

THE CONQUEST OF CANAAN

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CHAPTER IX.

If any echo of doubt concerning his undesirable conspicuousness sounded faintly in Joe's mind, it was silenced ere it was uttered. Canaan had not forgotten him. Far from it, so far that it began pointing him out to strangers on the street the very day of his return. His course of action, likewise that of his friends, permitted him little obscurity, and when the rumors of his finally obtaining lodging at Beaver Beach and of the celebration of his installation there were presently confirmed he stood in the lime light indeed, as a Mephistopheles upsprung through the trap door.

The welcoming festivities had not been so discreetly conducted as to accord with the general policy of Beaver Beach. An unfortunate incident caused the arrest of one of the celebrators and the ambulancing to the hospital of another on the homeward way, the ensuing proceedings in court bringing to the whole affair a publicity devoutly unsought for. Mr. Happy Fear (such was the habitual name of the imprisoned gentleman) had to bear a great amount of harsh criticism for injuring a companion within the city limits after daylight and for failing to observe that three policemen were not too distant from the scene of operations to engage therein.

"Happy, if he had it in mind to harm him," said the red bearded man to Mr. Fear upon the latter's return to society, "why didn't ye do it out here at the beach?"

"Because," returned the indiscreet, "he didn't say what he was goin' to say till we got in town."

Extraordinary probing on the part of the prosecutor had developed at the trial that the obnoxious speech had referred to the guest of the evening. The assaulted party, one "Nashville" Cory, was not of Canaan, but a bit of driftwood haply touching shore for the moment at Beaver Beach, and—strange is this world—he had been introduced to the coterie of Mike's Place by Happy Fear himself, who had enjoyed a brief acquaintance with him on a day when both had chanced to travel incognito by the same freight.

Naturally Happy had felt responsible for the proper behavior of his protégé—was, in fact, bound to enforce it; additionally, Happy had once been saved from a term of imprisonment (at a time when it would have been more than ordinarily inconvenient) by help and advice from Joe, and he was not one to forget. Therefore he was grieved to observe that his own guest seemed to be somewhat jealous of the hero of the occasion and disposed to look coldly upon him. The stranger, however, contented himself with innuendo (mere expressions of the face and other manner of things for which one could not squarely lay hands upon him) until such time as he and his sponsor had come to Main street in the clear dawn on their way to Happy's apartment, a variable abode. It may be that the stranger perceived what Happy did not—the three blue-coats in the perspective. At all events, he now put into words of simple strength the unfavorable conception he had formed of Joe. The result was mediaevally immediate, and the period of Mr. Cory's convalescence in the hospital was almost half that of his sponsor's detention in the county jail.

When Happy Fear had suffered, with a give and take simplicity of patience, his allotment of months in duration and was released and sent into the streets and sunshine once more, he knew that his first duty lay in the direction of a general apology to Joe. But the young man was no longer at Beaver Beach; the red headed proprietor dwelt alone there and, receiving Happy with scorn and pity, directed him to retrace his footsteps to the town.

"Ye must have been in the black hole of incarceration indeed if ye haven't heard that Mr. Loudon has his law office on the square and his livin' room behind the office. It's in that little brick buildin' straight across from the sheriff's door o' the jail. Ye've been neighbors this long time. A hard time the boy had persuadin' any one to rent to him, but by payin' double the price he got a place at last. He's a practical lawyer now, and all the boys and girls of our acquaintance go to him with their troubles. Ye'll see him with a murder case to try before long as sure as ye're not worth yer salt! But I expect ye can still call him by his name of Joe, all the same!"

It was a bleak and meager little office into which Mr. Fear ushered himself to offer his amends. The cracked plaster of the walls was bare, save for dust. There were no shelves. The fat brown volumes, most of them fairly new, were piled in regular columns upon a cheap pine table. There was but one window, small paned and shadeless. An inner door of this sad chamber stood half ajar, permitting the visitor unreserved acquaintance with the domestic economy of the tenant, for it disclosed a second room, smaller than the office and dependent upon the window of the latter for air and light. Behind a canvas camp cot, dimly visible in the obscurity of the inner apartment, stood a small gas

stove surmounted by a stewpan, from which projected the handle of a big tin spoon, so that it needed no ghost from the dead to whisper that Joseph Loudon, attorney at law, did his own cooking. Indeed, he looked it!

