

THE CONQUEST of CANAAN

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"On purpose!" repeated Jonas. "And smashed a straw hat I hadn't had three months! All to pieces! So it couldn't be fixed!"

"And what then?" pursued Bradbury.

"She ran," replied Jonas bitterly—"ran! And Joe Loudens—Joe Loudens!" He paused and gulped.

"What did he do?" Peter leaned forward in his chair eagerly.

The narrator of the outrage gulped again and opened and shut his mouth before responding.

"He said if I didn't pay for a broken spoke on his wheel he'd have to sue me!"

CHAPTER II.

MAIN street, already muffled by the snow, added to its quietude a frozen hush where the wonder bearing youth pursued his course along its white, straight way. None was there in whom impertinence overmastered astonishment or who recovered from the sight in time to jeer with effect. No "Trab's boy" gathered courage to enact in the thoroughfare a scene of mockery and of joy.

And now that expression he wore—the indulgent amusement of a man of the world—began to disintegrate and show signs of change. It became finely grave, as of a high conventionality, lofty, assured and mannered, as he approached the Pike "mansion."

It was a big, smooth stone faced house, product of the seventies, frowning under an outrageously insistent mansard, capped by a cupola and staring out of long windows overtopped with ornamental slabs. Two east iron deer, painted death gray, twins of the same mold, stood on opposite sides of the front walk, their backs toward it and each other, their bodies in profile to the street, their necks bent, however, so that they gazed upon the passerby, yet gazed without emotion. Two large calm dogs guarded the top of the steps leading to the front door. They also were twins and of the same interesting metal, though honored beyond the deer by coats of black paint and shellac. It was to be remarked that these dogs were of no distinguishable species or breed, yet they were unmistakably dogs. The dullest must have recognized them as such at a glance, which was perhaps enough. It was a hideous house, important looking, cold, yet harshly aggressive, and it sat in the middle of its flat acre of snowy lawn like a rich, fat man enraged and sitting straight up in bed to swear.

And yet there was one charming thing about this ugly house. Some workmen were inclosing a large side porch with heavy canvas, evidently for festive purposes. Looking out from between two strips of the canvas was the rosy and delicate face of a pretty girl, smiling upon Eugene Bantry as he passed. It was an obviously pretty face, all the youth and prettiness there for your very first glance, elaborately pretty, like the splendid profusion of hair about and above it, amber colored hair, upon which so much time had been spent that a circle of large, round curls rose above the mass of it like golden bubbles tipping a coronet.

The girl's fingers were pressed thoughtfully against her chin as Eugene strode into view. Immediately her eyes widened and brightened. He swung along the fence with the handsomest appearance of unconsciousness until he reached a point nearly opposite her. Then he turned his head as if haphazardly and met her eyes. At once she threw out her hand toward him, waving him a greeting, a gesture which as her fingers had been near her lips was a little like throwing a kiss. He crooked an elbow and with a one, two, three military movement removed his small brimmed hat, extending it to full arm's length at the shoulder level, returned it to his head with life guard precision. This was also new to Canaan. He was letting Mamie Pike have it all at once.

The impression was as large as he could have desired. She remained at the opening in the canvas and watched him until he wagged his shoulders round the next corner and disappeared into a cross street. As for Eugene, he was calm with a great calm and very red.

He had not covered a great distance, however, before his gravity was replaced by his former smiling look of the lapsed gentleman amused by the innocent pastimes of the peasants, though there was no one in sight except a woman sweeping some snow from the front steps of a cottage, and she, not perceiving him, retired indoors without knowing her loss. He had come to a thinly built part of the town, the perfect quiet of which made the sound he heard as he opened the picket gate of his own home all the more startling. It was a scream, loud, frantic and terror stricken.

