

# THE CONQUEST of CANAAN

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## CHAPTER VII.

THE passing of Joseph from Canaan was complete. It was an event which there was neither sackcloth nor wailing, and, though there came no news to him, it cannot be said that Canaan did not hear of him, for surely it could hear itself talk. The death of Jonas Tabor and young Loudens' crime and flight incited high doings in the National House windows. Many days the sages lingered with the broken seats of morsels left over from the banquet of gossip.

Very little of Joseph's adventures and occupations during the time of his wandering is revealed to us; he always had an unwilling memory for pain and was not afterward wont to speak of those years which cut the hard lines in his face. The first account of him to reach Canaan came as directly to the windows of the National House as Mr. Arp, hastening thither from the station, satchel in hand, could bring it.

This was on a September morning two years after the flight, and Eskew, it appears, had been to the state fair and had beheld many things strangely affirming his constant testimony that this unhappy world increaseth in sin; strangest of all, his meeting with our vagrant sculawag of Canaan. "Not a blame bit of doubt about it," declared Eskew to the incredulous conclave. "There was that Joe, and nobody else, stuck up in a little box outside a tent at the fair grounds and sellin' tickets



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to see the Spotted Wild Boy!" Yes, it was Joe Loudens! Think you Mr. Arp could forget that face, those crooked eyebrows? Had Eskew tested the recognition? Had he spoken with the outcast? Had he not! Aye, but with such peculiar result that the battle of words among the sages began with a true onset of the regulars, for, according to Eskew's narrative, when he had delivered grimly at the boy this charge, "I know you—you're Joe Loudens!" the extraordinary reply had been made promptly and without change of countenance. "Positively no free seats!"

"What's the matter with you?" Mr. Arp whirled upon Uncle Joe Daver, who was enjoying himself by repeating at intervals the unreasonable words, "Couldn't of be'n Joe," without any explanation. "Why couldn't it?" shouted Eskew. "It was! Do you think my eyes are as fur gone as yours? I saw him, I tell you. What's more, that boy Joe 'll turn up here again some day. You'll see if he don't. He's a seed of trouble and iniquity, and anything of that kind is sure to come back to Canaan!"

Mr. Arp stuck to his prediction for several months. Then he began to waver and evade. By the end of the second year following its first utterance he had formed the habit of denying that he had ever made it at all and, finally having come to believe with all his heart that the prophecy had been deliberately foisted upon him and put in his mouth by Squire Buckalew, became so sore upon the subject that even the hardest dared not refer to it in his presence.

Eskew's story of the ticket seller was the only news of Joe Loudens that came to Canaan during seven years. Another citizen of the town encountered the wanderer, however, but under circumstances so susceptible to misconception that in a moment of illumination he decided to let the matter rest in a golden silence. This was Mr. Bantry, and the cause of his silence was the fact that his meeting with Joe occurred in the "Straw Cellar," a tough New York resort, in which neither of them should have been.

## CHAPTER VIII.

EUGENE did not inform Canaan or any inhabitant of his adventure of the "Straw Cellar," nor did any hear of his meeting

with his stepbrother, and after Mr. Arp's adventure five years passed into the imperishable before the town heard of the wanderer again, and then it heard at first hand. Mr. Arp's prophecy fell true, and he took it back to his bosom again, claimed it as his own the morning of its fulfillment. Joe Loudens had come back to Canaan.

The elder Loudens was the first to know of his prodigal's return. He was alone in the office of the wooden butter dish factory, of which he was the superintendent, when the young man came in unannounced. He was still pale and thin. His eyebrows had the same crook, one corner of his mouth the same droop. He was only an inch or so taller, not enough to be thought a tall man, and yet for a few moments the father did not recognize his son, but stared at him, inquiring his business. During those few seconds of unrecognition Mr. Loudens was somewhat favorably impressed with the stranger's appearance.

"You don't know me," said Joe, smiling cheerfully. "Perhaps I've changed in seven years." And he held out his hand.