Upon the threshold of the second room reposed a small, worn, light brown scrub brush of a dog, so cosmopolitan in ancestry that his species was almost as undeterminable as the cast iron dogs of the Pike mansion. He greeted Mr. Fear hospitably, having been so lately an offcast of the streets himself that his adoption had taught him to lose only his old tremors, not his hopefulness. At the same time Joe rose quickly from the deal table, where he had been working, with one hand in his hair, the other splattering ink from a bad pen.

"Good for you, Happy!" he cried cheerfully. "I hoped you'd come to see me today. I've been thinking about a job for you."

"I don't want a job, now!" said Mr. Fear, going to the door. "I don't want to work. There's plenty ways fer me to git along without that. But I'll say one thing more. Don't you worry about gittin' law practice. Mike says you're goin' to git all you want, and if there ain't no other way, why, a few of us'll go out and make some fer ye!"

These prophecies and promises, over which Joe chuckled at first, with his head cocked to one side, grew very soon to his amazement, to wear a supernatural similarity to actual fulfillment. His friends brought him their own friends such as had sinned against the laws of Canaan, those under the ban of the sheriff, those who had struck in anger, those who had stolen at night, those who owed and could not pay, those who lived by the dice, and to his other titles to notoriety was added that of defender of the poor and wicked. He found his hands full, especially after winning his first important case, on which occasion Canaan thought the jury mad and was indignant with the puzzled judge, who could not see just how it had happened.

Joe did not stop at that. He kept on winning cases, clearing the innocent and lightening the burdens of the guilty. He became the most dangerous attorney for the defense in Canaan. His honorable brethren, accepting the popular view of him, held him in personal contempt, but feared him professionally, for he proved that he knew more law than they thought existed. Nor could any trick him, failing which many tempers were lost, but never Joe's. His practice was not all criminal, as shown by the peevish outburst of the eminent Buckalew (the squire's nephew, esteemed the foremost lawyer in Canaan), "Before long there won't be any use trying to foreclose a mortgage or collect a note unless this slyster gets himself in jail!"

The wrath of Judge Martin Pike was augmented—there was a kind of sublimity in its immensity—on a day when it befell that the shyster stood betwixt him and money.

That was a monstrous task—to stand between these two and separate them, to hold back the hand of Martin Pike from what it had reached out to grasp. It was in the matter of some tax titles which the magistrate had acquired, and in court Joe treated the case with such horrifying simplicity that it seemed almost credible that the great man had counted upon the ignorance and besottedness of Joe's client, a hard drinking, disreputable old farmer, to get his land away from him without paying for it. Now, as every one knew such a thing to be ludicrously impossible, it was at once noised abroad in Canaan that Joe had helped to swindle Judge Pike out of a large sum of money—it was notorious that the shyster could bamboozle court and jury with his tricks, and it was felt that Joe Loudon was getting into very deep waters indeed. This was serious. If the young man did not look out he might find himself in the penitentiary.

Joe did not move into a larger office; he remained in the little room with its one window and its fine view of the jail. His clients were

nearly all poor, and many of his fees quite literally nominal. Tatters and rags came up the narrow stairway to his door—tatters and rags and pitiful fineries; the bleared, the sodden, the flaunting and rouged, the furtive and wary, some in rags, some in tags and some—the sorriest—in velvet gowns. With these, the distressed, the wrongdoers, the drunks, the dirty and the very poor, his work lay and his days and nights were spent.