Eugene stopped, with the gate half open. Out of the winter skeleton of a grape arbor at one side of the four square brick house a brown faced girl of seventeen precipitated herself through the air in the midst of a shower of torn cardboard which she threw before her

as she leaped. She lit upon her toes and headed for the gate at top speed, pursued by a pale young man whose thin arms strove spasmodically to reach her. Scattering snow behind them, hair flying, the pair sped on like two tattered branches before a high wind, for, as they came nearer Eugene, of whom, in the tenseness of their flight, they took no note, it was to be seen that both were so shabbily dressed as to be almost ragged.

The girl ran beautifully, but a fleet foot was behind her and, though she dodged and evaded like a creature of the woods, the reaching hand fell upon the loose sleeve of her red blouse, nor fell lightly. She gave a wrench of frenzy. The antique fabric refused the strain, parted at the shoulder seam so thoroughly that the whole sleeve came away, but not to its owner's release, for she had been brought round by the jerk, so that, agile as she had shown herself, the pursuer threw an arm about her neck before she could twist away and held her.

There was a sharp struggle as short as it was fierce. Neither of these extraordinary wrestlers spoke. They fought. Victory hung in the balance for perhaps four seconds. Then the girl was thrown heavily upon her back in such a turmoil of snow that she seemed to be the mere nucleus of a white comet. She struggled to get up, plying knee and elbow with a very anguish of determination, but her opponent held her, pinioned both her wrists with one hand and with the other rubbed great handfuls of snow into her face, sparing neither mouth nor eyes.

"You will!" he cried. "You will tear up my pictures! A dirty trick, and you get washed for it!"

Half suffocated, choking, gasping, she still fought on, squirming and kicking with such spirit that the pair of them appeared to the beholder like figures of mist writhing in a fountain of snow.

More violence was to mar the peace of morning. Unexpectedly attacked from the rear, the conqueror was seized by the nape of the neck and one wrist and jerked to his feet, simultaneously receiving a succession of kicks from his assailant. Prompted by an entirely natural curiosity, he essayed to turn his head to see who this might be, but a twist of his forearm and the pressure of strong fingers under his ear constrained him to remain as he was, therefore, abandoning resistance and, oddly enough, accepting without comment the indication that his captor desired to remain for the moment incognito, he resorted calmly to explanations.

"She tore up a picture of mine," he said, receiving the punishment without apparent emotion. "She seemed to think because she'd drawn it herself she had a right to."

There was a slight whimsical droop at the corner of his mouth as he spoke, which might have been thought characteristic of him. He was an odd looking boy, not ill made, though very thin and not tall. His pallor was clear and even, as though constitutional; the features were delicate, almost childlike, but they were very slightly distorted, through nervous habit, to an expression at once wistful and humorous; one eyebrow was a shade higher than the other, one side of the mouth slightly drawn down; the eyelids twitched a little, habitually; the fine, blue eyes themselves were almost comically reproachful—the look of a puppy who thinks you would not have beaten him if you had known what was in his heart. All of this was in the quality of his voice, too, as he said to his invisible captor, with an air of detachment from any personal feeling:

"What peculiar shoes you wear! I don't think I ever felt any so pointed before."

The rescuing knight took no thought of offering to help the persecuted damsel to arise; instead he tightened his grip upon the prisoner's neck until, perforce, water—not tears—started from the latter's eyes.

"You miserable little muff!" said the conqueror. "What the devil do you mean making this scene on our front lawn?"

"Why, it's Eugene!" exclaimed the helpless one. "They didn't expect you 'll tonight. When did you get in?"

"Just in time to give you a lesson, my buck," replied Bantry grimly. "In good time for that, my playful stepbrother."

He began to twist the other's wrist, a treatment of bone and ligament in the application of which schoolboys and even freshmen are often adept. Eugene made the torture acute and was apparently enjoying the work when suddenly, without any manner of warning, he received an astounding blow upon the left ear, which half stunned him for the moment and sent his hat flying and himself reeling, so great was the surprise and shock of it. It was not a slap, not an open handed push—nothing like it—but a fierce, well delivered blow from a clinched fist with the shoulder behind it, and it was the girl who had given it.

