

THE CONQUEST OF CANAAN

By **BOOTH TARKINGTON**,
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CHAPTER XII.

MAMIE, waiting just inside the door as Ariel and Eugene entered, gave the visitor a pale greeting and a moment later, hearing the wheels of the brougham crunch the gravel of the carriage drive, hurried away down the broad hall and disappeared. Ariel dropped her parasol upon a marble topped table near the door and, removing her gloves, drifted into a room at the left, where a grand piano found shelter beneath crimson plush. After a moment of contemplation she pushed back the coverlet and, seating herself upon the plush covered piano stool (to match), let her fingers run up and down the keyboard once and fall listlessly in her lap as she gazed with deep interest at three life sized colored photographs in carved gilt frames upon the wall she was facing—Judge Pike, Mamie and Mrs. Pike, with her rubies.

The daughter of the house exhibited signs of consternation. "He wants to see you," she repeated falteringly. "He's in the library."

Having thus discharged her errand, she hastened to the front door, which had been left open, and out to the steps, evidently with the intention of removing herself as soon and as far as possible from the vicinity of the library.

Eugene, visibly perturbed, followed her to the doorway of the room and paused.

"Do you know the way?" he inquired, with a note of solemnity.

"Where?" Ariel had not risen.

"To the library."

"Of course," she said, beaming upon him. "I was about to ask you if you wouldn't speak to the judge for me. This is such a comfortable old friend, this chair."

"Speak to him for you?" repeated the nonplused Eugene.

She nodded cheerfully. "If I may trouble you. Tell him certainly I shall be glad to see him."

Eugene went. There was nothing else to do. And he wished with every step that the distance to the portals of the library might have been greater.

In whatever guise he delivered the summons, it was perfectly efficacious. A door slammed, a heavy and rapid tread was heard in the hall, and Ariel, without otherwise moving, turned her head and offered a brilliant smile of greeting.

"It was good of you," she said as the doorway filled with red, imperial wrath. "To wish to have a little chat with me. I'm anxious, of course, to go over my affairs with you, and last night after my journey I was too tired. But now we might begin, not in detail, of course, just yet. That will do for later when I've learned more about business."

The great one had stopped on the threshold.

"Madam," he began coldly, "when I say my library I mean my—"

"Oh, yes," she interrupted, with amiable weariness; "I know. You mean you keep all the papers and books of the estate in there, but I think we'd better put them off for a few days."

"I'm not talking about the estate," he exclaimed. "What I want to talk to you about is being seen with Joseph Loudon!"

"Yes," she nodded brightly. "That's along the line we must take up first."

"Yes, it is!" He hurled his bull bass at her. "You knew everything about him and his standing in this community! I know you did, because Mrs. Pike told me you asked all about him from Mamie after you came last night, and see here, don't you?"

"Oh, but I knew before that," she laughed. "I had a correspondent in Canaan, one who has always taken a great interest in Mr. Loudon. I asked Miss Pike only to get her own point of view."

"I want to tell you, madam," he shouted, coming toward her, "that no member of my household—"

"That's another point we must take up today. I'm glad you remind me of it," she said thoughtfully, yet with so magically compelling an intonation that he stopped his shouting in the middle of a word, stopped with an appropos splutter. "We must arrange to put the old house in order at once."

"We'll arrange nothing of the sort," he responded after a moment of angry silence. "You're going to stay right here."

"Ah, I know your hospitality," she bowed graciously. "But of course I must not tax it too far. And about Mr. Loudon? As I said, I want to speak to you about him."

"Yes," he intervened harshly, "so do I, and I'm going to do it quickly! You'll find—"

Again she mysteriously baffled him. "He's a dear old friend of mine, you know, and I have made up my mind that we both need his help, you and I."

"What!"

"Yes," she continued calmly, "in a business way, I mean. I know you have great interests in a hundred directions, all more important than mine. It isn't fair that you should bear the whole burden of my affairs, and I think it will be best to retain Mr. Loudon as my man of business. He could take all the cares of the estate off your shoulders."