When Joe went about the streets he was made to feel his condition by the elaborate avoidance, yet furtive attention, of every respectable person he met, and when he came home to his small rooms and shut the door behind him he was as one who has been hissed and shamed in public and runs to bury his hot face in his pillow. He petted his mongrel extravagantly (well he might) and would sit with him in his rooms at night holding long converse with him, the two alone together. The dog was not his only confidant. There came to be another, a more and more frequent partner to their conversations, at least a familiar spirit. This third came from a brown jar which Joe kept on a shelf in his

bedroom, a vessel too frequently replenished. When the day's work was done he shut himself up, drank alone and drank hard. Sometimes when the jug ran low and the night was late he would go out for a walk with his dog and would awake in his room the next morning not remembering where he had gone or how he had come home. Once, after such a lapse of memory, he woke amazed to find himself at Beaver Beach, whither, he learned from the red bearded man, Happy Fear had brought him, having found him wandering dazedly in a field near by. These lapses grew more frequent until there occurred that which was one of the strange things of his life.

It was a June night, a little more than two years after his return to Canaan, and the Toecin had that day announced the approaching marriage of Eugene Bantry and his employer's daughter. Joe ate nothing during the day and went through his work clumsily, visiting the bedroom shelf at intervals. At 10 in the evening he went out to have the jug refilled, but from the moment he left his door and the fresh air struck his face he had no clear knowledge of what he did or of what went on about him until he woke in his bed the next morning.

And yet, whatever little part of the soul of him remained that night still undulled, not numbed, but alive, was in some strange manner lifted out of its pain toward a strange delight. His body was an automaton, his mind in bondage, yet there was a still small consciousness in him which knew that in his wandering something incredible and unexpected was happening. What this was he did not know, could not



"I don't want a job, now!" said Mr. Fear.

see, though his eyes were open, could not have told himself any more than a baby could tell why it laughs, but it seemed something so beautiful and wonderful that the night became a night of perfume, its breezes bearing the music of harps and violins, while nightingales sang from the maples that bordered the streets of Canaan.

CHAPTER X.

HE woke to the light of morning amazed and full of a strange wonder because he did not know what had amazed him. A chime of bells sounded from a church steeple across the square, ringing out in assured righteousness, summoning the good people who maintained them to come and sit beneath them or be taken to task, and they fell so dismally upon Joe's ear that he bestirred himself and rose, to the delight of his mongrel, who leaped upon him joyfully. An hour later or thereabout the pair emerged from the narrow stairway and stood for a moment, blinking in the fair sunshine, apparently undecided which way to go. The church bells were silent. There was no breeze. The air trembled a little with the deep pings of the organ across the square, and, save for that, the town was very quiet. The paths which crossed the courthouse yard were flecked with steady shadow, the strong young foliage of the maples not moving, having the air of observing the Sabbath with propriety. The organ ceased to stir the air, and all was in quiet, yet a quiet which for Loudon was not peace.

He looked at his watch and, without intending it, spoke the hour aloud, "A quarter past 11." The sound of his own voice gave him a little shock. He rose without knowing why, and as he did so it seemed to him that he heard close to his ear another voice, a woman's, troubled and insistent, but clear and sweet, saying:

"Remember! Across Main street bridge at noon!"

It was so distinct that he started and looked round. Then he laughed. "I'll be seeing circus parades next." His laughter died, for, louder than the ringing in his ears, unmistakably came the strains of a faraway brass band which had no existence on land or sea or in the waters under the earth.

"Here!" he said to the mongrel. "We need a walk, I think. Let's you and me move on before the camels turn the corner."

The music followed him to the street, where he turned westward toward the river, and presently as he walked on, fanning himself with his straw hat, it faded and was gone. But the voice he had heard returned.

"Remember! Across Main street bridge at noon!" it said again close to his ear.

This time he did not start. "All right," he answered, wiping his forehead. "If you'll let me alone, I'll be

At a dingy saloon corner near the river a shabby little man greeted him heartily and petted the mongrel. "I'm mighty glad you didn't go, after all, Joe," he added, with a brightening face.

"Go where, Happy?"

Mr. Fear looked grave. "Don't you recollect meetin' me last night?"

Louden shook his head. "No. Did I?"

