

# Jane Cable

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

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## CHAPTER XXII (Continued).

Amigos along the mountain road gave information that was not worth having. A deserted village showed signs of the passage, and finally there was proof ahead that Pilar had stopped to give battle. He had reached his vantage ground. Connell and his men drew back and waited. Nightfall came and with it the spiteful crack of the Mauser rifle. A brave trooper toppled over with a great hole in his head. Pilar's pickets could see like cats in the night. The native scout reported that the big village of Concepcion was not far ahead; Pilar's men were making their stand before this rather important stronghold.

"We'll get a scrap that is a scrap, boys," said Connell exultingly. "These fellows are going to put up a fight at last. They're like bees up yonder. We've got to fall back on the company before the little captain can get us up before the little captain can get us up."

Too well did the men know the bellicose temperament of the big Irishman to think of grumbling at such a command, yet it was with a certain reluctance which invariably accompanies a backward step that the men retired to meet the advancing company.

Young Bansemmer in his khaki uniform was not the immaculate, debonaire man of the drawing room. Severe, though short, had been hard and grueling. His face was even handsomer with its rugged lines and set features. He was thinner and browner; his eyes were clearer and a darker gray; his hair seemed thicker and fairer than before; his figure more erect and sinewy. The wistful look in his eyes seemed to betray hunger for action; his ever ready eagerness to be on the move told of his strength and of his weakness. He had the lean, active bearing of the panther and the restless daring of that little animal.

No man in the company had stood fire as valiantly as he. He courted the whiz of the bullet, scoffed at the rigors of the march and instinctively was a good shot with the rifle. He bore no grudge against the department at home; he had no grievance.

The officers recognized in him a man of parts, a man of station far above the position which he had chosen in the army. He was a source of mystery to the men of his own rank in the line—the plowboys, the teamsters, the roustabouts and the ne'er-do-wells who had gone into the army from choice or discretion. At first they had called him the "dude" and had laughed at his white hands and clean jaws. His indifference to their taunts annoyed them. One day he knocked down the biggest bully of the lot and walked away without even waiting to see whether he would arise after the blow. He simply glared at the next man who chaffed. It was enough. The company held him in a new respect that forbade the reporting of the incident to the officer of the day.

Every night before he lay down to sleep, in the rice field or the barrios, he took from his pocket a leather case and gazed at the small portrait it sheltered. No one had been permitted to see him in his devotions, for that was what he called these sacred moments. His lean face, full of fierce energy all day long, softened as his eyes devoured the dainty miniature.

"Halt! Who goes there?"

A shot rang out in the stillness of the night. It was answered at once by another closer in. More shots followed, gradually increasing to a fusillade as the scouts and pickets came running back. Men sprang up from the ground, but even as they did so another volley reached them, and three men dropped with a groan and lay still. The alarm sounded clear from the bugle and echoed back from the surrounding hills. A sharp command came from the throat of the sergeant.

The company seized the stacked rifles. Captain Groce gave another order. The formation to repel attack was made in an incredibly short space of time. There was no disorder, no confusion. The little officer was as cool as if on dress parade.

"Steady, men! Wait until they're nearer!"

They had not long to wait. From all sides a horde of shouting, firing men were rushing on the little square.

"Here they are! Now, then, boys, fire!"

Valley after valley rang out. The foremost of the enemy fell at their feet. Hand to hand was the fighting. The bayonets lunged with deadly effect, but seemed powerless to thrust the mass back on itself. Men shot, hacked, stabbed and clubbed each other. It was a whirl of puffing and descending rifles and bolts.

Fierce onsets vied with the shrieks of the wounded for supremacy. The grunt of men who slaughter, the gasps of the victims when the steel went home, were heard on all sides. At times the soldiers could not see on account of the sweat and blood pouring from their faces. The very air was foul from the steam from the living and the dead. They could not breathe.

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see that he is dying?" cried the boy piteously in broken English. "He cannot fight you; he's dying," and then in a perfect frenzy of rage to Bansemmer. "Let me go—pig!"

Not until afterward did Bansemmer recall that in the general excitement it was the boy who dragged him along to the spot. And in spite of the solemnity of the scene there was something in his manner of delivering the insult that amused rather than angered the American.

"Flucky little devil!" he said half aloud.

Again the sick man groaned, tried to rise from the blankets and speak, but only to fall back moaning. Connell cautioned him against exertion and promised that no harm should come to either of them. While he reported the discovery to Captain Groce, he had the man carried to another part of the church and there made comfortable. For the first time now Bansemmer began to notice the pain in his arm. Something angrily he turned to the boy:

"Come! Give an account of yourself! How came you here?"

"Prisoners," was the sullen answer.

"Of the Filipinos?" Bansemmer asked in surprise.

"Yes."

"Then why did you try to kill me?"

"I hate you both! We Spaniards, we are not as much to fear from you? What difference does color make in brutes?"

"By the holy apostles! You're a grumpy young'un!" growled the returning sergeant. "Who's the other chap?"

