

THE CONQUEST OF CANAAN

By BOOTH TARKINGTON,
Author of "Cherry," "Monsieur Beaucaire," Etc.

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Synopsis of Previous Chapters.

CHAPTER I—Eugene Bantry, a Canaan (Ind.) young man, who has been sent to college, returned home and astounded the natives by the gorgeousness of his raiment. His stepbrother, Joe, aged male gossip who daily assemble at the National House for argument as the good for nothing associate of doubtful characters. II—Eugene's appearance has a pronounced effect upon Mamie Pike, whose father, Judge Pike, is the wealthiest and most prominent citizen of Canaan. Joe worships Mamie from afar. Eugene interferes in a snow fight between Joe and his holdenish and very poor girl friend, Ariel Tabor, who is worsted. Ariel hotly resents the interference and slaps Eugene, who seizes her home. III—Ariel, unbecomingly attired, attends Mamie Pike's ball. IV—Joe, concealed behind some plants on the Pike veranda, watches hungrily for a glimpse of Mamie. Ariel is ignored by most of the guests. Ariel discovers Joe, but shortly afterwards, learning that her uncle, Jonas Tabor, has died suddenly, leaves. V—The Daily Tocsin of the next day tells of Joe's discovery on the Pike veranda and of his pursuit and escape therefrom. It also refers to wounds in the head of himself and of Norbert Filtcroff, who detected him. Joe retreats to the "Beach," a low resort kept by his friend, Mike Sheehan, who dresses his wound. VI—Joe leaves Mike's place. He visits Ariel Tabor, who by the death of her Uncle Jonas has become rich. She wishes Joe to accompany her and her grandfather to Paris. Joe refuses and leaves Canaan to avoid arrest for the trouble at Judge Pike's. VII—Joe is heard from two years later as a ticket seller for a side show. Eugene Bantry also meets him seven years later, in a low resort in New York, but wisely refrains from advertising it. VIII—Joe returns to Canaan a full fledged lawyer. Even his father ignores him, and he is refused accommodations at the National House. IX—Joe is welcomed at the "Beach," and "Happy Fear," one of Joe's admirers, seriously assaults Nashville Corey. At the end of Happy's term in prison he visits Joe, who now has a law office on the square, with a living room adjoining. Joe has a large practice, principally among the lower classes, and is frequently attacked by the Tocsin. Joe begins, in his loneliness, to yield to the seduction of the bottle. Bantry's engagement to Mamie Pike is announced. Bantry is now associate editor of the Tocsin, owned by Judge Pike. X—Joe awakens after a "bad night" with the words, "Remember, across the Main-street bridge at noon," ringing in his ears. He goes there and is presently joined by the most beautiful and most beautifully dressed girl he has ever seen. XI—She turns out to be Ariel Tabor, arrived in Canaan the night before from her long sojourn in Paris. She has seen Joe as she alighted from the train and, realizing his condition, had escorted him home after exacting from him a promise to meet her the next day (Sunday) across the Main-street bridge at noon. Joe learns that Ariel is stopping at Judge Pike's home, the judge having entire charge of her money, etc. XII—Eugene Bantry, although engaged to Mamie, is much smitten with Ariel's charms. Judge Pike tries his usual blustering tactics with Ariel, but subsides when she tells him that she shall ask him to turn over the care of her estate to Joe Louden.

CHAPTER XIV—Continued.

"And who could of dreamed," Mr. Bradbury was saying, with a side glance of expectancy at Eskew, "that Jonas Tabor would ever turn out to have a niece like that?"

Mr. Arp ceased to fan himself with his wide straw hat and said grimly: "I don't see as Jonas has 'turned out'—not in particular! If he's turned at all lately I reckon it's in his grave, and I'll bet he has if he had any way of bearin' how much she must of spent for clothes!"

"I believe," Squire Buckalew began, "that young folks' memories are short." "They're lucky!" interjected Eskew. "The shorter your memory the less meanness you know!"

"I meant young folks don't remember as well as older people do," continued the squire. "I don't see what's so remarkable in her comin' back and walkin' up street with Joe Louden. She used to go kintin' round with him all the time before she left here. And yet everybody talks as if they never heard of such a thing."

"It seems to me," said Colonel Filtcroff hesitatingly, "that she did right. I know it sounds kind of a queer thing to say, and I stirred up a good deal of opposition at home yesterday evening by sort of mentioning something of the kind. Nobody seemed to agree with me except Norbert, and he didn't say much, but—"

He was interrupted by an uncontrollable cackle which issued from the mouth of Mr. Arp. The colonel turned upon him, with a frown, inquiring the cause of his mirth.

"It put me in mind," Mr. Arp began promptly, "of something that happened last night."