Then Mr. Loudens knew. He tilted back in his desk chair, his mouth falling open. "Good God!" he said, not noticing the outstretched hand. "Have you come back?"

Joe's hand fell. "Yes, I've come back to Canaan," Mr. Loudens plainly received this as no pleasant surprise. "What for?" he asked slowly.

"To practice law, father." "What?" "Yes," said the young man. "There ought to be an opening here for me. I'm a graduate of as good a law school as there is in the country."

Mr. Loudens leaned forward, a hand on each knee, his brow deeply corrugated.

"Who do you think in Canaan would put a case in your hands?"

"Oh, I don't expect to get anything important at the start, but after awhile—"

"With your reputation?" "But that's seven years ago, and I suppose the town's forgotten all about it and forgotten me too. So, you see, I can make a fresh start. That's what I came back for."

"I don't believe," said Mr. Loudens, with marked uneasiness, "that Mrs. Loudens would be willing to let you live with us."

"No," said Joe gently. "I didn't expect it. Well, I won't keep you from your work. I suppose you're pretty busy."

"Yes, I am," responded his father promptly. "But I'll see you again before you go. I want to give you some advice."

"I'm not going," said Joe. "Not going to leave Canaan, I mean. Where will I find Eugene?"

"At the Tocsin office; he's the assistant editor. Judge Pike bought the Tocsin last year, and he thinks a good deal of Eugene. Don't forget I said to come to see me again before you go."

Joe came over to the older man and held out his hand. "Shake hands, father," he said. Mr. Loudens looked at him out of small implacable eyes, the steady hostility of which only his wife or the imperious Martin Pike, his employer, could quell. He shook his head.

"I don't see any use in it," he answered. "It wouldn't mean anything. All my life I've been a hard working man and an abiding man. Before you got in trouble you never did anything you ought to. You ran with the lowest people in town, and I and all your folks were ashamed of you. I don't see that we've got a call to be any different now." He swung round to his desk emphatically on the last word, and Joe turned away and went out quietly.

But it was a bright morning to which he emerged from the outer doors of the factory, and he made his way toward Main street at a lively gait. As he turned the corner opposite the National House he walked into Mr. Eskew Arp. The old man drew back angrily.

"Lord 'a' mercy!" cried Joe heartily. "It's Mr. Arp! I almost ran you down!" Then, as Mr. Arp made no response, but stood stock still in the way, staring at him fiercely: "Don't you know me, Mr. Arp?" the young man asked. "I'm Joe Loudens."

Eskew abruptly thrust his face close to the other's. "No free seats!" he hissed savagely and swept across to the hotel to set his world afire.

Joe looked after the irate receding figure and watched it disappear into the Main street door of the National House. As the door closed he became aware of a mighty shadow upon the pavement and, turning, beheld a fat young man wearing upon his forehead a scar similar to his own waddling by, with eyes fixed upon him.

"How are you, Norbert?" Joe began. "Don't you remember me? I"— He came to a full stop as the fat one, thrusting out an under lip as his only

token of recognition, passed balefully on.

Joe proceeded slowly until he came to the Tocsin building. At the foot of the stairway leading up to the offices he hesitated for a few moments. Then he turned away and walked toward the quieter part of Main street. Most of the people he met took no notice of him, only two or three giving him second glances of half cognizance, as though he reminded them of some one they could not place, and it was not until he had come near the Pike mansion that he saw a full recognition in the eyes of one of the many whom he knew and who had known him in his boyhood in the town. A lady, turning a corner, looked up carelessly and then half stopped within a few feet of him as if startled. Joe's cheeks went a sudden crimson, for it was the lady of his old dreams.

As she came to her half stop of surprise, startled, he took his courage in two hands and, lifting his hat, stepped to her side.

"You—you remember me?" he stammered.

"Yes," she answered, a little breathlessly.

"Ah, that's kind of you" he cried and began to walk on with her unconsciously. "I feel like a returned ghost wandering about—invisible and unrecognized. So few people seem to remember me!"

