THE CONQUEST of CANAAN

By BOOTH TARKINGTON,

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(Continued)

Joe opened the door and went in. All of the merry company (who were able) turned sharply toward the door as it opened. One or two nearest the door asked the boy, without great curiosity, what had happened to his head. He merely shook it faintly in reply and crossed the room to an open hallway beyond. At the end of this he came to a frowzy bedroom, the door of which stood ajar. Seated at a deal table and working by a dim lamp with a broken chimney, a close cropped, red bearded, red haired man in his shirt sleeves was jabbing gloomily at a column of figures scrawled in a dirty ledger. He looked up as Joe appeared in the doorway, and his eyes showed a slight surprise.

"I never thought ye had the temper to git somebody to split yer head," said he. "Where'd ye collect it?"

He unwound the handkerchief and removed it from Joe's head gently. "Whee!" he cried as a long gash was exposed over the forehead. "I hope ye left a mark somewhere to pay a little on the score o' this."

Joe chuckled and dropped dazily back upon the pillow. "There was an other who got something like it," he gasped feebly, "and, oh, Mike, I wish you could have heard him going out. Perhaps you did. It was only three miles from here."

"Nothing I'd liked better," said the other, bringing a basin of clear water from a stand in the corner. "It's a beautiful thing to hear a man holler when he gits a grand one like ye're wearing tonight."

He bathed the wound gently and, hurrying from the room, returned immediately with a small jug of vinegar. Wetting a rag with this tender fluid he applied it to Joe's head, speaking soothingly the while.

"Nothing in the world like a bit o' good cider vinegar to keep off the bo-teria. It may seem a trifle scrimpin' for the moment, but it ussinnates the blood p'ison. There ye go! Nice thing for ye, Joe. What are ye squirmin' about?"

"I'm only enjoying it," the boy answered, writhing as the vinegar went into the gash. "Don't you mind my laughing to myself."

"Ye're a good one, Joe," said the other, continuing his ministrations. "I wish, after all, ye told like mainy you known to what's the trouble. There's some of us would be glad to take it up for ye, and"—

"No, no; it's all right. I was somewhere I had no business to be, and I got caught."

"Who caught ye?"

"First some nice white people," Joe smiled his distorted smile, "and then a low down black man helped me to get away as soon as he saw who it was. He's a friend of mine, and he fell down and tripped up the pursuit."

"I always knew ye'd get into large trouble some day." The red bearded man tore a strip from an old towel and began to bandage the boy's head with an accustomed hand. "Yer taste for excitement has been growin' on ye every minute of the four years I've known ye."

"I've got $7," Joe said, without replying to Mike, "and I'll leave the clothes I've got on. Can you fix me up with something different?"

"I'll have the things for ye, and I'll let ye know I have no use for $7," returned the red bearded man crossly. "What are ye sniffin' for?"

"I'm thinking of the poor fellow that got the mate to this," said Joe, touching the bandage. "I can't help crying when I think they may have used vinegar on his head too."

"Git to sleep if ye can!" exclaimed the Samaritan as a hideous burst of noise came from the dance room, where some one seemed to be breaking a chair upon an acquaintance. "I'll go out and regulate the boys a bit." He turned down the lamp, rambled in his big pocket and went to the door.

CHAPTER VI.

THE day broke with a scream of wind out of the prairies and such choke-hearts of snow that Joe could see neither bank of the river as he made his way down the big level of ice. The wind struck so bitterly that now and then he stopped and, panting and coughing, turned his weight against it. The snow on the ground was caught up and flew like sea spume in a hurricane; it swirled about him, jeering the Rules in the air, so that it seemed to be crawling from the gruffed species as much as from the sky downward. Twice or thrice it was upon as it was to drift through snow from the earth upon from the sky. Joe was grateful for it, feeling that it veiled him, making him safer, though he trusted somewhat the change of costume he had effected at Denver. Presently a round, unfortunate cap with pulled down over his ears and eyebrows, a knitted comforter wound about the lower part of his face, under a ragged overcoat he wore blue overalls and rubber boots, and in one of his red mittened hands he swung a tin dinner pail.

He bent his body against the wind and went on, still keeping to the back ways, until he came to the alley which passed behind his own house, where, however, he paused only for a moment to make a quick survey of the premises. A chance satisfied him; he ran to the back fence, hoisted himself wearily over it and dropped into Horace Tabor's back yard.