"What was it?"

Eskew's mouth was open to tell, but he remembered just in time that the grandfather of Norbert was not the audience properly to be selected for

this recital, choked a half born word, coughed loudly, realizing that he must withhold the story of the felling of Martin Pike until the colonel had taken his departure, and replied: "Nothin' to speak of. Go on with your argument."

"I've finished," said the colonel. "I only wanted to say that it seems to me a good action for a young lady like that to come back here and stick to her old friend and playmate."

"Stick to him!" echoed Mr. Arp. "She walked up Main street with him yesterday. Do you call that stickin' to him? She's been away a good while; she's forgotten what Canaan is. You wait till she sees for herself jest what his standin' in this com'—"

"I agree with Eskew for once," interrupted Peter Bradbury. "I agree because—"

"Then you better wait," cried Eskew, allowing him to proceed no further, "till you hear what you're agreed to! I say you take a young lady like that—pretty and rich and all cultured up, and it stands to reason that she won't—"

"No; it don't!" exclaimed Buckalew impatiently. "Nothing of the sort! I tell you—"

Eskew rose to his feet and pounded the pavement with his stick. "It stands to reason that she won't stick to a man no other decent woman will speak to, a feller that's been the mark for every stone thrown in the town ever since he was a boy, an outcast with a reputation as black as a preacher's shoes on Sunday! I don't care if he's her oldest friend on earth, she won't stick to him! She walked with him yesterday, but you can mark my words, his goose is shirked!" The old man's voice rose shrill and high. "It ain't in human nature fer her to do it! You hear what I say—you'll never see her with Joe Louden again in this livin' world, and she as good as told me so herself last night. You can take your oath she's quit him already! Don't!"

Eskew paused abruptly, his eyes widening behind his spectacles. His jaw fell. His stick, raised to hammer the pavement, remained suspended in the air. A sudden color rushed over his face, and he dropped speechless in his chair. The others after staring at him in momentary alarm followed the direction of his gaze.

Just across Main street and in plain view was the entrance to the stairway which led to Joe's office. Ariel Tabor, all in cool gray, carrying a big bunch of white roses in her white gloved hands, had just crossed the sidewalk from a carriage and was ascending the dark stairway. A moment later she came down again empty handed, got into the carriage and drove away.

"She missed him," said Squire Buckalew. "I saw him go out half an hour ago. But," he added, exercising a self restraint close upon the saintly, did not even glance toward the heap which was Mr. Arp. "I notice she left her flowers!"

Ariel was not the only one who climbed the dingy stairs that day and read the penciled script upon Joe's door: "Will not return until evening. J. Louden." Many others came, all exceedingly unlike the first visitor. Some were quick and watchful, dodging into the narrow entrance furtively; some smiled contemptuously as long as they were in view of the street, drooping wanly as they reached the stairs; some were brazen and amused, and some were thin and troubled. Not all of them read the message, for not all could read, but all looked curiously through the half opened door at the many roses which lifted their heads delicately from a water picher on Joe's desk to scent that dusty place with their cool breath.

Most of these clients after a grunt of disappointment turned and went away, though there were a few, either unable to read the message or so pressed by anxiety that they disregarded it, who entered the room and sat down to wait for the absentee. There were plenty of chairs in the office now, bookcases also and a big steel safe. But when evening came and the final gray of twilight had vanished from the window panes all had gone except one, a woman who sat patiently, her eyes upon the floor and her hands folded in her lap, until the footsteps of the last of the others to depart had ceased to sound upon the pavement below. Then with a wordless exclamation she sprang to her feet, pulled the window shade carefully down to the sill and when she had done that struck a match on the heel of her shoe—a soiled white canvas shoe, not a small one—and applied the flame to a gas jet. The yellow light flared up, and she began to pace the room haggardly.

The courthouse bell rang 8, and as the tremors following the last stroke paused themselves into silence she heard a footfall on the stairs and immediately relapsed into a chair, fold-

ing her hands again in her lap, her expression composing itself to passivity, for the step was very much lighter than Joe's.

A lady beautifully dressed in white dimity appeared in the doorway. She hesitated at the threshold, not, apparently, because of any timidity (her expression being too thoughtfully assured for that), but almost immediately she came in and seated herself near the desk, acknowledging the other's presence by a slight inclination of the head.



A lady beautifully dressed in white dimity appeared in the doorway.

This grave courtesy caused a strong, deep flush to spread itself under the rouge which unevenly covered the woman's cheeks as she bowed elaborately in return. Then furtively, during a protracted silence, she took stock of the new comer from the tip of her white suede shoes to the filmy lace and pink roses upon her wide white hat, and the sidelong gaze lingered marvelously upon the quiet, delicate hands, slender and finely expressive, in their white gloves.