"Don't you dare to touch Joe!" she cried passionately. "Don't you lay a finger on him!"

Furious and red, he staggered round to look at her.

"You wretched little wildcat, what do you mean by that?" he broke out. "Don't you touch Joe!" she panted. "Don't you touch Joe!" Her breath caught and there was a break in her voice as she faced him. She could not finish the repetition of that cry, "Don't you touch Joe!"

But there was no break in the spirit, that passion of protection which had dealt the blow. Both boys looked at her, somewhat aghast.

Eugene recovered himself. He swung round upon his heel, restored his hat to his head with precision, picked up his stick and touched his banjo case with it.

"Carry that into the house," he said indifferently to his stepbrother.

"Don't you do it!" said the girl hotly between her chattering teeth.

Eugene turned toward her, wearing the sharp edge of a smile. Not removing his eyes from her face, he produced with deliberation a flat silver box from a pocket, took therefrom a cigarette, replaced the box, extracted a smaller silver box from another pocket, shook out of it a fusee, slowly lit the cigarette—this in a splendid silence, which he finally broke to say languidly, but with particular distinctness:

"Ariel Tabor, go home!" The girl's teeth stopped chattering, her lips remaining parted; she shook the hair out of her eyes and stared at him as if she did not understand, but Joe Loudens, who had picked up the banjo case obediently, burst into cheerful laughter.

"That's it, Gene," he cried gayly. "That's the way to talk to her!"

"Stow it, you young cub," replied Eugene, not turning to him. "Do you think I'm trying to be amusing?"

"I don't know what you mean by 'stow it,'" Joe began, "but if—"

"I mean," interrupted the other, not relaxing his faintly smiling stare at the girl—"I mean that Ariel Tabor is to go home. Really we can't have this kind of thing occurring upon our front lawn!"

The flush upon her wet cheeks deepened and became dark. Even her arm grew redder as she gazed back at him. In his eyes was patent his complete realization of the figure she cut, of this bare arm, of the strewn hair, of the fallen stocking, of the ragged shoulder of her blouse, of her patched short skirt, of the whole disheveled little figure. He was the master of the house, and he was sending her home as ill behaved children are sent home by neighbors.

The immobile, amused superiority of this proprietor of silver boxes, this wearer of strange and brilliant garments, became slightly intensified as he pointed to the fallen sleeve, a rag of red and snow, lying near her feet.

"You might take that with you?" he said interrogatively.

Her gaze had not wavered in meeting his, but at this her eyelashes began to wink uncontrollably, her chin to tremble. She bent over the sleeve and picked it up before Joe Loudens, who had started toward her, could do it for her. Then turning, her head still bent so that her face was hidden from both of them, she ran out of the gate.

Ariel ran along the fence until she came to the next gate, which opened upon a walk leading to a shabby, meandering old house of one story, with a very long, low porch, once painted white, running the full length of the front. Ariel sprang upon the porch and disappeared within the house.

Joe stood looking after her, his eyelashes winking as had hers. "You oughtn't to have treated her that way," he said huskily.

"Pick up that banjo case again and come on," commanded Mr. Bantry tartly. "Where's the mater?"

Joe stared at him. "Where's what?"

"The mater?" was the frowning reply.

"Oh, yes, I know!" said Joe, looking at his stepbrother curiously. "I've seen

"Don't you dare to touch Joe!" she cried, it in stories. She's upstairs. You'll be a surprise. You're wearing lots of clothes, Gene."

"I suppose it will seem so to Canaan," returned the other wearily. "Governor feeling fit?"

"I never saw him," Joe replied, then caught himself. "Oh, I see what you mean! Yes, he's all right."

They had come into the hall, and Eugene was removing the long coat, while his stepbrother looked at him thoughtfully.

dies' names are not supposed to be mentioned indiscriminately."