The place seemed empty, and he was on the point of going away when he heard the click of the front gate and saw Annie coming toward him. At the sound of the gate he had crouched close against the side of the house, but she saw him at once.

She stopped abruptly and, throwing the waterproof hood from her head, looked at him through the driven lace of snow. One of her hands was stretched toward him unconsciously, and it was in that attitude that he later remembered her she looked as Christine of the snow.

Suddenly she ran to him, still keeping her hand outstretched until it touched his own.

"Have you come back?" he said.

"Know you!" Is all the answer she made to that question. "Come into the house. I've got some coffee on the stove for you. I've been up and down the street waiting for you ever since it began to get light. There's no one home."

She led him to the front door, where he stamped and shook himself. He was shown from head to foot.

She wasted no time in getting him to the kitchen, where, when she had removed his overcoat, she placed him in a chair, unwound the comforter and, as carefully as a nurse, lifted the cup from his injured head. When the strip of towel was disclosed, she stood quite still for a moment, with the cup in her hand. Then, with a broken little cry, she stooped and kissed a lock of his hair which escaped, discolored, beneath the bandage.

"Stop that!" he commanded, horribly embarrassed.

He looked up as Joe appeared in the doorway.

"Oh, Joe," she cried, "I knew! I knew it was there, but to see it! And it's my fault for leaving you. I had to go or I wouldn't have—I"

"Where'd you hear about it?" he asked shortly.

"I haven't been to bed," she answered. "Grandfather and I were up all night at Uncle Jonas'. Grandfather—

"Did he tell you about—the fight?"

"Yes—a great deal." She poured out the tea as she talked, placing before him a cup of broth upon a stool, lovely to look upon as the hot cake. "The colonel said that Norbert thought he wouldn't get well," she concluded. "And Mr. Arp said Norbert was the kind that never die, and they had quite an argument."

"What sense can anything at Jones Tabor's" asked Joe, drinking his coffee, with a brightening eye.

"We never went for," she answered.

"What for?"

She boosted the hood attractively without replying, and when she dared at that it was beautiful enough to put on a warm plate. This she brought to him and, standing in front of him her elbow on his knee, offered for his consideration, looking "straightly" up at his eyes. He began to eat ravenously.

"What for?" he repeated. "I didn't suppose Jones would let you come in his house. Was he sick?"

"Joe," she said quietly, disregarding his question, "Joe, have you got to run away?"

"Yes, I've got to," he answered.

"Would you have to go to prison if you stayed?" She asked this with a breathless tranquility.

"I'm not going to beg father to help me out," he said determinedly. "He said he wouldn't, and he'll be spared the chance. He won't mind that my body will come. Nobody! What does anybody care what I do?"

"Now you're thinking of Mamie!" she cried. "I can always tell. Whenever you don't talk naturally you're thinking of her."

He poured down the last of the coffee, growing red to the tips of his ears. "Ariel," he said, "if I come back—"

"Why?" she interrupted. "Would you have to go to prison right away if they caught you?"

"Oh, it isn't that," he laughed sadly. "But I'm going to clear out. I'm not going to take any chances. I want to see other parts of the world, other kinds of people. I might have come anyway, soon, even if it hadn't been for last night. Don't you ever feel that way?"

"You know I do," she said. "I've told you that often! But, Joe, Joe, you haven't any money! You've got to have money to live."

"You needn't worry about that," returned the cousin of 87 generally. "I've saved enough to take care of me for a long time."

"Joe, please! I know it isn't my—if you could wait just a little while, stay a few weeks—only a few, Joe"—

"What for?"

"I could let you have all you want. It would be such a beautiful thing for me, Joe. Oh, I know how you'd feel. You wouldn't even let me give you that dollar I found in the street but you let this would be only lending it to you, and you could pay me back some time."

"Ariel!" he exclaimed and, setting his cup down upon the floor, took her by the shoulders and shook her till the china plate which had held the toast dropped from her lap and broke into fragments. "You've been reading the 'Arabian Nights'!"

"No, no!" she cried, vehemently. "Grandfather would give me anything. He'd give me all the money I ask for."

"Money!" said Joe. "Which of us is wandering? Money? Horace Tabor give you money?"

"Not for awhile. A great many things have to be settled first."

"What things?"

"Joe," she asked earnestly, "do you think it's bad of me not to feel things I ought to feel?"

"No."