Martin Pike spoke no word, but he looked at her strangely, and she watched him with sudden keenness, leaning forward in her chair, her gaze alert but quiet, fixed on the dilating pupils of his eyes. He seemed to become dizzy, and the choleric scarlet which had overspread his broad face and his neck faded splotchily.

Still keeping her eyes upon him, she went on: "I haven't asked him yet, and so I don't know whether or no he'll consent, but I think it possible that he may come to see me this afternoon, and if he does we can propose it to him together and go over things a little."

Judge Pike recovered his voice. "He'll get a warm welcome," he pronounced huskily, "if he sets foot on my premises!"

"You mean you prefer I shouldn't receive him here?" She nodded pleasantly. "Then certainly I shall not. Such things are much better for offices; you are quite right." She swept lightly and quickly to the door, where she paused, gathering her skirts. "I shall not detain you another instant! And if Mr. Loudon comes this afternoon I'll remember. I'll not let him come in, of course. It will be perhaps pleasanter to talk over my proposition as we walk!"

There was a very faint, spicy odor, like wild roses and cinnamon, left in the room where Martin Pike stood alone, staring whitely at the open doorway.



"It's one of those simpler Grieg things, isn't it?" he said.

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CHAPTER XIII.

HERE was a custom of Canaan, time worn and seldom honored in the breach, which put Ariel that afternoon in easy possession of a coga of vantage commanding the front gate. The heavy Sunday dinner was finished in silence (on the part of Judge Pike deafening) about 3 o'clock, and soon after Mamie tossed a number of cushions out upon the stoop between the cast iron dogs, Sam Warden having previously covered the steps with a rug and placed several garden chairs near by on the grass. These simple preparations concluded, Eugene sprawled comfortably upon the rug and Mamie seated herself near him, while Ariel wandered with apparent aimlessness about the lawn, followed by the gaze of Mr. Bantry until Miss Pike begged her a little petulantly to join them.

She came, looking about her dreamily and touching to her lips now and then, with an absent air, a clover blossom she had found in the longer grass against the fence. She stopped to pat the neck of one of the cast iron deer and, with grave eyes, proffered the clover top first for inspection, then as food. There were those in the world who, seeing her, might have wondered that the deer did not play Galatea and come to life.

She had put on her hat after dinner, and Mamie now inquired if she would not prefer to remove it, offering to carry it indoors for her, to Ariel's room, to insure its safety. "You look so sort of temporary, wearing it," she urged; "as if you were only here for a little while. It's the loveliest hat I ever saw, and so fragile, too, but I'll take care."

"I am wearing my hat," answered Ariel, "because at any moment I may decide to go for a long walk."

"Oh, I hope not," said Mamie. "There are sure to be people. A few still come, even though I'm an engaged girl. I expect that's just to console me, though," she added, smiling over this worn quip of the betrothed and shaking her head at Eugene, who grew red and coughed. "There'll be plenty today, but they won't be here to see me. It's you, Ariel, and they'll be terribly disappointed if you weren't here. I shouldn't wonder if the whole town came. It's curious enough about you!"

And now the young men of the town, laboriously arranged as to apparel, began to appear on the street in small squads, making their Sunday rounds, the youngest working in phalanxes of threes and fours, those somewhat older inclining to move in pairs, the eldest, such as were now beginning to be considered middle aged beaux or (by the extremely youthful) "old bachelors," evidently considered it advantageous to travel alone. Of all these there were few who did not before evening fell turn in at the gate of the Pike mansion. Consciously, shyly or confidently, according to the condition of their souls, they made their way between the cast iron deer to be presented to the visitor.

Ariel sat at the top of the steps and, looking amiably over their heads, talked with such as could get near her. There were many who could not, and Mamie, occupying the bench below, was surrounded by the overflow. The difficulty of reaching and maintaining a position near Miss Tabor was increased by the attitude and behavior of Mr. Filteroff, who that day cooled the feeling of friendship which several of his fellow townsmen had hitherto entertained for him. He had been the first to arrive, coming alone, though that was not his custom, and he established himself at Ariel's right, upon the step just below her, so disposing

the great body and the ponderous arms and legs the gods had given him that no one could mount above him to sit beside her or approach her from that direction within conversational distance.

