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.

"Please don't stop playing, Miss Tabor," said a voice behind her. She had not observed that Eugene had followed her into the room.

"Very well, if you like," she answered, looking up to smile absently at him, and she began to play a rakish little air which, composed by some rattlebrain at a cafe table, had lately skipped out of the Moulin Rouge to disport itself over Paris. She played it slowly in the minor, with elfish pathos, while he leaned upon the piano, his eyes fixed upon her fingers, which bore few rings—none, he observed with an unreasonable pleasure, upon the third finger of the left hand.

"It's one of those simpler Grieg things, isn't it?" he said, sighing gently. "I care for Grieg."

"Would you mind its being Chaminade?" she returned, dropping her eyes to cloak the sin.

"Ah, no; I recognize it now," replied Eugene. "He appeals to me even more than Greig."

At this she glanced quickly up at him, but more quickly down again, and hastened the time emphatically, swinging the little air into the major.

"Do you play 'The Pilgrim's Chorus?'"

She shook her head.

"Vous name pas Wagner?" inquired Eugene, leaning toward her.

"Oh, yes," she answered, bending her head far over, so that her face was concealed from him, except the chin, which, he saw with a thrill of inexplicable emotion, was trembling slightly. There were some small white flowers upon her hat, and these shook too.

When she turned to him he was surprised to see that she looked astonishingly happy, almost as if she had been struggling with joy instead of pain.

"This chair," she said, sinking into it, "makes me feel at home."

Naturally he could not understand.

"Because," she explained, "I once thought I was going to live in it. It has been reupholstered, but I should know it if I met it anywhere in the world."

"How very odd!" exclaimed Eugene, staring.

"I settled here in pioneer days," she went on, tapping the arms lightly with her finger tips. "It was the last dance I went to in Canaan."

"I fear the town was very provincial at that time," he returned, having completely forgotten the occasion she mentioned, therefore wishing to shift the subject. "I fear you may still find it so. There is not much here that one is in sympathy with intellectually—few people really of the world."

"Few people, I suppose you mean," she said softly, with a look that went deep into his eyes—"few people who really understand one."

Eugene had seated himself on the sill of an open window close by. "There has been," he answered, with the ghost of a sigh, "no one."

Mamie appeared in the doorway, and Eugene rose swiftly. "I have been trying to persuade Miss Tabor," he explained, with something too much of laughter, "to play again. You heard that little thing of Chaminade's"—

Mamie did not appear to hear him. She entered breathlessly, and there was no color in her cheeks. "Ariel," she exclaimed, "I don't want you to think I'm a tale bearer"—

"Oh, my dear!" Ariel said, with a gesture of deprecation.

"No," Miss Pike went on, all in one breath, "but I am afraid you will think it, because papa knows, and he wants to see you."

"What is it that he knows?"

"That you were walking with Joseph Louden!" (This was as if she had said, "That you poisoned your mother.") "I didn't tell him, but when he saw you with him I was troubled and asked Eugene what I'd better do, because he always knows what is best." (Mr. Bantry's expression, despite this tribute, was not happy.) "And he advised me to tell mamma about it and leave it in her hands. But she always tells papa everything"—

"Certainly; that is understood," said Ariel slowly, turning to smile at Eugene.

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 Louden!"

"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. Louden. 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 apoplectic 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. Louden? 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 quick! 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. Louden 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 big 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 not 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 promised huskily, "if he sets foot on my premises!"

"You mean you prefer I shouldn't receive him here?" She nodded pleasantly and quickly to the door, where she paused, gathering her skirts. "I shall not detain you another instant! And if Mr. Louden 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.

CHAPTER XIII.

THERE was a custom of Canaan, time worn and seldom honored in the breach, which put Ariel that afternoon in easy possession of a coign 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, Eugent 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 beaus 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. Flitcroft, 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 [illegible]

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. Louden?" 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 Louden 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. Flitcroft 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. Louden?"

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 glibness, "No."