"Then I'm glad," she said, and something in the way she spoke made him start with pain, remembering the same words, spoken in the same tone, by another voice the night before on the veranda. "I'm glad, Joe, because I seemed all wrong to myself. Uncle Jonas died last night, and I haven't been able to get sorry. Perhaps it's because I've been so frightened about you, but I think not, for I wasn't sorry even before Colonel Fillcroft told me about you."

"Jonas Tabor dead?" said Joe. "Why, I saw him on the street yesterday!"

"Yes, and I saw him just before I came out on the porch where you were. He was there in the hall. He and Judge File had been having a long talk. They'd been in some speculations together, and it had all turned out well. It's very strange, but they say now that Uncle Jonas' heart was weak—he was an old man, you know, almost eighty—and he'd been very anxious about his money. The judge had persuaded him to risk it, and the shock of finding that he'd made a great deal seemed sublimity."

"I've heard he'd had that same shock before," said Joe, "when he sold out to your father."

"Yes, but this was different, grandfather says. He told me it was in one of those big risky businesses that Judge Pike likes to go into. And last night it was all finished, the strain was over, and Uncle Jonas started home. His house is only a little way from the Pikes', you know, but he dropped down in the snow at his own gate, and some people who were going by saw him fall. He was dead before grandfather got there."

She put her hand on the boy's arm, and he let it remain there. Her eyes still sought his with a tremulous appeal.

"Glad bless you, Ariel!" he said. "It's going to be a great thing for you."

"Yes—yes; it is." The tears came suddenly to her eyes. "I was foolish last night, but there had been such a long time of wanting things, and now—and now grandfather and I can go"—

"You're going, too!" Joe chuckled.

"It's heartless, I suppose, but I've waited so—We're going"—

"Europe!" he cried. "You've said so a thousand times when he's told you about it. Paris!"

"Paris!" Her face lit. "To Paris where we can really together, where he can learn how to put the pictures he has been painting and where I"

"Go on," Joe encouraged her. "I want to hear you say it. You don't seem that you're going to study painting. You mean that you're going to learn how to make stick lobsters as fine as you can and dance."

"I want to learn how to dance," she said.

Joe was silent for a moment. Then he rose and took the tassled overcoat from the back of his chair. "Where's that muffler?" he asked.

She brought it from where she had placed it to dry behind the stove.

"Joe," she said huskily, "won't you wait till"—

"Till the estate is settled and you can write your grandfather to"—

"No, no! But you could go with us."

"To Paris?"

"He would take you as his secretary."

"Ahal" Joe's voice rang out gaily as he rose, refreshed by the coffee, toast and warmth she had given him. "You've been story reading, Ariel, like Eugenia, 'Secretary!'"

"Please, Joe!"

"Where's my tin dinner pail?" He found it himself upon the table where he had set it above. "I'm going to earn a dishonest living," he went on. "I have an engagement to take a freight off a water tank that's a friend of mine, half a mile south of the vards. Thank God, I'm going to get away from Canaan!"

"Wait, Joe!" She caught at his sleeve. "I want you to."

He disappeared in a white whirl of wind.

CHAPTER VII.

THE parading of Joseph from Canaan was complete. It was an exhibition concerning which there was neither sneer nor surprise, and, though there came no more of him, it cannot be said that Canaan did not hear of him, for shortly it could hear itself talk. The death of Jonas Tabor and young Lothrop's sudden and night inclined high change in the National House whatever. Many stays the cases lingered with the broken meats 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 at ease when asked 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 November afternoon two years after the flight, and Eskew, it appears, had been in the state fair and had beheld many things already affording his constant testimony that this unhappy world increasingly in the strangeness of all his meeting with an vagrant sodaw or of a moment. "Not a blame bit of doubt about it," he cried to the incredulous conclave. "There was that Joe, and nobody else, stuck up in a little box outside a tent at the fair ground and selling tickets

"There was that Joe, and nobody else, stuck up in a little box outside a tent."

to see the Spotted Wild Boy!" Yes, it was Joe Loudest. Think you Mr. Arp could forget that face, those crooked eyebrows? Had Eskew tested his recognition? Had he spoken with the oracle? Had he not? Aye, but with such peculiar result that the battle of words among the sages began with a true chest of the regulars, for according to Eskew's narrative, when he had delivered grimly at the big lids charge, "I know you—you're Joe Loudest!" his 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 Davis, 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 far gone as yours? I saw him, I tell you. What's more, that lad Joe 'll turn up here again some day. You'll see if he don't. He's a sort of trouble and iniquity, and anything of that kind is sure to come back to Canaan!"

(To be continued.)

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