

# THE CONQUEST of CANAAN

By BOOTH TARKINGTON,  
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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 pencil heated over a lamp chimney, and she placed above one ear three or four large artificial roses, taken from an old hat of her mother's, which she had found in a trunk in the storeroom. Possessing no slippers, she carefully blacked and polished her shoes, which had been clumsily resoled, and fastened into the strings of each small rosettes of red ribbon, after which she practiced swinging the train of her skirt until she was proud of her manipulation of it. She had no powder, but found in her grandfather's room a lump of magnesia that he was in the habit of taking for heartburn and passed it over and over her brown face and hands. Then a lingering gaze into her small mirror gave her joy at last. She yearned so hard to see herself charming that she did see herself so. Admiration came, and she told herself that she was more attractive to look at than she had ever been in her life and that perhaps at last she might begin to be sought for like other girls.

It was in the Pike dressing room that the change began to come. There was a big cheval glass at one end of the room, and she faced it when her turn came for the mirror was popular with a sinking spirit. There was the contrast, like a picture painted and framed. The other girls all wore their hair after the fashion introduced to Canaan by Mamie Pike the week before on her return from a visit to Chicago. None of them had "crimped" and none had bedecked their tresses with artificial flowers. Her alterations of the wedding dress had not been successful; the skirt was too short in front and higher on one side than on the other, showing too plainly the heavy soled shoes, which had lost their polish in the walk through the snow. The ribbon rosettes were fully revealed, and as she glanced at their reflection, she heard the words, "Look at that train and those rosettes!" whispered behind her and saw in the mirror two pretty young women turn away with their handkerchiefs over their mouths and retreat hurriedly to an alcove. All the feet in the room except Ariel's were in dainty kid or satin slippers of the color of the dresses from which they glimmered out, and only Ariel wore a train. She went away from the mirror and pretended to be busy with a hanging thread in her sleeve.

Ariel sat in one of the chairs against the wall and watched the dancers with a smile of eager and benevolent interest. In Canaan no parents, no guardians, no aunts were hailed forth of nights to denounce the junketings of youth. Ariel sat conspicuously alone. There was nothing else for her to do. It was not an easy matter.

Once or twice between the dances she saw Miss Pike speak appealingly to one of the superfluous, glancing at the same time in her own direction, and Ariel could see, too, that the appeal proved unsuccessful, until at last Mamie approached her leading Norbert Filtcroft partly by the hand, partly by will power. Norbert was an excessively fat boy and at the present moment looked as patient as the blind. But he asked Ariel if she was "engaged for the next dance?" and, Mamie having flitted away, stood disconsolately beside her waiting for the music to begin.

Ariel was grateful for him.

The orchestra flourished into "La Paloma;" he put his arm mournfully about her and, taking her right hand with his left, carried her arm out to a rigid right angle, beginning to pump and balance for time. They made three false starts and then got away. Ariel danced badly; she hopped and lost the step, but they persevered, bumping against other couples continually.

She caught her partner making a burlesque face of suffering over her shoulder and, turning her head quickly, saw for whose benefit he had constructed it. Eugene Bantry, dying expertly by with Mamie, was bestowing upon Mr. Filtcroft a condescendingly commiserative wink. The next instant she tripped in her train and fell to the floor at Eugene's feet, carrying her partner with her.

There was a shout of laughter. The young hostess stopped Eugene, who would have gone on, and he had no choice but to stoop to Ariel's assistance.

"It seems to be a habit of mine," she said, laughing loudly.

She did not appear to see the hand he offered, but got to her feet without help and walked quickly away with Norbert, who proceeded to live up to the character he had given himself.

"Perhaps we had better not try it again," she laughed.

"Well, I should think not," he returned, with the frankest gloom. With the air of conducting her home he took her to the chair against the wall whence he had brought her. There his responsibility for her seemed to cease. "Will you excuse me?" he asked, and there was no doubt that he felt that he had been given more than his share that evening, even though he was fat.

