

Jane Cable

By GEORGE BARR McCUTCHEON, Author of "Beverly of Graustark," Etc.

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CHAPTER XIII—(Continued)

"I'm going to stand my ground," said Bansemmer, steadily drumming on the table with his stiff fingers. "They can't prove anything, and the man who makes a charge against me will have to substantiate it. I'll not run a step."

"Then," said Droom curtly, "you must let Mrs. Cable alone. She is your sister, Mr. Bansemmer. She'll fight for you. Mr. Bansemmer, she'll fight for you. She's not a true aristocrat. She comes of a class that doesn't give up."

"But she's like the rest. If Harbert doesn't get in his nasty work she'll give in like all the others." "I thought you said you'd do nothing to mar the happiness of Graydon," asserted Droom.

"I don't intend to, you old fool. This affair is between Mrs. Cable and me. If she wins, I'll give up. But understand me, I'm perfectly capable of knowing just when I'm beaten."

"I only know your financial value," said Elias dryly.

"That's all you're expected to know, sir."

"Then we won't quarrel about it," said the other, with his sweetest grin.

"Umph! Well, pleasant as you are, we must look ourselves over carefully before we see our New York friend. He must not find us with unclean linen. Elias, I'm worried, but I'm not afraid. Is there anything that we have bungled?"

"I have always been afraid of the chorus girl business. I don't like chorus girls," Bansemmer said at another time would have smiled.

It was past midnight when the two left the stall and started in separate ways for their north side homes. The master felt more secure than when he left the home of David Cable earlier in the night. Elias Droom said at parting:

"I don't like your attitude toward Mrs. C. It's not very manly to make war on a woman."

"My good Elias," said Bansemmer, complacently surveying himself in the small mirror across the stall, "all men make war on women one way or another."

He did not see Droom's ugly scowl as he preceded that worthy through the doorway.

The next morning Bansemmer walked down the Drive. It was a bright, crisp day, and the snow had been swept from the sidewalks. He felt that a visit from Harbert during the day was not unlikely, and he wanted to be fresh and clear headed. Halfway down he met Jane Cable coming from the home of a friend. He never had seen her looking so beautiful, so full of the joy of living. Her friendly, sparkling smile sent a momentary pang of shame into his calloused heart, but it passed with the buoyant justification of his decision to do nothing in the end that might mar his son's happiness.

She was walking to town and assured him that she rejoiced in his distinguished company. They discussed the play and the supper party.

"Now that I'm engaged to Graydon I'm positively beginning to grow sick of people," Miss Cable declared—and as they all declared at that age and stage.

"Well, you'll soon recover," he smiled. "Marriage is the convalescence of a love affair, you know."

"Oh, but most of the men one meets are so hopelessly silly—firesome," she went on. "It's strange too. Nearly all of them have gone to college—Yale or Harvard."

"My dear Jane, they are the unfortunate sons of the rich. You can't blame them. All Yale and Harvard men are not firesome. You should not forget that a large sprinkling of the young men you meet at the pink teas were sent to Yale or Harvard for the sole purpose of becoming Yale and Harvard men; nothing more. Their mothers never expected them to be anything else. The poor man sends his son to be educated; the rich man usually does it to get the boy away from home, so that he won't have to look at him all the time. I'm happy to say that I was quite poor when Graydon got his diploma."

"Oh, Graydon isn't at all like the others. He is a man!" cried Jane, her eyes dancing.

"I don't mean to say that all rich men's sons are failures. Some of them are really worth while. Give credit unlimited to the rich man's son who goes to college and succeeds in life in spite of his environment. I must not forget that Graydon's chief ambition at one time was to hunt Indians."

"He couldn't have got that from his mother," said she accusingly. Bansemmer looked at her sharply. He had half expected on meeting her to observe the first sign that the Cable family had discerned him well, but not favorably. Her very brightness convinced him that she at least had not been taken into the consultation.