Her own hands, unlike the lady's, began to fidget confusedly, and the silence continuing, she coughed several times to effect the preface required by her sense of fitness before she felt it proper to observe, with a polite titter: "Mr. Louden seems to be a good while comin'."

"Have you been waiting very long?" asked the lady.

"Ever since 8 o'clock!"

"Yes," said the other, "that is very long."

"Yes, ma'am, it cert'nly is." The ice thus broken, she felt free to use her eyes more directly and, after a long, frank stare, exclaimed: "Why, you must be Miss Ariel Tabor, ain't you?"

"Yes—Ariel touched one of the roses upon Joe's desk with her finger tips—"I am Miss Tabor."

"Well, excuse me fer asking; I'm sure it ain't any business of mine," said the other, remembering the manners due one lady from another. "But I thought it must be. I expect," she added, with loud, inconsequent laughter, "there's not many in Canaan ain't heard you've come back." She paused, laughed again, nervously, and again, less loudly, to take off the edge of her abruptness, gradually tittering herself down to a pause, to fill which she put forth, "Right nice weather we be'n havin'."

"Yes," said Ariel.

"It was rainy first of last week though. I don't mind rain so much"—this with more laughter—"I stay in the house when it rains. Some people don't know enough to, they say. You've heard that saying, ain't you, Miss Tabor?"

"Yes."

"Well, I tell you," she exclaimed noisily, "there's plenty ladies and gentlemen in this town that's like that."

Her laughter did not cease. It became louder and shriller. It had been until now a mere lubrication of the conversation, helping to make her easier in Miss Tabor's presence, but as it increased in shrillness she seemed to be losing control of herself, as if her laughter were getting away with her. She was not far from hysteria when she stopped with a gasp, and she sat up straight in her chair, white and rigid.

"There!" she said listening intently. "Ain't that him?" Steps sounded upon the pavement below, paused for a second at the foot of the stairs; there was a snap of a match, then the steps sounded again, retreating. She sank back in her chair limply. "It was only some one stoppin' to light his cigar in the entry. It wasn't Joe Louden's step anyway."

"You know his step?" Ariel's eyes were bent upon the woman wonderingly.

"I'd know it tonight," was the answer, delivered with a sharp and painful giggle. "I got plenty reason to."

Ariel did not respond. She leaned a little closer to the roses upon the desk, letting them touch her face and breathing deeply of their fragrance to neutralize a perfume which pervaded the room, an odor as heavy and cheap-sweet as the face of the woman who had saturated her handkerchief with it, a scent which went with her perfectly and made her unapparently delicate; suited to her clumsily dyed hair, to her soiled white shoes, to the hot red hat smothered in plumage, to the restless stub fingered hands, to the fat, plated rings, of which she wore a great quantity, though, surprisingly enough, the large diamonds in her ears

were pure and of a very clear water. It was she who broke the silence once more. "Well," she drawled, coughing genteelly at the same time, "better late than never, as the saying is. I wonder who it is gits up all them comical sayings?" Apparently she had no genuine desire for light upon this mystery as she continued immediately: "I have a gen'leman friend that's always gittin' 'em off. 'Well,' he says, 'the best of friends must part,' and 'Thou strik'st me to the heart'—all kinds of cracks like that. He's real comical. And yet," she went on in an altered voice, "I don't like him much. I'd be glad if I'd never seen him."

The change of tone was so marked that Ariel looked at her keenly, to find herself surprised into pitying this strange client of Joe's, for tears had sprung to the woman's eyes and alid along the lids, where she tried vainly to restrain them. Her face had altered, too, like her voice, haggard lines suddenly appearing about the eyes and mouth as if they had just been penciled there—the truth issuing from beneath her plumbbeck simulations like a tragic mask revealed by the displacement of a tawdry covering.

"I expect you think I'm real foolish," she said, "but I be'n waitin' so awful long, and I got a good deal of worry on my mind till I see Mr. Louden."

"I am sorry," Ariel turned from the roses and faced her and the heavy perfume. "I hope he will come soon."

"I hope so," said the other. "It's something to do with me that keeps him away, and the longer he is the more it scares me." She shivered and set her teeth together. "It's kind of hard waitin'. I cert'nly got my share of troubles."

"Don't you think that Mr. Louden will be able to take care of them for you?"

"Oh, I hope so, Miss Tabor! If he can't, nobody can." She was crying openly now, wiping her eyes with her moist soaked handkerchief. "We had to send for him yesterday afternoon—"

"To come to Beaver Beach, do you mean?" asked Ariel, leaning forward.

