Jane Cable

By George Barr McCutcheon

Author of "Beverly of Graustark," Etc.

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...ER IV—(Continued.)

...r baby?" asked Banse- ...interested. The word gov- ...ed to him. It meant that ...do with wealthy people at

...s—well, not exactly," she ...sedly. The lawyer looked ...arply that she flinched un- ...A kidnaper, thought he, ...ick cunning of one who ...ratagems. Instinctively he ...t as if to make sure that ...no unnecessary witnesses ...secret.

...this room," said he sud- ...h of you. See that we are ...ed," he added to Droom. ...can give you a few min- ...and perhaps some very ... Be seated," he went on. ...door after them. His eyes ...room's face for an instant ...closed, and he saw a par- ...tating grin struggling on ... "Now, what is it? Be ...possible, please. I'm in ...y."

...to him at this juncture ...ng woman was not par- ...ressed. Instead, her rath- ...ce was full of eagerness. ...as a certain lightness in ...that puzzled him for the ...er companion was the ...two and quite as prepos- ...th were neatly dressed. ...ked as though they were ...breadwinners. If they ...it was now quite evident ...d, quick thinker that it ...rk one. In truth, he was ...feel that something mis- ...ed in the attitude of the

...ask how a person has to ...adopt a baby," was the

...how a person has to pro- ...to adopt a baby."

...prising remark that came ...who held the infant. Ban- ...self getting angry. ...s to adopt it?" he asked

...ourse," she answered, so ...the lawyer stared. He ...from head to foot critical- ...reddened perceptibly. It ...to find that she was ...erely good looking. She ...y attractive!

...married woman?" he de-

...answered, with a furtive ...companion. "This is my ...dded.

...ere is your husband?" ...home, or, rather, at his ...e. We are living there

...you said you were a gov-

...t prevent me from hav- ...does it?" she explained ...of a nurse, you know." ...your child, then?" he ...tly.

...w whose child it is." ...ew softness in her voice ...look hard at her while ...hand tenderly over the ... "She comes from a ...e, sir."

...adopt a child unless sup- ...e authority," he said. ...happen to be in your ...what papers have you ...lings home to show that ...are willing that you ...e? There is a lot of red ...matters, madam."

...erhaps you could manage ...r. Bansemer," she said. ..."They say you never fail ...undertake." He was ...was a compliment in her ...treated it with indiffer-

...I can't help you." The

...ll me how I'll have to ...t adopt the child, sir, ...her." Her manner was ...and there was a touch ...in her voice.

...to the proper court and ...that's all," he volun- ... "The judge will do ...your husband approve ...ew anything about it."

... It would spoil ev-

... I don't believe I ...quite clearly. You ...the child and keep the ...far as your husband is

concerned? May I inquire the reason? ...May I inquire the reason?" Bansemer naturally was interested by this time.

"If you have time to listen, I'd like to tell you how it all comes about. It won't take long. I want some one to tell me just what to do, and I'll pay for the advice, if it isn't too expensive. I'm very poor, Mr. Bansemer. Perhaps you won't care to help me after you know that I can't afford to pay very much."

"We'll see about that later," he said brusquely. "Go ahead with the story."

The young woman hesitated, glanced nervously at her sister as if for support and finally faced the expectant lawyer with a flash of determination in her dark eyes. As she proceeded Bansemer silently and somewhat disdainfully made a study of the speaker. He concluded that she was scarcely of common origin and was the possessor of a superficial education that had been enlarged by conceitedness. Furthermore, she was a person of selfish instincts, but without the usual cruel impulses. There was little, if any, sign of true refinement in the features, and yet there was a strange strength of purpose that puzzled him. As her story progressed he solved the puzzle. She had the strength to carry out a purpose that might further her own personal interests, but not the will to endure sacrifice for the sake of another. Her sister was larger and possessed a reserve that might have been mistaken for deepness. He felt that she was hardly in sympathy with the motives of the younger, more volatile woman.

"My husband is a railroad engineer and is ten years older than I," the narrator said in the beginning. "I wasn't quite nineteen when we were married, two years ago. For some time we got along all right; then we began to quarrel. He commenced to"—

"Mr. Bansemer is in a hurry, Fan," broke in the older sister sharply, and then, repeating the lawyer's words, "Be as brief as possible."

There was a world of reproach in the look which greeted the speaker. Evidently it was a grievous disappointment not to be allowed to linger over the details.

"Well," she continued half pettishly, "it all ended by his leaving home, job and everything. I had told him that I was going to apply for a divorce. For three months I never heard from him."

"Did you apply for a divorce?" asked the lawyer, stifling a yawn.

"No, sir, I did not, although he did nothing toward my support." The woman could not resist a slightly coquettish attempt to enlist Bansemer's sympathy. "I obtained work at St. Luke's Hospital For Foundlings and after that as a governess. But once a week I went back to the asylum to see the little ones. One day they brought in a beautifully dressed baby—a girl. She was found on a doorstep, and in the basket was a note asking that she be well cared for. With it was a hundred dollar bill. The moment I saw the little thing I fell in love with her. I made application, and they gave me the child with the understanding that I was to adopt it. You see, I was lonely. I had been living alone for nine or ten months. The authorities knew nothing of my trouble with Mr. Cable—that's my husband, David Cable. The child was about a month old when I took her to his mother, whom I hadn't seen in months. I told Mrs. Cable that she was mine. The dear old lady believed me; half the battle was won." She paused out of breath, her face full of excitement.