"I am afraid it came from his horrid father. But Graydon is a good boy. He couldn't long follow the impulses of his father. I dare say he could be a stunner if he tried, too. I have an uncle. An imbecile, in my mind, is the fellow without the capacity to err in-

quickly. His hand hovered close to hers as it lay in her lap. There was an eyewitness to this single picture in the brief scene. Jane had started downstairs. From the upper steps she could look into the drawing room below. She could not help seeing Bansemmer's fervent attitude. She heard nothing that he said. The girl paused in surprise. A feeling of dread—she could not explain—swept over her. A chill struck into her heart.

It was as if she had awakened from a sweet sleep to look out upon a bleak, hoarid morning.

Involuntarily she shrank back, quite beyond the actual vision, but not free from it. She stood straight and tense and silent at the top of the stairs, her head clasping the wall. She could hear her heart throb plainly. There was no mistaking the picture as it had burst upon her unexpecting eyes. A great fear, a dark uncertainty, welled up in her heart.

It was not until the butler admitted other callers that she found the courage to turn her eyes toward the drawing room. Although she succeeded in blinding the fact, it was difficult to approach and greet James Bansemmer with the naturalness of the unsuspecting. His manner was beyond reproach, and yet for the first time she saw the real light in his black eyes. She talked to him as if nothing had happened to make her distrustful, but no self-control in the world could have checked the growth of that remorseless thing called suspicion. For her own sake, for her mother's, for Graydon's, she tried to put it down. Instead it grew greater and stronger as she looked into his eyes, for in them she saw the light that heretofore had escaped her notice.

And this was the father of the man whom she was to marry, the one whom she loved with all her heart and soul! This man who would degrade her own mother! Her mother—she looked at her with a new question in her eyes.

Half a dozen people came and went. James Bansemmer was the last to leave. He met the girl's tense, inquiring look from time to time, but he could not have felt its meaning. There was nothing in her voice which might have warned him, although it sounded strained and without warmth on her own ears. In spite of herself she wondered how he would act in saying good-by to her mother. Although she tried with all the might of her will to look away, she could not take her eyes from the pair as Bansemmer arose to depart.

His manner was most circumspect. The hand clasp was brief, even formal, and there was no look in his eyes to indicate the presence of anything but the most casual emotions. After his departure Mrs. Cable turned to Jane and complained of a frightful headache and went to her room to lie down for awhile before dinner. Jane's gaze followed her steadily as she ascended the stairs. Then she walked to the window and looked out upon the street, a hundred perplexities in her mind.

Her father was standing in the middle of the sidewalk, looking down the darkening street. His cab was turning the corner below, showing that he had been standing there for longer than a minute. She watched him with interest. What had happened in the street to hold his interest so closely? It was Jane who opened the door and let him in. As she kissed his cold cheek she noticed the frown on his brow and caught the strange gleam in his eyes. His greeting was less warm than usual, and he went to his room upstairs without removing his hat or coat below. But not before he sent a quick, keen glance about the drawing room to find if James Bansemmer had been the single visitor of the afternoon.

"Where is your mother?" he asked from the stairs, without looking back.

"She has just gone to her room," Jane replied, a chill shooing through her veins. Some strange, unnatural impulse compelled her to add, as if the explanation were just and necessary, "We have had a lot of people in drinking tea, and mother has a headache."

She watched him ascend the steps and turn into his smoking room. The door closed sharply, and a wave of inexplicable relief rushed over her. Her hands were cold. She went to the fireplace and held them out to the blaze. Her ears were alert for sounds from above—alert with a strange fear which choked her with its persistence. She dreaded the opening of her father's door and her mother's room. She waited for those sounds, minute after minute, but they did not come. The fire would not give warmth to her hands; the chill seemed to spread. In her new consciousness she felt that a tragedy was just begun.

"Graydon is coming over tonight," she said. "We'll be very quiet and try not to disturb you. Don't work too hard, daddy dear."

Upstairs Frances Cable was battling with herself in supreme despair. Confession was on her lips a dozen times, but courage failed her. When she heard his footsteps in the hallway she was ready to cry out the truth to him and end the suspense. As he opened the door to enter the spirit of fairness turned frail and fled before the appeal of procrastination. "Wait, wait, wait!" cried the powerful weakness in her heart, and it conquered. She could not tell him then. Tomorrow—the next day, yes, but not then. It was too much to demand of herself, after all.

