—good-by and be blowed to you!"

He raised the pick above his head, and struck to the right of him. Once, twice, three, four, five times. A cloud of red dust, a heap of stones—as usual. He held the pick poised, a grim smile on his un-browed lips.

"The sixth and very last, so help me heaven!"

Down came the pick, up went the dust, down rattled the stones. He scarcely looked at the heap, but let the pick fall, and turned to leap from the hole. As he did so the corner of his eye, the corner only, caught the sweet, the precious, the dear, dull glitter, which is the grandest light earth holds for a digger's eyes. He swung round, dropped on his knees, and claving at the heap with his hands dragged out a nugget.

The sudden turn of the wheel of fortune stunned him for a moment. It was so unexpected, so unlooked for, that he could not believe in it.

He took it up and weighed it in both hands. In nine months a digger learns something of the value of a nugget. Neville thought there must be over a thousand pounds in the one he held in his hat trembling hands.

He turned it over as a miser turns over his title deeds, a bibliomane his rare first edition, a numismatist his precious coin; he held it close to his eyes, stroked it, even smelled it.

Over a thousand pounds! He sank down in the pit, leaning against the side, and still with his eyes fixed on it, thought of what he would do with it.

It was not a fortune. By no means. But a thousand pounds, remember, is a large sum to fall into the hands of a youngster of nineteen, especially when a few minutes before his only valuable was a silver pencil-case—which he had parted with for meal!

With a thousand pounds he could go back to England, if not rich, as riches are counted, yet at any rate, not a beggar. Jordan—no one—would laugh or sneer at him. A thousand pounds. He could buy land a small farm in Devonshire, and rear cattle. He could—at any

rate, he could get out of this beastly, sun-smitten, plague-stricken, blackguard-haunted Lorn Hope.

The thought recalled him to himself, sent the fire through his veins, infused him with energy, strength, hope, spirit. He leaped—not climbed—out of the pit with the precious nugget hidden under his tattered shirt, and ran toward the hut and began turning out the contents of his box, flinging the things to right and left in a senseless kind of fashion. What he was trying to do was to look out some more decent apparel.

The old woman darkened the doorway. "This yere's all I can get," she croaked, holding up the bag, in the bottom of which was some meal. "Taint much, taint half enough, but there don't seem no run on pencil-cases."

Neville turned his glowing face up to her wrinkled, veined one.

"All right, Meth," he said, with a laugh in his voice. "It's all right! I've struck it!" And he held up the nugget.

"Flush!" for the old woman had uttered a suppressed scream. "Struck it! just now, five minutes, half an hour—" He didn't know how long he had been sitting in the pit staring at the nugget. "Just after you had gone. Grand, isn't it?"

"Lork's sakes!" mumbled the old woman. "To think of it! And I'd 'er bet my bottom dollar that there warn't a spark of yellow in the whole claim."

"That's just it! That's just the way of it," said Neville, rapidly. "It always comes when you don't expect it, when you're not looking for it. That's the charm of this confounded gold-digging business. But it's come, that's the main thing."

"Let's wet it," said Mrs. Meth. Neville raked inside the box.

"Sorry," he said. "The last drop of liquor I had. Never mind, Meth. You shall have enough to swim in to-morrow. Let me see. This is the 10th, isn't it?"

Yes. The day the bank agent comes down. I'll take it down to the camp and swap it for notes, and then—"

He drew a long breath.

"And then you're off," said Mrs. Meth, stirring up the fire with one hand and turning out the meal on to a board with the other.

"Then, I'm off, as you say," he assented. "No more Lorn Hope for me, thank you."

"There might be more where that came from," she croaked, pointing a skinny finger at the yellow nugget lying beside him, within reach of his hand.

He shook his head.

"No; it's just a pocket, Meth. I know the look of it. And if there were—Well, I don't think it would keep me! I'm sick of it—just sick of it. I want to go back. I'm homesick—do you understand, Meth?"

Old Meth, rapidly making the meal into cakes, nodded.

"That's it," he said. "Homesick. Got the English fever on me, Meth. You don't know what that means. Lucky for you, perhaps. What's the time?"

He sprang up and screening his eyes with his hand, looked at the sinking sun.

"The bank agent will be down at the camp, I should think. I'm off."

"You'd best stop and get a cup of tea and some hot water," said the old woman. "You go rushing down there with that nugget on an empty stomach, and they'll get the best of you, young 'un."

He laughed and pushed the short curly hair from his forehead.