"And then?" he asked, once more interested.

"We both wrote to David asking him to come home to his wife and baby." She looked away guiltily. For a full minute Bansemer did not speak.

"The result?" he demanded.

"He came back last month."

"Does he know the truth?"

"No, and with God's help he never shall! It's my only salvation!" she exclaimed emotionally. "He thinks she is his baby and—and"— The tears were on her cheeks now. "I worship him, Mr. Bansemer! Oh, how good and sweet he has been to me since he came back! Now, don't you see why I must adopt this child and why he must never know? If he learned that I had deceived him in this way he would hate me to my dying day."

The infant was awake and staring at him with wide blue eyes.

"And you want me to handle this matter so that your husband will be none the wiser?"

"Oh, Mr. Bansemer," she cried, "it means everything to me! All depends on this baby. I must adopt her or the asylum people won't let me keep her. Can't it be done so quickly that he'll never find it out?"

"How many people know that the child is not yours?"

"My sister and the authorities at the asylum; not another soul."

"It is possible to arrange the adoption, Mrs. Cable, but I can't guarantee that Mr. Cable will not find it out. The records will show the fact, you know. There is but one way to avoid discovery."

"And that, please?"

"Leave New York and make your home in some distant city. That's the safe way. If you remain here there is always a chance that he may find out. I see the position you're in, and I'll help you. It can be done quite regularly, and there is only one thing you'll have to fear—your own tongue," he concluded pointedly.

"I hate New York, Mr. Bansemer. David likes the west, and I'll go anywhere on earth if it will keep him from finding out. Oh, if you knew how he adores her!" she cried, regret and ecstasy mingling in her voice. "I'd give my soul if she were only mine!" Bansemer's heart was too roughly calloused to be touched by the wistful longing in these words.

Before the end of the week the adoption of the foundling babe was a matter of record, and the unsuspecting David Cable was awaiting a reply from the trainmaster of a big western railroad to whom, at the earnest, even eager solicitation of his wife, he had applied for work. Elias Droom made a note of the fee in the daybook at the office, but asked no questions. Bansemer had told him nothing of the transaction, but he was confident that the unspeakable Droom knew all about it even though he had not been nearer than the outer office during any of the consultations.

CHAPTER V.

TWENTY long years had passed since David and Frances Cable took their hasty departure, virtually fleeing from New York city, their migrations finally ending in that thriving western city—Denver. Then the grime of the engine was on Cable's hands and deep beneath his skin; the roar of iron and steel and the rush of wind were ever in his ears, the quest of danger in his eye, but there were love, pride and a new ambition in his heart. Now, in 1898, David Cable's hands were white and strong; the grime was gone; the engineer's cap had given way to the silk tile of the magnate, and the shovel was a memory.

But his case was not unique in that day and age of pluck and luck. Many another man had gone from the bottom to the top with the speed and security of the elevator car in the lofty skyscrapers. In the heartless revolution of a few years he became the successor of his western benefactor. The turn that had been kind to him was unkind to his friend and predecessor. The path that led upward for David Cable ran the other way for the trainmaster, who years afterward died in his greasy overalls and the close fitting cap of an engineer. One night Cable read the news of the wreck with all the joy gone from his heart.

From the cheap, squalid section of town known as "Railroad End" Cable's rising influence carried him to the well earned luxury. The lines of care and toil mellowed in the face of his pretty wife as the years rolled by. Her comely figure shed the cheap raiment of "hard old days" and took on the plumage of prosperity. Trouble, resentment and worry disappeared as if by magic, smoothed out by the satiny touch of comfort's fingers. She went upward much faster than her husband, for her ambitions were less exacting. She longed to shine socially. He loathed the thought of it. But Cable was proud of his wife. He enjoyed the transition that lifted her up with steady strength to the plane which fitted her best, as he regarded it. She had stuck by him nobly and uncomplainingly through the vicissitudes; it delighted him to give her the pleasures.

Frances Cable was proud, but she had not been too proud to stand beside the man with the greasy overalls and to bend her fine young strength to work in unison with his. Together, facing the task, cheerfully they had battled and won.

There were days when it was hard to smile, but the next day always brought with it a fresh sign of hope. The rough, hard days in the far west culminated in his elevation to the office of general manager of the great railroad system, whose headquarters and home were in the city of Chicago. Attaining this high place two years prior to the opening of this narrative, he was regarded now as one of the brainiest railroad men and slated to be president of the road at the next meeting.