Several of the young men rose. The wretched Flitcroft, 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.

Ariel started to her feet, but the bent figure coming up the walk in the darkness was that of Eskew Arp. He bowed gloomily to Mamie and in response to her inquiry if he wished to see her father answered no; he had come to talk with the granddaughter of his old friend Roger Tabor.

"Mr. Arp!" called Ariel. "I am so very glad!" She ran down to him and gave him her hand. "We'll sit here on the bench, shan't we?"

Mamie had risen and, skirting Norbert frostily, touched Eugene upon the shoulder as she went up the steps. He understood that he was to follow her indoors and, after a deep look at the bench where Ariel had seated herself beside Mr. Arp, he obeyed. Norbert was left a lonely ruin between the cold twin dogs. He had wrought desolation this afternoon, and that sweet verdure, his good name, so long in the planting, so carefully tended, was now a dreary waste; yet he contemplated this not so much as his present aspect of splendid isolation. Frozen by the daughter of the house, forgotten by the visitor, whose conversation with Mr. Arp was carried on in tones so low that he could not understand it, the fat one, though heartbreakingly loath to take himself away, began to comprehend that his hour had struck. He rose, descended the steps to the bench and seated himself unexpectedly upon the cement walk at Ariel's feet.

"Leg's gone to sleep," he explained in response to her startled exclamation, but, like a great soul, ignoring the accident of his position as well as the presence of Mr. Arp, he immediately proceeded, "Will you go riding with me tomorrow afternoon?"

"Aren't you very good natured, Mr. Flitcroft?" she asked, with an odd intonation.

"I'm imposed on often enough," he replied, rubbing his leg, "by people

of something that happened long ago, before I left Canaan, the last time I met you."

"I don't think I knew you before you went away. You haven't said if you'll go riding with me tomorrow. Please"—

"Get up," interrupted Mr. Arp acidly. "Somebody'll fall over you if you stay there." Flitcroft departed abruptly.

Ariel laughed, leaning forward, resting her elbows on her knee and her chin in her hand, so that the shadow of her hat shielded her eyes from the light. "I thought you looked surprised when you saw me today."

"I reckon I did!" he exclaimed. "Who wouldn't of been?"

"Why?"

"Wasn't the whole town the same way?" he demanded. "Did you meet anybody that didn't look surprised?"

"But why should they?"

"Good gracious!" he broke out. "Ain't you got any lookin' glasses?"

"I think almost all I have are still in the customs warehouse."

"Then use Mamie Pike's," responded the old man. "The town never dreamed you were goin' to turn out pretty at all, let alone the way you've turned out pretty. The Tocsin had a good deal about your looks and so forth in it once in a letter from Paris, but the folks that remembered you kind of set that down to the way papers talk about anybody with money, and nobody was prepared for it when they saw you. You don't need to drop no courtesies to me." He set his mouth grimly in response to the bow she made him. "I think female beauty is like all other human furbelows and as holler as heaven will be if only the good people are let in. But yet I did stop to look at you when you went past me today, and I kept on lookin' long as you were in sight. I reckon I always will when I git the chance, too—only shows what human nature is. But that wasn't all that folks were starin' at today. It was your walkin' with Joe Louden that really finished 'em, and I can say it upset me more than anything I've seen for a good many years."

"Upset you, Mr. Arp?" she cried. "I don't quite see."

The old man shook his head deploringly. "After what I'd written you about that boy"—

"Ah," she said softly, touching his sleeve with her fingers, "I haven't thanked you for that."

"You needn't," he returned sharply. "It was a pleasure. Do you remember how easy and quick I promised you?"

"I remember that you were very kind."

"Kind!" He gave forth an acid and chilling laugh. "It was about two months after Louden ran away and before you and Roger left Canaan, and you asked me to promise to write to you whenever word of that outcast came"—

"I didn't put it so, Mr. Arp."