Ariel sat through more dances, interminable dances and intermissions, in that same chair, in which, it began to seem, she was to live out the rest of her life. Now and then if she thought people were looking at her as they passed she broke into a laugh and nodded slightly, as if still amused over her mishap.

After a long time she rose and, laughing cheerfully to Mr. Filtcroft, who was standing in the doorway and replied with a wan smile, stepped out quickly into the hall, where she almost ran into her great-uncle, Jonas Tabor. He was going toward the big front doors with Judge Pike, having just come out of the latter's library, down the hall.

Jonas was breathing heavily and was shockingly pale, though his eyes were very bright. He turned his back upon his grandniece sharply and went out of the door. Ariel turned from him quite as abruptly and re-entered the room whence she had come. She laughed again to her fat friend as she passed him and, still laughing, went toward the fatal chair, when her eyes caught sight of Eugene Bantry and Mamie coming in through the window. She went to the window and looked out. The porch seemed deserted and was faintly illuminated by a few Japanese lanterns. She sprang out, dropped upon the divan and, burying her face in her hands, cried heartbrokenly. Presently she felt something alive touch her foot, and, her breath catching with alarm, she started to rise. A thin hand, issuing from a shabby sleeve, had stolen out between two of the green tubs and was pressing upon one of her shoes.

"Sh!" said Joe. "Don't make a noise! What were you crying about?" "Nothing," she said, the tears not ceasing to gather in her eyes.

"I want to know what it was," he insisted. "Didn't the fools ask you to dance? Well, what do you care about that for?" "I don't," she answered; "I don't." Then suddenly, without being able to prevent it, she sobbed.

She gave way all at once to a gust of sorrow and bitterness. She bent far over and caught his hand and laid it against her wet cheek. "Oh, Joe," she whispered brokenly, "I think we have such hard lives, you and I! It doesn't seem right while we're so young! Why can't we be like the others? Why can't we have some of the fun?"

He withdrew his hand with the embarrassment and shame he would have felt had she been a boy. "Get out!" he said feebly.

She did not seem to notice, but, still stooping, rested her elbows on her knees and her face in her hands. "I try so hard to have fun, to be like the rest, and it's always a mistake, always, always, always!" She rocked herself slightly from side to side. "I am a fool, it's the truth, or I wouldn't have come tonight. I want to be attractive. I want to be in things. I want to laugh like they do."

"I'll tell you something," Joe whispered, chucking desperately. "Gene made me unpack his trunk, and I don't believe he's as great a man at college as he is here. I opened one of his books, and some one had written in it, 'Trigamallow Bantry, the Class Try-to-Be.' He'd never noticed, and you ought to have heard him go on! You'd have just died, Ariel. I almost bust wide open. It was a mean trick in me, but I couldn't help showing it to him."

Joe's object was obtained. She stopped crying and, wiping her eyes, smiled faintly. Then she became grave. "You're jealous of Eugene," she said.

He considered this for a moment. "Yes," he answered thoughtfully; "I am. But I wouldn't think about him differently on that account. And I wouldn't talk about him to any one but you."

"You must go away," she said anxiously. "Oh, please, Joe!"

"Not yet. I want!"

She coughed loudly. Eugene and Mamie Pike had come to the window, with the evident intention of occupying the veranda; but, perceiving Ariel engaged with threads in her sleeve, they turned away and disappeared.



They made three false starts and then got away.

Other couples looked out from time to time and, finding the solitary figure in possession, retreated abruptly to seek stairways and remote corners for the things they were impelled to say.

And so Ariel held the porch for three dances and three intermissions, occupying a great part of the time with entreaties that her obdurate and reckless companion should go. When for the fourth time the music sounded, her agitation had so increased that she was visibly trembling. "I can't stand it, Joe," she said, bending over him. "I don't know what would happen if they found you. You've got to go!"

"No; I haven't," he chuckled. "They haven't even distributed the supper yet."