"Yes, ma'am. It all begun out there—leastways it begun before that with me. It was all my fault. I deserve all that's comin' to me, I guess. I done wrong! I done wrong! I'd oughtn't never to of went out there yesterday."

She checked herself sharply, but after a moment's pause continued, encouraged by the grave kindness of the delicate face in the shadow of the wide white hat. "I oughtn't to of went," she repeated. "Oh, I reckon I'll never, never learn enough to keep out o' trouble, even when I see it comin'! But that gen'leman friend of mine—Mr. Nashville Cory's his name—he kind o' coaxed me into it, and he's right comical when he's with ladies, and he's good company, and he says, 'Claudine, we'll dance the light fantastic,' he says, and I kind o' wanted something cheerful. I'd be workin' steady quite a spell, and it looked like he wanted to show me a good time, so I went, and that's what started it."

Now that she had begun she babbled on with her story, at times incoherently, full of excuses made to herself more than to Ariel, pitifully endeavoring to convince herself that the responsibility for the middle she had made was not hers. "Mr. Cory told me my husband was drinkin' and wouldn't know about it, and, 'Besides,' he says, 'what's the odds?' Of course I knowed there was trouble between him and Mr. Fear—that's my husband—a good while ago, when Mr. Fear up and laid him out. That was before me and Mr. Fear got married; I hadn't even be'n to Canaan then; I was on the stage. I was on the stage quite awhile in Chicago before I got acquainted with my husband."

"You were on the stage?" Ariel exclaimed involuntarily.

"Yes, ma'am—livin' pitchers at Goldberg's rat'skeller, and amunchoer nights I nearly always done a sketch with a gen'leman friend. That's the way I met Mr. Fear. He seemed to be real struck with me right away, and soon as I got through my turn he ast me to order whatever I wanted. He's always gen'lemanlike when he ain't had too much, and even then he vurry vurry seldom acks rough unless he's jealous. That was the trouble yesterday. I never would of gone to the Beach if I'd dreamed what was comin'! When we got there I saw Mike—that the gen'leman that runs the Beach—lookin' at my company and me kind of anxious, and pretty soon he got me away from Mr. Cory and told me what's what. Seems this Cory only wanted me to go with him to make my husband mad, and he'd took good care that Mr. Fear heard I'd be there with him. An' he'd be'n bangin' around me every time he struck town jest to make Mr. Fear mad—the fresh thing! You see, he wanted to make my husband start something again, this Mr. Cory did, and he was fixed for it."

"I don't understand," said Ariel.

"It's this way: If Mr. Fear attacked Mr. Cory, why, Mr. Cory could shoot him down and claim self defense. You see, it would be easy for Mr. Cory, because Mr. Fear nearly killed him when they had their first trouble, and that would give Mr. Cory a good excuse to shoot if Mr. Fear jest only pushed him. That's the way it is with the law. Mr. Cory could wipe out their old score and git off scot free."

"Surely not!"

"Yes, ma'am, that's the way it would be. And when Mike told me that Mr. Cory had got me out there jest to provoke my husband I went straight up to him and begun to give him a piece of my mind. I didn't talk loud, because I never was one to make a disturbance

and start trouble the way some do, and right while I was talkin' we both see my husband pass the window. Mr. Cory give a kind of yelling laugh and put his arm round me jest as Mr. Fear come in the door. And then it all happened so quick that you could hardly tell what was goin' on. Mr. Fear, we found afterward, had promised Mr. Louden that he wouldn't come out there, but he took too much—you could see that by the look of him—and forgot his promise—forgot everything but me and Cory, I guess."

"He come right up to us, where I was tryin' to git away from Cory's arm—it was the left one he had around me and the other behind his back—and neither of 'em said a word. Cory kept on laughin' loud as he could, and Mr. Fear struck him in the mouth. He's little, but he can hit awful hard, and Mr. Cory let out a screech, and I see his gun go off right in Mr. Fear's face, I thought, but it wasn't. It only scared him. Most of the other gen'lemen had run, but Mike made a dive and managed to knock the gun to one side (jest barely in time. Then Mike and three or four others that come out from behind things separated 'em, both of 'em fightin' to git at each other. They locked Mr. Cory up in Mike's room and took Mr. Fear over to where they hitch the horses. Then Mike sent for Mr. Louden to come out to talk to my husband and take care of him—be's the only one can do anything with him when he's like that—but before Mr. Louden could git there Mr. Fear broke loose and run through a cornfield and got away—at least they couldn't find him. And Mr. Cory jumped through a window and slid down into one of Mike's boats, so they'd both gone. When Mr. Louden come he only stayed long enough to hear what had happened and started out to find Happy—that's my husband. He's bound to keep them apart, but he hasn't found Mr. Fear yet or he'd be here."

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(Continued next week.)

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