"It's only," said Joe, "that I wanted to say that there's a dance at their house tonight. I suppose you'll be going?"

"Certainly. Are you?"

Both knew that the question was needless, but Joe answered gently: "Oh, no, of course not." He leaned over and fumbled with one foot as if to fasten a loose shoestring. "She wouldn't be very likely to ask me."

"Well, what about it?"

"Only that—that Ariel Tabor's going."

"Indeed!" Eugene paused on the stairs, which he had begun to ascend. "Very interesting."

"I thought," continued Joe hopefully, straightening up to look at him, "that maybe you'd dance with her. I don't believe many will ask her—I'm afraid they won't—and if you would, even only once, it would kind of make up for—"

"Dear old mater!" said Eugene. Joe went out of the front door quickly.

CHAPTER III.

THE door which Ariel had entered opened upon a narrow hall, and down this she ran to her own room, passing, with face averted, the entrance to the broad, low ceilinged chamber that had served Roger Tabor as a studio for almost fifty years. He was sitting there now, in a hopeless and disconsolate attitude, with his back toward the double doors, which were open, and had been open since their hinges had begun to give way, when Ariel was a child. Hearing her step, he called her name, but did not turn, and, receiving no answer, sighed faintly as he heard her own door close upon her.

Then as his eyes wandered about the many canvases which leaned against the dingy walls he sighed again. Usually they showed their brown backs, but today he had turned them all to face outward. Twilight, sunset, moonlight (the courthouse in moonlight), dawn, morning, noon (Main street at noon), high summer, first spring, red autumn, midwinter, all were there, ilimitably detailed, worked to a smoothness like a glaze and all lovingly done with unthinkable labor.

After a time the old man got up, went to his easel near a window and, sighing again, began patiently to work upon one of these failures—a portrait in oil of a savage old lady, which he was doing from a photograph. The expression of the mouth and the shape of the nose had not pleased her descendants and the beneficiaries under the will, and it was upon the images of these features that Roger labored. He leaned far forward, with his face close to the canvas, holding his brushes after the Spencerian fashion, working steadily through the afternoon and when the light grew dimmer, leaning closer to his canvas to see. When it had become almost dark in the room he lit a student lamp with a green glass shade and, placing it upon a table beside him, continued to paint. Ariel's voice interrupted him at last.

"It's quitting time, grandfather," she called gently from the doorway behind him.

He sank back in his chair, conscious for the first time of how tired he had grown. "I suppose so," he said, "though it seemed to me I was just getting my hand in." His eyes brightened for a moment. "I declare, I believe I've caught it a great deal better. Come and look, Ariel. Doesn't it seem to you that I'm getting it? Those pearly shadows in the flesh?"

"I'm sure of it. Those people ought to be very proud to have it." She came to him quietly, took the palette and brushes from his hands and began to clean them, standing in the shadow behind him. "It's too good for them."

"No," he murmured in return. "You can do much better yourself. Your sketches show it."

"No, no!" she protested quickly. "Yes, they do, and I wondered if it was only because you were young. But those I did when I was young are almost the same as the ones I paint now. I haven't learned much. There hasn't been any one to show me. And you can't learn from print, never! Yet I've grown in what I see—grown so that the world is full of beauty to me that I never dreamed of seeing when I began. But I can't paint it. I can't get it on the canvas. Ah, I think I might have known how to if I hadn't had to teach myself, if I could only have seen how some of the other fellows did their work. If I'd ever saved money to get away from Canaan—if I could have gone away from it and come back knowing how to paint it—if I could have got to Paris for just one month! Paris for just one month!"

"Perhaps we will. You can't tell what may happen." It was always her reply to this cry of his.

"You're young, you're young." He smiled indulgently. "What were you doing all this afternoon, child?"

"In my room, trying to make over mamma's wedding dress for tonight."

"Tonight?"

"Mamie Pike invited me to a dance at their house."