"You speak the words of wisdom and of truth, old Meth," he said. "I'll stay for tea. And, look here, I mean the square thing by you. You've stood by me through a long run of luck."

"That's nothing," she said, shifting the boiling kettle from the fire.

"But it is, and I'll stand by you, Meth. You shall have—let me see—you shall have fifty pounds."

"Fifty pounds!"

She opened her lips and showed her toothless gums.

"Yes," he said. "And if my partner were here he should have half of it—the nugget, I mean. But he checked it up."

"All the better for you," said the old woman, with a grin.

Neville nodded.

"Yes; and I wish he'd hung on. It's strange that I should have stayed."

"You believed in your luck, young 'un," she croaked. "Nothing like sticking to your luck. Here's your tea; and here's a cake."

He drank the awful mixture of currant bush and iron filings and ate some of the hot meal cake. Your gold digger knows not indignation.

"Fifty pounds," he said, as he set the tin mug down on the top of the box. "That will give you a fresh start, eh, Meth?"

She laughed and crooned.

He washed himself, thrust on a light peajacket, and with the precious nugget hidden beneath it, left the hut.

A new moon was rising placidly above the mountain range, its faintly defined crescent shining feebly against the light from the west in which the sun had sunk surrounded by golden fire.

Neville didn't stop to admire or even notice the moon; but with the nugget pressed close to his heart, walked rapidly toward the camp.

He passed his claim, glancing at it as a man glances at a much-loved mistress, picked his way past many a similar hole, threaded the tents and shanties which formed the outposts of the camp and

presently neared the centre—Sandy McGregor's grog tent.

It was a larger tent than the rest, and Neville as he approached it saw the lights of the candles and benzoline lamps shining through it. He also heard the buzz and murmur of voices. They floated through the evening air, clear, brisk and heavy with the remnant of the day's heat.

He trod lightly, springily, drawing strength and energy from the nugget pressed against his breast. He knew that the bank agent, if he had arrived, would be found there, and in imagination he already held and counted the precious notes which he would receive in exchange for his nugget.

He paused as he reached the tent, and drawing the lump of virgin gold from its hiding place, to take a last look at it! A thousand pounds! Dear, sweet, green, smiling England! A farm, loving cattle, green fields! Home! Oh! you discontented ones who dwell at home in the dear old land, and grumble at the weather and the this, that and the other, if you only knew how the wanderer longs for home, home!

The flap of the tent door was thrown back; he drew near and looked it. Sandy was standing at the bar, behind a counter of rough deal. The place was full, but the men were not sitting and sprawling around, playing cards or strolling, but standing in a crowd, with all their faces turned toward the end of the tent.

Something unusual and out of the ordinary was going on.

Neville drew nearer and looked farther in.

He saw, at the end of the big tent, a man standing on an upturned barrel. He was the spokesman of Lorn Hope, a ne'er-do-well with the gift of the gab, a man named Lockit, and was evidently holding forth.

He stood, ragged and with unkempt hair and long, neglected beard, a tin can in one hand, the other held up to invoke silence.

Neville, curious but impatient, listened.

And this is what he heard:

"Now, pards," the orator was saying, "this yere's the case in a nut-shell. A stranger comes to this yere camp, comes here from no one knows where or how, sick and sorry, and this yere stranger, after receivin' every attention from our mutual friend, the Doc—"

"Three cheers for the Doc!" cried a voice, thick with McGregor's whiskey; followed by "Shut up! Turn it off!"

"After receivin' every attention from the Doc," continued the orator, "this yere stranger hands in his checks. It ain't an unusual proceedin' in Lorn Hope by no means."

"A custom more honored in the breach than the observance," called out the doctor. "That's Shakespeare, boys."

"Right you are, Doc, and you ought to know," was the shouted response.

"Order!" said the speaker on the barrel. "This yere stranger cuts his cable, and upon my mortal soul, it's the best thing he could do."

"Heart! heart!"

"There's no luck in Lorn Hope for the residents, leave alone a stranger, boys."

"Heart! heart!" with increased emphasis.

"The stranger goes," continued the orator, "but he leaves something more than his blessing behind. Boys, he leaves a child—a girl. And now, gentlemen, the question for this free and independent assemblage of Lorn Hope citizens is to decide what shall be done with that child."

"Heart! heart! That's the question," hiccupped a miner close to the entrance, against which Neville stood and watched and listened.