"And you take all the chances," she said slowly, "just to see her pass that widow a few times."

"What chances?"

"Of what the judge will do if any one sees you."

"Nothing, because if any one saw me I'd leave."

"Please go."

"Not till!"

"Sh!"

A colored waiter, smiling graciously, came out upon the porch bearing a tray of salad, hot oysters and coffee. Ariel shook her head.

"I don't want any," she murmured.

The waiter turned away in pity and was re-entering the window, when a passionate whisper fell upon her ears, as well as upon Ariel's.

"Take it!"

"Ma'am?" said the waiter.

"I've changed my mind," he answered quickly. The waiter, his entire face, so quick, gave of his vernal smile, and, as he distributed the product of his wealthy.

When he had gone, "Give me the very thing that's hot," said Joe. "You can't keep the salad."

"I couldn't eat it or anything else," she answered, thrusting the plate between the palms.

For a time there was silence. From within the house came the continuous babble of voices and laughter, the clink of cutlery on china. The young people spent a long time over their supper. By and by the waiter returned to the veranda, deposited a plate of colored ices upon Ariel's knees with a noble gesture and departed.

"No ice for me," said Joe.

"Won't you please go now?" she entreated.

"It wouldn't be good manners," he responded. "They might think I only came for supper."

"Hand me back the things. The waiter might come for them any minute."

"Take them, then. You'll see that jealousy hasn't spoiled my appetite!"

A bottle shaped figure appeared to the window, and she had no time to take the plate and cup which were being pushed through the palm leaves. She whispered a syllable of warning, and the dishes were hurriedly withdrawn as Norbert Filtcroft, wearing a solemn expression of injury, came out upon the veranda.

He halted suddenly. "What's that?" he asked, with suspicion.

"Nothing," answered Ariel sharply. "Where?"

"Behind those palms."

"Probably your own shadow," she laughed; "or it might have been a draft moving the leaves."

He did not seem satisfied, but stared hard at the spot where the dishes had disappeared, meantime edging back cautiously nearer the window.

"They want you," he said, after a pause. "Some one's come for you."

"Oh, is grandfather waiting?" She rose, at the same time letting her handkerchief fall. She stooped to pick it up with her face away from Norbert and toward the palms, whispering tremulously, but with passionate urgency, "Please go!"

"It isn't your grandfather that has come for you," said the fat one slowly. "It is old Eskew Arp. Something's happened."

She looked at him for a moment, beginning to tremble violently, her eyes growing wide with fright.

"Is my grandfather—is he sick?"

"You better go and see. Old Eskew's waiting in the hall. He'll tell you."

She was by him and through the window instantly. Norbert did not follow her; he remained for several moments looking earnestly at the palms; then he stepped through the window and beckoned to a youth who was lounging in the doorway across the room.

"There's somebody hiding behind those palms," he whispered when his friend reached him. "Go and tell Judge Pike to send some of the niggers to watch outside the porch, so that he doesn't get away. Then tell him to get his revolver and come here."

Meanwhile Ariel had found Mr. Arp waiting in the hall talking in a low voice to Mrs. Pike.

"Your grandfather's all right," he told the frightened girl quickly. "He sent me for you, that's all. Just hurry and get your things."

She was with him again in a moment and, seizing the old man's arm, hurried him down the steps and toward the street almost at a run.

"You're not telling me the truth," she said—"you're not telling me the truth!"

"Nothing has happened to Roger," panted Mr. Arp. "Nothing to mind, I mean. Here! We're going this way, not that." They had come to the gate, and as she turned to the right he pulled her round sharply to the left. "We're not going to your house."

"Where are we going?"

"We're going to your Uncle Jonas."

"Why?" she cried in supreme astonishment. "What do you want to take me there for? Don't you know that he's stopped speaking to me?"

"Yes," said the old man grimly, with something of the look he wore when delivering a clincher at the National House; "he's stopped speaking to everybody."

(Continued Next Sunday.)

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