"Very well. I'm glad you're going to be gay," he said, not seeing the faintly bitter smile that came to her face. "I don't think I'll be very gay," she answered. "I don't know why I go. Nobody ever asks me to dance."

off before he could speak. "Oh, it isn't altogether because we're poor. It's more I don't know how to wear what I've got, the way those girls do. I never cared much and—well, I'm not worrying, Roger. And I think I've done a good deal with mamma's dress. It's a very grand dress. I wonder I never thought of wearing it until today. I may be"—she laughed and blushed—"I may be the belle of the ball—who knows?"

"You'll want me to walk over with you and come for you afterward, I expect."

"Only to take me. It may be late when I come away—if a good many should ask me to dance for once. Of course I could come home alone. But Joe Loudens is going to sort of hang around outside, and he'll meet me at the gate and see me safe home."

"Oh!" he exclaimed blankly. "Isn't it all right?"

"I think I'd better come for you," he answered gently. "The truth is, I—I think you'd better not be with Joe Loudens a great deal."

"Why?"

"Well, he doesn't seem a vicious boy to me, but I'm afraid he's getting rather a bad name, my dear."

"He's not getting one," she said gravely. "He's already got one. He's



"If I could have got to Paris for just one month!"

had a bad name in Canaan for a long while. It grew in the first place out of shabbiness and mischief, but it did grow, and if people keep on giving him a bad name the time will come when he'll live up to it. He's not any worse than I am, and I guess my own name isn't too good—for a girl. And yet, so far, there's nothing against him except his bad name."

"I'm afraid there is," said Roger. "It doesn't look very well for a young man of his age to be doing no better than delivering papers."

"It gives him time to study law," she answered quickly. "If he clerked all day in a store he couldn't."

"I didn't know he was studying now. I thought I'd heard that he was in a lawyer's office for a few weeks last year and was turned out for setting fire to it with a pipe."

"It was an accident," she interposed. "But some pretty important papers were burned, and after that none of the other lawyers would have him."

"He's not in an office," she admitted. "I didn't mean that. But he studies a great deal. He goes to the courts all the time they're in session, and he's bought some books of his own."

"Well, perhaps," he assented, "but they say he gambles and drinks and that last week Judge Pike threatened to have him arrested for throwing dice with some negroes behind the judge's stable."

"What of it? I'm about the only nice person in town that will have anything to do with him—and nobody except you thinks I'm very nice!"

"Ariel! Ariel!"

"I know all about his gambling with dardies," she continued excitedly, her voice rising, "and I know that he goes to saloons and that he's an intimate friend of half the riffraff in town. And I know the reason for it, too, because he's told me. He wants to know them, to understand them, and he says some day they'll make him a power, and then he can help them!"

The old man laughed helplessly. "But I can't let him bring you home, my dear."

She came to him slowly and laid her hands upon his shoulders. Grandfather and granddaughter were nearly of the same height, and she looked squarely into his eyes. "Then you must say it is because you want to come for me, not because I mustn't come with Joe."

"But I think it is a little because you mustn't come with Joe," he answered, "especially from the Pikes. Don't you see that it mightn't be well for Joe himself if the judge should happen to see him? I understand he warned the boy to keep away from the neighborhood entirely or he would have him locked up for dice throwing. The judge is a very influential man, you know, and as determined in matters like this as he is irritable."

"Oh, if you put it on that ground," the girl replied, her eyes softening, "I think you'd better come for me yourself."

downs of all the houses threw bright patches on the snow of the side yards. The windows of other rooms, except those of the kitchens, were dark, for the rule of the place was Puritanical in thrift, as in all things, and the good housekeepers disputed every record of the meters with unhappy gas collectors.

There was no better housekeeper in town than Mrs. Loudens, nor a thrifter, but hers was one of the few houses in Canaan that evening which showed bright lights in the front rooms while the family were at supper. It was proof of the agitation caused by the arrival of Eugene that she forgot to turn out the gas in her parlor and in the chamber she called a library on her way to the evening meal.