The other's jaw fell, and his brow corrugated with self reproach. "Well, if that don't show what a thick head I am! I thought ye was all right er I'd gone on with ye. Nobody e'd 'a' walked straighter ner talked straighter. Said ye was goin' to leave Canaan fer good and didn't want nobody to know it. Said ye was goin' to take the 'leven o'clock through train fer the west and told me I couldn't come to the deeto with ye. Said ye'd had enough o' Canaan and of everything, I follered ye part way to the deeto, but ye turned and made a motion fer me to go back, and I done it because ye seemed to be kind of in trouble, and I thought ye'd rather be by yerself. Well, sir, it's one on me."

"Not at all," said Joe. "I was all right."

"Was ye?" returned the other. "Do remember, do ye?"

"Almost," Joe smiled faintly.

"Almost," echoed Happy, shaking his head seriously. "I tell ye, Joe, ef I was you"—he began slowly, then paused and shook his head again. He seemed on the point of delivering some advice, but evidently perceiving the snobbishness of such a proceeding, or else convinced by his own experience of the futility of it, he swerved to cheerfulness:

"I hear the boys is all goin' to work hard for the primaries. Mike says ye got some chances ye don't know about. He swears ye'll be the next mayor of Canaan."

"Nonsense! Folly and nonsense, Happy! That's the kind of thing I used to think when I was a boy. But now—pshaw!" Joe broke off with a tired laugh. "Tell them not to waste their time! Are you going out to the Beach this afternoon?"

The little man lowered his eyes moodily. "I'll be near there," he said, scraping his patched shoe up and down the curbstone. "That feller's in town ag'in."

"What follow?"

"Nashville" they call him. Ed's the name he give the hospital. Cory—him that I soaked the night you come back to Canaan. He's after Claudine to git his evens with me. He's made a raise somewhere and plays the spender. And her—well, I reckon she's tired waitin' table at the National House, tired o' me, too. I got a hint that they're goin' out to the Beach together this afternoon."

Joe passed his hand wearily over his aching forehead. "I understand," he said, "and you'd better try to. Cory's laying for you, of course. You say he's after your wife? He must have set about it pretty openly if ye're going to the Beach today, for there is always a crowd there on Sundays. Is it hard for you to see why he's doing it? It's because he wants to make you jealous. What for? So that you'll tackle him again. And why does he want that? Because he's ready for you!"

The other's eyes suddenly became bloodshot, his nostrils expanding incredibly. "Ready, is he? He better be ready, I!"

"That's enough!" Joe interrupted swiftly. "We'll have no talk like that. I'll settle this for you myself. You send word to Claudine that I want to see her at my office tomorrow morning, and you—you stay away from the Beach today. Give me your word."

Mr. Fear's expression softened. "All right, Joe," he said. "I'll do whatever you tell me to. Any of us'll do that; we sure know who's our friend."

"Keep out of trouble, Happy." Joe turned to go and they shook hands. "Good day, and—keep out of trouble!"

When he had gone Mr. Fear's countenance again gloomed ominously, and, shaking his head, he ruminatively entered an adjacent bar through the alley door.

The Main street bridge was an old fashioned wooden covered one, dust colored and very narrow, squarely framing the fair open country beyond, for the town had never crossed the river. Joe found the cool shadow in the bridge gracious to his hot brow, and through the slender chinks of the worn flooring he caught bright glimpses of running water. When he came out of the other end he felt enough refreshed to light a cigar.

"Well, here I am," he said, "across Main street bridge, and it must be getting on toward noon!" He spoke almost with the aspect of daring and immediately stood still listening. "Remember," he ventured to repeat, again daring—"remember! Across Main street bridge at noon!" And again he listened. Then he chuckled faintly with relief, for the voice did not return. "Thank God, I've got rid of that!" he whispered. "And of the circus band too!"

A dusty road turned to the right, following the river and shaded by big sycamores on the bank. The mongrel, intensely preoccupied with this road, scampered away, his nose to the ground. "Good enough," said the master. "Lead on and I'll come after you."

But he had not far to follow. The chase led him to a half hollow log which lay on a low grass grown levee above the stream where the dog's interest in the pursuit became vivid; temporarily, however, for after a few minutes of agitated investigation he was seized with indifference to the whole world, panted briefly, slept. Joe set upon the log, which was in the shade, and smoked.