"My brother—he's dying," said the boy, his voice softening. "Holy Virgin, save him! For weeks we've been in the hands of Aguineldo's men. He's been so ill all the time. Have you a doctor?"

"A surgeon will probably be with us before long," was the sergeant's evasive reply.

Bansemmer looked searchingly at Connell. What he saw in the other's eyes caused him a sharp pang of grief.

Both men turned their faces away for a moment, and it was with a gulp that Connell continued:

"Your brother will have the best of care if we get out of this mess. You are both safe. We are not fighting the Spaniards." And then pertinently, "So these were Aguineldo's men?"

"Yes. He was here directing the fight," the boy answered.

"Aguinaldo here?" This and other ejaculations of surprise and anger

burst in chorus from every throat. But as suddenly they were followed by expressions of chagrin, for by contrasting the present situation with that which they had anticipated, this information had succeeded in intensifying their mortification.

But notwithstanding his share of the universal disappointment, a hasty reflection of preceding events convinced Graydon that personally he had little ground for complaint against the late occupants of the convent, for unintentional as undoubtedly had been the act through which at the very point of death his existence had been preserved, there was no evidence to refute the hypothesis that the shot which had killed his assailant in the plaza had been fired by one of the insurgents under cover.

"Great Scott!" was the exclamation to which he gave utterance. "Once more, I suppose, I owe my life to the blundering marksmanship of a Filipino!"

This half hearted acknowledgment of his strange indebtedness evoked from his companions no recognition other than a puzzled stare from the sergeant and an enigmatical smile on the face of the young Spaniard. Connell proceeded with his examination:

"Why did they leave you here?"

"They had no time to take us with them when you broke in," was the boy's answer. "Aguinaldo was on his way to some village where his family is hiding. The scouts told him of your presence. Then he determined not to wait for Pilar, but to surprise you. We never rested day or night. My poor brother—how he suffered!"

"Yes, yes, but why are they carrying you on a march like this?"

"My brother is the only man who knows where the Spanish gold was hidden when our war was ended—I mean the gold that came up with guns and ammunition. Aguineldo is looking for the hiding place. My father, a high officer in the Spanish army, died of the fever last winter. We were evicted from our house in Manila by Aguineldo's men and have been going from place to place ever since. We have not told of the hiding place. The Americans do not need gold, do they?"

The boy laughed sarcastically. "How many men has Aguineldo?"

"Three hundred or more. I would advise you to look out for Pilar. He, too, may come at any moment."

Scarcely had the words left his mouth when a storm of yells came from outside the convent, and immediately the boy rushed to his brother's side.

"Great Caesar, there's a thousand of them!" cried Rogers.

Instantly every man made for the position assigned to him. The gun was in readiness. Outside the Mauers rattled, bullets coming from all quarters and thumping sharply against the opposite walls with patter that warned the Americans against standing erect.

Occasionally a scout would peep from a window and take a shot into the darkness, but these ventures were few. All lights were extinguished. The men fired at the spots from which burst the flames of rifles, then dropped suddenly. After awhile the firing of the Filipinos dwindled into a shot now and then.

"Keep low! They don't dare risk a charge! Be ready to defend the door!" Captain Groce commanded.

The night wore on, and with the cessation of hostilities confidence increased. Re-enforcements were not far off, and it did not seem possible that the sounds of battle could not be heard. The men went out by the exciting events of the day, were generally silent. Sergeant Connell, however, was an exception.

"Get up! Not a bit of it," he was saying, "the dirty little cowards! Major March will be here in the shake of a dead lamb's tail."

An hour later Bansemmer, his rifle in hand, sitting near one of the windows, suddenly felt some one tugging at his arm. Turning, he saw the Spanish boy.

"Won't you come and help me to carry my brother behind the stone wall?" he was saying. "He is exposed to the bullets and cannot move himself."

"Willingly?" and Graydon followed his lead. As if he was a child, he picked up the gaunt Spaniard and carefully bore him to the place of shelter, but despite all that he could do to hide his suffering the pain in his arm, which the removal of the man had increased, was such for a moment that he felt faint and staggered. The boy was quick to notice it and quickly asked:

"What is the matter? Wounded?"

"It's nothing; merely a scratch."

"Oh, I know. Why, it's your arm, and I—"

The boy's face crimsoned with shame and contrition. Through the semidarkness the blush escaped Graydon's notice, but not so the truly feminine little shriek of dismay as he touched and felt the wet sleeve.

"It was I who did it! Oh, how can you ever forgive me?"

Graydon, dumfounded, stared in wonder.

"What?" he exclaimed; "you're a girl?"

"Yes, I'm his sister," pointing to the dying man; then, with some embarrassment: "These clothes? They are the only ones they would give me. You see, a girl would have been a burden; a boy none at all. Do you think that had I been a man you could so easily have overpowered me? No!"