"Nothing's known of this yere stranger," resumed Lockit. "He don't leave no will and he don't express no wish, and it's left to the—the—he sought for a big and appropriate word, and found it at last—"

"For the collective wisdom of Lorn Hope to decide. Here's the Doc. He was with the stranger in his last moments and he's offered to take the child; but—the speaker paused—"it 'pears to me that the Doc has as much as he can do to look after himself!"

"Heart! heart! heart!" from all parts of the audience.

"Just so! Well, this yere child is a kid at present, but she'll grow up to be useful presently, and if any one wants a promising young 'un, as can be taught to cook and look after things, now's his chance."

A hubbub of voices arose, almost drowning the speaker's last words, and in the midst of the noise Neville made his entrance without attracting any attention.

He looked round the tent. It was filled with the Lorn Hope population, men, boy, woman. His bright young eye felt ultimately upon a group standing just beneath the orator.

There were three or four women, and in their midst a young girl with gray eyes and dark hair. She looked pale and dared with fear, and clung to one of the women with one hand, while the other held back the thick wealth of hair from her puzzled and frightened eyes.

"A face, the eyes, smote Neville like a blow."

He saw the bank agent sitting on a plank and watching the proceedings with a smile of indolent amusement, but even as he looked at the agent he forgot him; the girl's pale, frightened face fascinated, absorbed him.

"Here's this young girl," resumed the orator, "a-goin' beggin', as you may say. Now, who—"

"I'll take her! I'll take her!" rose from different parts of the crowd.

"Too many of you!" retorted the speaker, tossing off a draught of McGregor's whiskey and chucking the empty tin to the proprietor of the saloon.

"On a time. You can't all of you have the young orphan. What's to be done?"

"Put her up for sale," cried a voice. "The highest bidder has her."

The orator paused a moment, and seemed to consider the proposal; then he nodded.

"Right you are," he said; "that's fair and square. Here's a useful lot—a young girl that'll learn to cook, and a cook before you can say Jack Robinson; a sunbeam for any man's home, let him be whosoever he may. Who bids for the orphan?"

The girl looked round at the hot, sun-burned faces, and her breath came fast and thick, clung to the light of the woman nearest to her, and the woman tried to soothe her.

The bank agent, who had been sitting on the plank, now rose and went toward the speaker.

tomed to the rough humor of a digger's camp, but it had been reserved for Lorn Hope to afford a new excitement. The scene reminded him of the "good" old slave times in the States.

"Now, then!" shouted the auctioneer. "Here's the rules and regulations. The orphan to be disposed of to the highest bidder."

"What are you going to do with the money?" demanded a voice.

"Lockit considered a moment."

"We'll hand it to the doctor as the beginning of a fund for the Great Lorn Hope Hospital."

"A jail 'ud be more useful," commented some one, sarcastically.

"Or a cemetery and lunatic asylum combined," yelled another.

"As you please, pards," said Lockit. "We can decide what we'll do with the money after we've got it. Jail, cemetery, hospital—"

"Or drinks all round," put in a voice.

"Whatever you like. Now, then, the first bid. Mind, the money's no use without a comfortable home and a good character; understand that. This yere orphan is the ward of Lorn Hope Camp. Now, then, first bid!"

Five men looked round at each other and laughed half shyly, no one liking to make the first offer.

"What! I'm to start the running eh?" said the auctioneer. "All right. He took out some buttons and odds and ends from his pocket, and pretended to count over a large quantity of coin."

"Well, to start you, here's a shilling. Somebody, half in jest, shouted:

"One and sixpence."

The ball was started and ran merrily. By sixpences and shillings and an occasional half crown the bidding was run up to three pounds.

Then, and instinctively put his hand over that part of his coat which covered his nugget.

(To be continued.)

### HEALTH FOR CHILDREN, EASE FOR MOTHERS

Baby's Own Tablets will promptly and surely cure all the minor ailments of babies and young children, such as constipation, colic, indigestion, diarrhoea, worms, teething troubles. They break up colds, prevent croup and cure simple fever. The Tablets contain no poisonous opiate or narcotic, as is testified by a Government analyst. Mrs. Ronald F. Seaford, Palmer Rapids, Ont., says: "I have found Baby's Own Tablets so satisfactory in curing the ailments of childhood that I would not care to be without them in the home." Sold by medicine dealers, or by mail at 25 cents a box from the Dr. Williams' Medicine Co., Brockville, Ont.

### REVIVAL OF OLD INNS.

Automobiles Have Given Old Taverns a New Lease of Life.

When the railway superseded the diligence, the coach, the chaise and Sterne's "disobedient" as means of European travel it was natural that the small roadside inn should suffer loss of patronage.