Norbert, not ordinarily talkative, had nothing to say. He seemed to find sufficient occupation in keeping the place he had gained, and from this close vantage he fastened his small eyes immovably upon Ariel's profile. Eugene, also apparently determined not to move, sat throughout the afternoon at her left, but as he was thin others who came and went were able to approach upon that side and hold speech with her.

The conversation of the gallants consisted for the greater part of witticisms at one another's expense, which, though evoked for Ariel's benefit (all eyes furtively reverting to her as each shaft was loosed), she found more or less enigmatical. The young men, however, laughed at each other loudly and seemed content if now and then she smiled. "You must be frightfully ennuied with all this," Eugene said to her. "You see how provincial we still are."

She did not answer. She had not heard him. The shadows were stretching themselves over the grass long and attenuated. The sunlight upon the trees and houses was like a thin, rosy pigment, blackbirds were calling each other home to beech and elm, and Ariel's eyes were fixed upon the western distance of the street where gold dust was beginning to quiver in the air. She did not hear Eugene, but she started a moment later when the name Joe Loudon was pronounced by a young man, the poetic Bradbury, on the step below Eugene. Some one immediately said, "Sh!" But she leaned over and addressed Mr. Bradbury, who, shut out, not only from the group about her, but from the other centering upon Miss Pike as well, was holding a private conversation with a friend in like misfortune.

"What were you saying of Mr. Loudon?" she asked, smiling down upon the young man. (It was this smile which inspired his description of her as "a revelation and a dream.")

"Oh, nothing particular," was his embarrassed reply. "I only mentioned I'd heard there was some talk among the—" He paused awkwardly, remembering that Ariel had walked with Joseph Loudon in the face of Canaan that very day. "That is, I mean to say, there's some talk of his running for mayor."

"What?"

There was a general exclamation, followed by an uncomfortable moment or two of silence. No one present was unaware of that noon walk, though there was prevalent a pleasing notion that it would not happen again, founded on the idea that Ariel, having only arrived the previous evening, had probably met Joe on the street by accident and, remembering him as a playmate of her childhood and uninformed as to his reputation, had, naturally enough, permitted him to walk home with her.

Mr. Filteroff broke the silence, rushing into words with a derisive laugh: "Yes, he's talked of for mayor—by the saloon people and the niggers! I expect the Beaver Beach crowd would be for him, and if tramps could vote he might!"

"What is Beaver Beach?" asked Ariel, not turning.

"What is Beaver Beach?" he repeated and cast his eyes to the sky, shaking his head awesomely. "It's a place," he said, with abysmal solemnity—"a place I shouldn't have mentioned in your presence, Miss Tabor."

"What has it to do with Mr. Loudon?"

The predestined Norbert conceived the present to be a heaven sent opportunity to enlighten her concerning Joe's character, since the Pikes appeared to have been derelict in the performance of this kindness.

"He goes there!" he proceeded heavily. "He lived there for awhile when he first came back from running away, and he's a friend of Mike Sheehan's that runs it. He's a friend of all the riffraff that hang around there."

"How do you know he goes there?"

"Why, it was in the paper the day after he came back." He appealed for corroboration. "Wasn't it, Eugene?"

"No, no!" she persisted. "Newspapers are sometimes mistaken, aren't they? Have you ever met any one who has seen him there?"

"I've seen him there myself!" The words skipped out of Norbert's mouth like so many little devils the instant he opened it. She had spoken so quickly and with such vehemence, looking him full in the eye, that he had forgotten everything in the world except making the point to which her insistence had led him.

Mamie looked horrified. There was a sound of smothered laughter, and Norbert, overwhelmed by the treachery of his own mouth, sat gasping.

"It can't be such a terrific place, then, after all," said Ariel gently, and, turning to Eugene, "Have you ever been there, Mr. Bantry?" she asked.

He changed color, but answered with enough gibberish, "No."

Several of the young men rose. The wretched Filteroff, however, evading Mamie's eye, in which there was a distinct hint, sat where he was until all of them, except Eugene, had taken a reluctant departure, one group after another, leaving in the order of their arrival.

(Continued next week.)

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