Joe escaped as soon as he could, though not before the count of his later sins had been set before Eugene in detail, in mass and in all of their depth, breadth and thickness. His father spoke but once after nodding heavily to confirm all points of Mrs. Loudens's recital.

"You better use any influence you've got with your brother," he said to Eugene, "to make him come to time. I can't do anything with him. If he gets in trouble, he needn't come to me! I'll never help him again. I'm tired of it!"

Joe's movements throughout the earlier part of that evening are of uncertain report. It is known that he made a partial payment of 45 cents at a second-hand book store for a number of volumes, "Grindstaff on Torts" and some others, which he had negotiated on the installment system. It is also believed that he won 28 cents playing seven-up in the little room behind Louie Farbach's bar, but these things are of little import compared to the established fact that at 11 o'clock he was one of the ball guests at the Pike mansion. He took no active part in the festivities, nor was he one of the dancers. His was, on the contrary, the role of a quiet observer. He lay stretched at full length upon the floor of the inclosed porch—one of the strips of canvas was later found to have been loosened—wedged between the outer railing and a row of palms in green tubs.

It was not to play eavesdropper that the uninvited Joe had come. He was not there to listen, and it is possible that had the curtains of other windows afforded him the chance to behold the dance he might not have risked the dangers of his present position. He had not the slightest interest in the whispered coquetries that he heard.

He watched only to catch now and then over the shoulders of the dancers a furtive glimpse of a pretty head that fitted across the window—the amber hair of Mamie Pike. He shivered in the drafts, and the floor of the porch was cement, painful to elbow and knee, the space where he lay cramped and narrow, but the golden bubbles of her hair, the shimmer of her dainty pink dress and the fluffy wave of her lace scarf as she crossed and recrossed in a waltz left him apparently in no discontent. He watched with parted lips, his pale cheeks reddening whenever those fair glimpses were his. At last she came out to the veranda with Eugene and sat upon a little divan, so close to Joe that, daring wildly in the shadow, he reached out a trembling hand and let his fingers rest upon the end of her scarf, which had fallen from her shoulders and touched the floor. She sat with her back to him, as did Eugene.

"You have changed, I think, since last summer," he heard her say reflectively.

"For the worse, ma chérie?" Joe's expression might have been worth seeing when Eugene said "ma chérie," for it was known in the Loudens household that Mr. Bantry had failed to pass his examination in the French language.

"No," she answered. "But you have seen so much and accomplished so much since then. You have become so polished and so—" She paused and then continued: "But perhaps I'd better not say it. You might be offended."

"No, I want you to say it," he returned confidently, and his confidence was fully justified, for she said:

"Well, then, I mean that you have become so thoroughly a man of the world. Now I've said it! You are offended, aren't you?"

"Not at all; not at all," replied Mr. Bantry, preventing by a masterful effort his pleasure from showing in his face.

"Then I'm—glad," she whispered, and Joe saw his stepbrother touch her hand, but she rose quickly. "There's the music," she cried happily. "It's a waltz, and it's yours."

Joe heard her little high heels tapping gayly toward the window, followed by the heavier tread of Eugene, but he did not watch them go.

He lay on his back, with the hand that had touched Mamie's scarf pressed across his closed eyes.

The music of the waltz was of the old fashioned swingingly sorrowful sort, and it would be hard to say how long it was after that before he could hear the air played without a recurrence of the bitterness of that moment. The rhythmic pathos of the violins was in such accord with a faint sound of weeping which he heard near him presently that for a little while he believed this sound to be part of the music and part of himself. Then it became more distinct, and he raised himself on one elbow to look about.

Very close to him, sitting upon the divan in the shadow, was a girl wearing a dress of beautiful silk. She was crying softly, her face in her hands.

CHAPTER IV.

ARIEL had worked all the afternoon over her mother's wedding gown, and two hours were required by her toilet for the dance. She curled her hair frizzily, burning it here and there, with a slate