You tourist, unless a sentimental journeyer like Sterne or Stevenson, began to leap by rail from spot to spot like a grasshopper upon a map. He breakfasted in London, took train, lunched in Dover, had tea at Orléans or Dieppe and supper in Paris.

Now with dining cars he's even worse, unless he be a motorist—a sentimental motorist. And despite speed and rumors of speed, there are such things as sentimental motorists. Indeed, it is owing very largely to this class that such of the old inns of France and England as managed to survive the introduction of the railway have blossomed into renewed prosperity and usefulness.—Travel Magazine.

### The Poetry Crop.

The poetry editor of one of the duller and more expensive magazines took out his notebook.

"I'm compiling statistics on the way the poetry trade is trending," he said. "Last year's crop was a good one. It totalled up to 3,916,472 pieces. I'd classify it about like this:

Spring	1,123,762
Love	1,172,341
Despair	809,019
Hope	1,528
Your duty	818,810
My duty	2

3,916,472  
—Philadelphia Bulletin.

### Cheaper Radium.

Speaking at the Royal Institution, London, the results of recent researches in radioactivity. Professor Rutherford, of Manchester University, commenting on the fact that certain bodies had been separated from the substance thorium, said that the interest attaching to the separation of those bodies lay in the fact that they might have, by their aid, to obtain a reasonably large quantity of a radio-active substance at a comparatively low price.

Evils that are passed should not be mourned.—Italian.



His Reason for Not Fighting.

Jimmy—You're afraid to fight; that's what it is.

Tommy—No, it isn't, either; but if I do my mother'll know and lick me.

Jimmy—How'll she find it out, eh?

Tommy—She'll see the doctor going to your house.

"Coming Through."

Marjorie was gazing intently at her father's bald head as she remarked: "Papa, are you still growing?"

### WIT AND HUMOR

#### More Than That.

"Is this a pay-as-you-enter car?" asked the man on the rear platform, who was inclined to be sociable.

"Yes, sir," said the conductor; "and it's an enter-as-you-pay car. Move along, sir. You're blocking the passage."

#### Fell Down.

"Squibb, you've made a remarkable success as a writer of ads. It must take a peculiar talent to do that sort of work."

"Ruggles, I'd rather you wouldn't say anything about it, but my success was only an accident. I can't write ads for shucks. I found that out when I advertised for a hired girl for Mrs. Squibb. We didn't get any applications, Ruggles, not a lone, solitary, dog-gone one."

#### TOO FRANK.

irate Leading Lady—Did you put this notice in the paper?

Manager—I sent them a notice that you had signed for another season.

irate Leading Lady—Well, it reads that I have signed for another season.

#### The Blow Falls.

"Amanda," said the Rev. Dr. Fourthly, sinking heavily into a chair, "I have a piece of bad news to tell you."

"You're not going to take your European vacation this year, Flavius?" faltered Mrs. Fourthly.

"Worse than that, Amanda," he groaned. "The congregation is going to give us an old-fashioned donation party next month!"

For at a considerable sacrifice, they had just filled the house with new furniture.

#### Uncle Allen.

"It's next thing to impossible," spoke up Uncle Allen Sparks, "to be a candid friend. If you're candid you don't have any friends."

#### Precocity.

Teacher (of class in geography)—Johnny, how is Chicago bounded?

Johnny—Lake Michigan on one side, ma'am. Ain't any boundaries on the other sides.

#### Very Dull.

"She's not a very brilliant conversationalist."

"No."

"No, we went to the theatre together, and would you believe it, she never spoke a word while the play was going on."

#### Curious.

"Some people get up with a song, others with a headache," says the Birmingham Age-Herald. Curiously enough, too the latter gentleman is generally the one who goes to bed with the song.

—Washington Herald.

#### The Farmer's Retort.

"What do you call your red automobile, mister?" drawled the old farmer at the drawbridge.

"The Fool Killer," bantered the man in goggles. "I call it that because it kills all the fools who happen to cross in front of it."

The old farmer cleaned his pipe with a straw and then replied, evenly:

"That's marvellous! Well, is there any chance of it blowing up and killing the fool inside?"—Chicago News.

#### Planet of Hammers.

The Martians were prepared to catch the first message from the earth.

"Let me see," exclaimed the first little green man, "I wonder if the first communication will be a flash, a tick or a knock."

"A knock, very likely," laughed the second little green man. "You know the earth is just full of knockers."