He came in, but left a few minutes later. She was strangely unresponsive to his tender inquiries. Her thoughts were of another was his quick conclusion as he fled from her presence before the harsh accusations could break from his lips.

In his den once more, with the door closed, he gave himself up completely to black thoughts. He recalled his words to her, uttered years ago, half in jest and half in earnest. He had horrified her beyond expression by telling her how he would punish a wife if he were the husband she deceived. With a grin, lurid smile he remembered the

penalty. He had said he would not kill; he would disgrace the woman frightfully and permit her to live as a moral example to other wives. He now felt less brutal. He might kill, but he would not disgrace. For an hour he sat and wondered what had been the feelings of his old friend George Driscoll just before he deliberately slew his faithless wife. He remembered saying to other friends at the time that Driscoll had "done right."

This night of black shadows—he did not sleep at all—was really the beginning of the end. He forgot the presidency that was to be handed out to him. He forgot everything but the low, wild snarl that gnawed into his brain, and brain.

Day and night he writhed in silent agony, a prey to the savage jealousy that gnawed and grew until it absorbed all other emotions. Scandal, disgrace, dishonor, murder, swept before the mind of this man who had been of the people and who would not condone. The people kill.

For a week he watched and waited and suffered. What he knew of men told him that they do not devote themselves to the wives of others with honorable motives behind them. He convinced himself that he knew the world; he had seen so much of it. The man aged years in that single week of jealousy and suspense. His face was haggard; his eyes took on a strange gleam; his manner was that of a man in grave trouble.

Day after day this piteous, frenzied man who swayed thousands with his hand stooped to deal with the smallest movements of one man and one woman. Despite his most intense desire to drive himself into other and higher channels, he found himself skulking and spying and eavesdropping with her one low end in view.

He employed every acute sense in the effort to justify his suspicions. Time and again he went home at unusual hours, fearing all the while that he might incur the pain of finding Bansemmer there. He even visited the man

in his office, always rejoicing in the fact that he found him there at the time. He watched the mail in the morning, he planned to go out of nights and then hurried home deliberately, but unexpectedly. Through it all he said no word to Frances Cable or Jane. He asked no questions, but he was being beaten down by apprehensions all the while.

His wife's manner convinced him that all was not well with her. She avoided being alone with him, keeping close to her room. He detected a hundred pretexts by which she managed to escape his simplest advances.

At last, overwrought by the strain, he began to resort to cunning—this man who was big enough to have gone from the engine cab to the president's office. It required hours of struggle with his father, nobler nature to bring himself low enough to do trickery, but the man's influence mastered. He despised himself for the trick, but he would know the truth.

The late afternoon mail one day brought to Mrs. Cable a brief letter, typewritten both inside and out. David Cable saw her open and read the message, and he saw her trembling hand go to her throat and then to her temple. Her back was toward him. He could not see her face until she turned, a full minute later. Then it was calm and undisturbed, but her eyes were brilliant. He ground his teeth and tore upstairs without a word. David Cable had stooped low enough to write this letter, and he was paying for it.

He knew the contents far better than she knew them. The letter purported to be an urgent appeal from James Bansemmer, asking her to meet him at 8 o'clock that night. It said:

"I must see you tonight. Leave your home at 8 o'clock for a short call on Mrs. W. Just around the corner. I will meet you across the Drive, near the sea wall. It is quite dark there."

David Cable did not know that earlier in the afternoon James Bansemmer had called her up by phone to say that he intended to speak to his son the following day unless word came to him from her, nor could he have possibly known that she was now determined to tell the whole story to her husband and to trust to his mercy. He only knew that he had written the letter and that he had told her of his intention to go downtown immediately after dinner.

"You look tired, father. Has it been a hard day?"

"A rather trying one, Jane. We're having some trouble with the bizards out west. Tying up everything that we are rushing to the Philippines."

"Is it settled that you are to be made president?"