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

"No, but you'd ought of! You asked me to write you whatever news of him should come, and if he came back to tell you how and when and all about it. And I did it and kept you sharp on his record ever since he landed here again. Do you know why I've done it? Do you know why I promised so quick and easy I would do it?"

"Out of kindness of your [illegible] think."

The acid laugh was repeated. "No, ma'am! You couldn't of guessed [illegible]er. I promised, and I kept on [illegible] because I knew there would be [illegible] anything good to tell. And she [illegible] was!"

"Nothing at all?" she inquired [illegible]ly.

"Never! I leave it to you if I've [illegible] ten one good word of him."

"You've written of the trouble he has received here," she [illegible] I've been able to see what he's [illegible] and bears."

"But have I written anything to show that he didn't deserve it? Haven't I told you everything [illegible] associates, his"—

"Indeed you have!"

"Then do you wonder that I am more surprised than most when you walking with him today? I knew you did it in cold [illegible] knowledge aforethought! Or I thought it was because you had been here long enough to hear his [illegible]tion, but I knew!"

"Tell me," she said, "if you [illegible] appointed when you saw [illegible] him."

"Yes," he snapped. "I was."

"I thought so. I saw the [illegible]tion in your face. You [illegible] didn't you?"

"I don't know what you're [illegible] about."

"Yes, you do. I know it hurt [illegible] to have me read you between [illegible] but for this once you must. You are so consistent that [illegible] never disappointed when [illegible] out badly or people are [illegible] foolish, are you?"

"No, certainly not. I expect [illegible]"

"And you were disappointed [illegible] today. Therefore, it must be [illegible] was doing something you [illegible] right and good. You see?" [illegible]ed a little closer to him, [illegible]gelically. "Ah, Mr. Arp," [illegible] "I know your secret! [illegible] me!"

He rose, confused and [illegible] full of denial as a detected [illegible] "I don't! Me admire? What [illegible] ornery world," he protested. [illegible] admire any human that ever [illegible]

"Yes, you do," she persisted [illegible] just proved it. But that is [illegible] your secret. The great thing [illegible] you admire Mr. Louden."

"I never heard such [illegible]" continued to protest, at the [illegible] moving down the walk [illegible] gate, leaning heavily [illegible] "Nothin' of the kind. There's [illegible] logic to that kind of an [illegible] no reason."

"You see, I understand [illegible] called after him. "I'm [illegible] away in the bitterness of [illegible] out."

"Found out!" His stick [illegible] moment to tap the cement. [illegible] he ejaculated uneasily. [illegible] pause, followed by a [illegible] chuckle. "At any rate," he [illegible] joy in the afterthought, "[illegible] go walkin' with him again."

He waited for the answer [illegible] came, after a time, sadly [illegible] you are right. Perhaps I [illegible]

"Ha, I thought so! Good [illegible]

"Good night, Mr. Arp."

She turned toward the light [illegible] Through the windows [illegible] could see Mamie, seated [illegible] miliar chair, following with [illegible] tender eyes the figure of Eugene [illegible] was pacing up and down [illegible] The town was deadly quiet; [illegible] hear the sound of footsteps [illegible] block away. She went to the [illegible] gazed a long time into the [illegible] street, watching the yellow [illegible] light sieved through the [illegible] the arc lights on the corner [illegible] and fro in the deep shadow [illegible] lamp swung slightly in the [illegible] Somewhere not far away [illegible] was broken by the screams [illegible] lor organ," which hooked [illegible] in pious agonies (the [illegible] hymnal), interminably prolonged [illegible] spasm. Presently a woman [illegible] outdid the organ, a voice [illegible] vivid the picture of the woman [illegible] owned it and the plowed [illegible] her above the nose glasses [illegible] "grace notes" were [illegible] birth. "Rescue the Perishing" [illegible] startlingly appropriate [illegible] dered with inconceivable [illegible] on each syllable—"Boss-[illegible] oosh-oong!" At unexpected [illegible] two male voices, evidently [illegible]

(Continued on page [illegible])

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