For the first time it struck Joe that it was a beautiful day, and it came to him that a beautiful day was a thing

which nothing except death, sickness or imprisonment could take from him, not even the ban of Canaan. Unforewarned music sounded in his ears again, but he did not shrink from it now. This was not the circus band he had heard as he left the square, but a melody like a faraway serenade at night, as of "the horns of elf land faintly blowing," and he closed his eyes with the sweetness of it.

"Go ahead," he whispered. "Do that all you want to. If you'll keep it up like this awhile, I'll follow with 'Little Brown Jug, How I Love Thee!' It seems to pay after all!"

The welcome strains, however, were but the prelude to a harsher sound which interrupted and annihilated them—the courthouse bell clanging out 12. "All right," said Joe. "It's noon, and I'm 'cross Main street bridge."

He opened his eyes and looked about him whimsically. Then he shook his head again.

A lady had just emerged from the bridge and was coming toward him. It would be hard to get at Joe's first impressions of her. We can find conveyance for only the broadest and heaviest. Ancient and modern instances multiply the case of the sleeper who dreams out a long story in accurate color and fine detail, a tale of years, in the opening and shutting of a door. So with Joseph in the brief space of the lady's approach. And with him, as with the sleeper, it must have been—in fact it was—in his recollections later a blur of emotion.

He had little knowledge of the millinery arts, and he needed none to see the harmony—harmony like that of the day he had discovered a little while ago. Her dress and hat and gloves and parasol showed a pale lavender overtint like that which he had seen over-spreading the western slope. (Afterward he discovered that the gloves she wore that day were gray and that her hat was for the most part white.) The charm of fabric and tint belonging to what she wore was no shame to her, not being of primal importance beyond herself. It was but the expression of her daintiness and the adjunct of it. She was tall, but if Joe could have spoken or thought of her as "slender" he would have been capable of calling her lips "red," in which case he would not have been Joe and would have been as far from the truth as her lips were from red or as her supreme delicateness was from mere slenderness.

She was to pass him—so he thought—and as she drew nearer his breath came faster.

"Remember! Across Main street bridge at noon!"

Was this the fay of whom the voice had warned him? With that, there befell him the mystery of last night. He did not remember, but it was as if he lived again dimly the highest hour of happiness in a life a thousand years ago; perfume and music, roses, nightingales and plucked harpstrings. Yes, something wonderful was happening to him.

She had stopped directly in front of him—stopped and stood looking at him with her clear eyes. He did not lift his own to hers. He had long experience of the averted gaze of women, but it was not only that. A great shyness beset him. He had risen and removed his hat, trying (ineffectually) not to clear his throat, his every day sense urging upon him that she was a stranger in Canaan who had lost her way—the preposterousness of any one's losing the way in Canaan not just now appealing to his every day sense.

"Can I—can I"—he stammered, blushing miserably, meaning to finish with "direct you," or "show you the way."

Then he looked at her again and saw what seemed to him the strangest sight of his life. The lady's eyes had filled with tears—filled and overflowed.

"I'll sit here on the log with you," she said. And her voice was the voice which he had heard saying: "Remember! Across Main street bridge at noon!"

"What?" he gasped.

"You don't need to dust it!" she went on tremulously. And even then he did not know who she was.

(To Be Continued.)

There is more Catarrh in this section of the country than all other diseases put together, and until the last few years was supposed to be incurable. For a great many years doctors pronounced it a local disease and prescribed local remedies, and by constantly failing to cure with local treatment, pronounced it incurable. Science has proven Catarrh to be a constitutional disease and therefore requires constitutional treatment. Hall's Catarrh Cure, manufactured by F. J. Cheney & Co., Toledo, Ohio, is the only constitutional cure on the market. It is taken internally in doses from 10 drops to a teaspoonful. It acts directly on the blood and mucous surfaces of the system. They offer one hundred dollars for any case it fails to cure. Send for circulars and testimonials.

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