"It looks like it." There followed a long silence. "By the way, I have good news for you. Mr. Clegg told me today that they are going to take Graydon into the firm. Isn't that great? He is quite remarkable. You are not the only person, it seems, who thinks a lot of that boy."

"A partner? Really? Oh, isn't it glorious? I knew he could—I told him he'd be a partner before long." She waited a moment and then added, "His father was here today for a cup of tea." Cable caught the slightly altered tone and looked up. She was trifling with her fork, palpably preoccupied.

"I'm—I'm sorry I missed him, father," she said.

"Certainly, and I'm sure your mother does." The fork shook in her fingers and then dropped upon the plate. She looked up in confusion. Cable's eyes were bent upon her intently, and she had never seen so queer a light in them. Scarcely more than the fraction of a second passed before he lowered his gaze, but the mysterious telegraphy of the mind had shot the message of comprehension from one to the other. He saw with horror that the girl at least suspected the true situation. A moment later he arose abruptly and announced that he would run up to see her mother before settling down to some important work in his den.

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ward unconsciously, almost blindly, and she caught a glimpse of his tall, dark figure. He was not unlike Bansemmer in height and carriage. As she drew near, his legs trembled and tears of despair flooded his eyes.

A savage desire to grasp her by the throat and hurl her into the waters beyond the break came over him with irresistible force. Then came the pitiful collapse which conquered the murderous impulses and left him weak and broken for the moment. With a sob he turned and leaped upon the wall, his back to her, his face buried in his tense arms—crushed, despised, dishonored! Kill her? The horror of it swept his brain clear for an instant. Kill his pretty Frances? Kill Jane's mother? How could he think of it? It was a long time before the wretched man knew that she was standing close behind him and was speaking to him. The sound of her voice came through the noise of his pounding heart as if it were far away and gentle. But what was it that she was saying? Her voice was angry, suppressed, condemning.

"You may take it or refuse it, just as you please," were the first words his turbulent senses distinguished. "I can pay no more than that for your silence. The other is impossible. I will not discuss it again with you." She paused as if waiting for him to respond.

"Tonight I shall tell my husband everything—the whole story. I cannot endure the suspense any longer. I will not live in fear of you another hour. My only reason for coming out here tonight is to plead with you to spare your son and Jane. I am not asking anything for myself. It would break Jane's heart if Graydon should refuse to marry her. You must have a heart somewhere in that!"—But the words became jumbled in the ears of her listener. From time to time his mind grasped such sentences as these, paralyzing in their bitterness: "I have the letters of adoption. David will not believe what you say. He loves me, and he loves Jane. I am willing to pay all that I have to keep it from Graydon and Jane. But I intend to tell my husband. I will not deceive him any longer. He will understand, even though he should hate me for it. He will love Jane, although she is not his own child."

David Cable seemed frozen to the spot. His brain was clearing; he was grasping the full importance of every sentence that rushed from her impassioned lips. The last appalling words fell like the blow of a club in the hands of a powerful man. He was dazed, stunned, senseless. It seemed to him that his breath had ceased to come and that his whole body had turned to stone. His wide staring eyes saw nothing ahead of him.

"Well, what have you to say?" she was demanding. "Why have you asked me to come out here? You have my final answer. What have you to say? Are you going to tell Graydon that Jane is not our child? I must know."

"Not our child?" came from the pale lips of David Cable, so low and lifeless that the sound was lost in the swish of the water below. The intermittent red signal in the lighthouse far out in the lake blinked back at him, but to him it was a star, a vivid glare.

(Continued next week.)

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CHAPTER XIV.

ABLE saw Bansemmer leave the house as he drove up to the curb in front. The lawyer did not look back, but turned the nearest corner as quickly as possible.

Closing the door of his smoking room behind him, David Cable dropped wearily into a chair without removing

CHAPTER XV.

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He was not armed. He had thrown his revolver away a week before. His only desire now was to learn the extent of her duplicity. If she obeyed the call of the letter then there could be no doubt that she was coming at the call of the lover. His hands twitched, and he shivered as if with a dreadful chill. His heart was shouting a warning to her, but his head was urging her to come and have done with it

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