The slim, little figure drew itself up straight and defiant before him. Despite the loose, ugly garments of the Filipinos, Graydon noticed for the first time that the figure was perfectly molded and high bred. She swept off the wide hat she wore, and the man saw a mass of dark hair done up tightly on her head. But even while he gazed her mood changed. She became subserviently anxious and begged him to let her attend to his arm. She pleaded so hard that, to please her, he yielded. Water was obtained from somewhere, the slight flesh wound washed and then, disappearing in the darkness, to his amazement she returned almost instantly with some bandages and dressed his arm.

While this surgical operation was going on Graydon, for the life of him, could not resist the temptation to ask her again why she had tried to shoot him. At first, so terribly in earnest did she take the question and beg for mercy, that he smiled at her, and then, seeing his amusement, she said coquettishly:

"How could I possibly have known that you were so nice? Besides, I had always heard you Americans referred to as brutes."

Graydon laughed; then suddenly his face became very grave. The realization of her terrible situation had dawned upon him. A woman among a crowd of rough soldiers! Her brother and protector dying! And all surrounded by hordes of savage enemies who at any moment might kill them! The thought dismissed all pleasantry from his mind. Something must be done, and at once. Presently he asked:

"What is your name?"

"My father was Colonel Ramos Jose Velasquez. That also is my brother's name, except that he is not an officer. I am Teresa Fortune Velasquez. My mother was English, a sister of Sir William Fortune. She is dead. For ten years we have lived in Manila."

"You won't mind if I call the sergeant, will you?" The girl nodded a slightly bewildered assent as Graydon

stood rapidly toward the others. Shortly he returned with the gallant Irishman.

"Senorita," began Connell, mopping his forehead and assuming his most polite manner, "you are perfectly safe with us, and as quickly as possible your brother and yourself shall be sent back to Manila. You are a brave slip of a girl, and we boys respect bravery in whatever dress—boy or girl."

She looked at him in grateful surprise, and her lips trembled.

"But I am not your friend?"

"Possibly, senorita," he bowed low

with almost Chesterfieldian grace. "But we are your friends."

Outside once more the Mauers were rattling, and Connell, with a word of parting, hastily took his leave. Graydon, on the point of returning to his post, was prevented by the girl.

"You were gentle with me even when I tried to— Don't risk your life there. Shoot from that narrow gate," pointing aloft. "It's not so exposed."

Bansemmer dragged an altar chair up to the grated window and perched

himself upon it. The girl sat below him, holding her brother's head in her lap. He was groaning and crying out to the soldiers to kill him rather than permit him to fall into the hands of the natives again.

Suddenly there was a great commotion and crashing of timbers in the front part of the church, followed by shouts and the rushing of feet. Graydon dropped from his perch and ran forth into the chancel. As he did so the banging of rifles close at hand deafened him. In an instant he saw what had happened. The Filipinos had charged the door and had forced it. They were crowding their way into the church in the face of the deadly Krag-Jorgensen. The chapel was lighted, but not from the inside. Cunning insurgents in the shelter of the walls were holding great torches just outside of the windows. Graydon could see his comrades firing at the door from behind every conceivable barrier. Without hesitation he dashed down the aisle and into the thick of the fray near the door.

The struggle was brief but fierce. The merciless fire of many Mauers on the outside opened a way through the small band of defenders, and the rush of the besiegers was successful. Through the door and windows they came, swarming like bees. Many of them fell to rise no more, but their comrades took an eye for an eye. Once confident soldiers toppled over dead until but few were left. Bansemmer led them in a quick dash for the chancel, hoping that the enemy would not dare attack a place so sacred.

Captain Groce and other officers had fallen. Connell became the leader of the remnant. Bansemmer stood squarely in front of the altar and blazed away at the horde of Filipinos as they advanced. He shot at him wildly and without effect. Bullets crashed into the altar decorations behind him. He stood there as one protected by God. Unharméd him his comrades covered and cursed in their dread of certain death. He heard the shrill cries of the girl urging him to protect her brother. She was calling upon God and the Holy Virgin to aid and shield him. And he stood there with a crazy joy in his heart, savagely pulling the trigger of the Krag-Jorgensen. Finally the hammer snapped with no report. As he turned back in consternation a small figure leaped to his side with a fresh weapon.

He shouted a word of warning to her and wheeled again to confront the foe. Even as he raised the gun a great shout arose above the noise of conflict. There was a mighty rush, a new banging of guns, a sudden stampede, and the chapel was filled with men in khaki!

CHAPTER XXIII.

GRATE was the disappointment of Major March and his men when they found that neither Aguineldo nor Pilar had fallen into their hands. Although they had come just in time to prevent the complete annihilation of the little company, the leaders had escaped with the remnant of their surprised forces. Scores of Filipinos were captured, dozens were killed and wounded. Eight of the dashing scouts who went out with Jerry Connell gave up their lives in exchange for the final victory.

A small guard was left at the convent to care for the wounded. The rest of the command hurried to the plaza to search for the remaining fugitives. Graydon Bansemmer was the first of the convent guard to be surprised and the application of his rifle to the insurgents' principles was demonstrated

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