"I think you are wrong. I think you'll find everybody remembers you," she responded uneasily.

"No; I'm afraid not," he began. "I—"

She interrupted him. They were not far from her gate, and she saw her father standing in the yard directing a palmer who was at work on one of the cast iron deer. The judge was apparently in good spirits, laughing with the workman over some jest between them, but that did not lessen Mamie's nervousness.

"Mr. Loudens," she said in as kindly a tone as she could, "I shall have to ask you not to walk with me. My father would not like it."

Joe stopped with a jerk. "Why, I—I thought I'd go in and shake hands with him—and tell him I—"

Astonishment that partook of terror and of awe spread itself instantly upon her face.

"Good gracious!" she cried. "No!" "Very well," said Joe humbly. "Good-by."

Joe got him meditatively back to Main street and to the Tocsin building. This time he did not hesitate, but mounted the stairs and knocked upon the door of the assistant editor.

"Oh," said Eugene. "You've turned up, have you?" "I've come back to stay, Gene," said Joe.

Bantry dropped his book. "Exceedingly interesting," he said. "I suppose you'll try to find something to do. I don't think you could get a place here. Judge Pike owns the Tocsin, and I greatly fear he has a prejudice against you."

"I expect he has," Joe chuckled, somewhat sadly. "But I don't want newspaper work. I'm going to practice law."

"By jove, you have courage, my festive prodigal! Vratment!"

Joe cocked his head to one side with his old look of the friendly puppy. "You always did like to talk that novelty way, Gene, didn't you?" he said impersonally.

Eugene's color rose. "Have you saved up anything to starve on?" he asked crisply.

"Oh, I'm not so badly off. I've had a salary in an office for a year, and I had one pretty good day at the races."

"You'd better go back and have another," said his stepbrother. "You don't seem to comprehend your standing in Canaan."

"I'm beginning to," Joe turned to the door. "It's funny, too, in a way. Well, I won't keep you any longer. I just stopped in to say good day." He paused, faltering.

"All right, all right," Eugene said briskly. "And, by the way, I haven't mentioned that I saw you in New York."

"Oh, I didn't suppose that you would."

"And you needn't say anything about it, I fancy."

"I don't think," said Joe—"I don't think that you need be afraid I'll do that. Goodby."

"Be sure to shut the door, please. It's rather noisy with it open. Goodby." Eugene waved his hand and sank back upon the divan.

Joe went across the street to the National House. The sages fell as silent as if he had been Martin Pike. Joe had begun to write his name in the register. "My trunk is still at the station," he said. "I'll give you my check to send down for it."

"Excuse me," said the clerk. "We have no rooms."

"What?" cried Joe innocently. He looked up into the condensed eyes of Mr. Brown. "Oh," he said, "I see."

Deathly silence followed him to the door, but as it closed behind him he heard the outbreak of the sages like a tidal wave striking a dump heap of tin cans.

Two hours later he descended from an evil ark of a cab at the corral attached to Beaver Beach and followed the path through the marsh to the crumbling pier. A red bearded man was seated on a plank by the water edge fishing.

"Mike," said Joe, "have you got room for me? Can you take me in for a few days, until I find a place in town where they'll let me stay?"

The red bearded man rose slowly, pushed back his hat and stared hard at the wanderer; then he uttered a howl of joy and seized the other's

hands in his and shook them wildly. "Glory be on high!" he shouted. "It's Joe Loudens come back! We never



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knew how we missed ye till ye'd gone! Place fer ye! Can I find it? There ain't a imp o' perdition in town, incindin' myself, that wouldn't kill me if I couldn't! Ye'll have old Maggie's room, my own aunt's. Ye remember how she used to dance? Ha, ha! She's been burnin' below these four years! And we'll have the celebration of yer return this night. There'll be many of 'em will come when they hear ye're back in Canaan! We'll all hope ye're goin' to stay awhile!"

(To be continued.)

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