Barely past fifty years of age, David Cable was in the prime of life and usefulness. Age and prosperity had improved him greatly. The iron gray of his hair, the keen brightness of his face, the erect and soldierly carriage of his person, made him a striking figure. His wife, ten years his junior, was one of the most attractive women in Chicago. Her girlish beauty had refined under the blasts of adversity. Years had not been unkind to her ... a ... she was the leader of a certain set, but her social ambitions were not content. There was a higher altitude in fashion's realm. Money, influence and perseverance were her allies, social despotism her only adversary.

The tall, beautiful and accomplished daughter of the Cables was worshiped by her father with all the warmth and ardor of his soul. Times there were when he looked in wonder upon this arbiter of not a few manly destinies and for his life could not help asking himself how the Creator had given him such a being for a child, commenting on the fact that she bore resemblance to neither parent.

For years Mrs. Cable had lived in no little terror of some day being found out. As the child grew to womanhood the fears gradually diminished, and a sense of security that would not be disturbed replaced them. Then just as she was reaching out for the chief prizes of her ambition she came face to face with a man whose visage she never had forgotten—Elias Droom! And Frances Cable looked again into the old and terrifying shadows.

It was late in the afternoon, and she was crossing the sidewalk to her carriage, waiting near Field's, when a man brushed against her. She was conscious of a strange oppressiveness. Before she turned to look at him she knew that a pair of staring eyes were upon her face. Something seemed to have closed relentlessly upon her heart.

One glance was sufficient. The tall, angular form stood almost over her; the two wide blue eyes looked down in feigned surprise; the never to be forgotten voice greeted her hoarsely:

"Good afternoon, Mrs. Cable! And how is the baby?"

"The baby!" she faltered. Struggle against it as she would, a sort of fascination drew her gaze toward the remarkable face of the old clerk. "Why—why—she's very well, thank you," she finally stammered. Her face was as white as a ghost. With a shudder she started to pass him. Droom blocked the way.

"She was such a pretty little thing, I remember," and then insinuatingly, "Where is her father now?"

"He—Mr. Cable," answered Mrs. Cable, feeling very much as a bird feels when it is charmed by a snake, "why, he's at home, of course."

"Indeed!" was all that Elias Droom said, for she had fled to escape the grin that writhed in and out among the wrinkles of his face.

As her carriage struggled through Washington street an irresistible something compelled Frances Cable to glance back. Droom stood on the curb, his eyes following her almost hungrily. Half an hour later when she reached home she was in a state of collapse. Although there was no physical proof of the fact, she was positive that Elias Droom had followed her to the very doorstep.

In suspense and dread she waited for days before there was a second manifestation of Droom. There was rarely a day when she did not expect her husband to stand before her and ask her to explain the story that had been carried to him by a demon in the form of man.

But Droom did not go to David Cable. He went to James Bansemer with the news.

James Bansemer's law and loan offices were not far from the river and, it is sufficient to say, not much farther from State street. He who knows Chicago well cannot miss the location more than three blocks either way if he takes city hall as a focal point. The office building in which they were located is not a pretentious structure, but its tenants were then and still are regarded as desirable. It may be well to announce that Bansemer on reaching Chicago was clever enough to turn over a new leaf and begin work on a clear white page, but it is scarcely necessary to add that the black, besmirched lines on the opposite side of the sheet could be traced through every entry that went down on the fresh white surface. Bansemer was just as nefarious in his transactions, but he was a thousandfold more cautious, Droom sarcastically reminded him that he had a reputation to protect in his new field, and, besides, as his son was "going in society" through the influence of a coterie of Yale men, it would be worse than criminal to deteriorate.

Bansemer loathed Droom, but he also feared him. He was the only living creature that inspired fear in the heart of this bold schemer. It is true that he feared the effect an exposure might have on the mind of his stalwart son, the boy with his mother's eyes, but he had succeeded so well in blinding the youth in the years gone by that the prospects of discovery now seemed too remote for concern. The erstwhile New York shark was now an eel, wily and elusive, but he was an eel with a shark's teeth and a shark's voraciousness. He had grown old in the study of this particular branch of natural history. Bansemer was fifty-five years old in this year of 1898. He was thinner than in the old New York days, but the bull-like vigor had given way to the wiry strength of the leopard. The once black hair was almost white and grew low and thick on his forehead. Immaculately dressed, ever straight and aggressive in carriage, he soon became a figure of whom all eyes took notice even in the most crowded of Chicago thoroughfares.

Graydon Bansemer, on leaving Yale with a diploma and some of the honors of his class, urged his father to take him into his office and ultimately to make him a partner in the business. James Bansemer never forgot the malicious grin that crossed the face of Elias Droom when the young fellow made the proposition not more than a fortnight before the Bansemer establishment picked itself up and hastily deserted New York. That grin spoke plainer than all the words in language. Take him into the office? Make this honest, gray eyed boy a partner? It was no wonder that Droom grinned, and it is no wonder that he forgot to cover his mouth with his huge hand, as was his custom.

The proposition, while sincere and earnest, was too impossible for words. For once in his life James Bansemer was at a loss for subterfuge. He stammered, flushed and writhed in the effort to show the young man that the step would be unprofitable, and he was sorely conscious that he had not convinced the eager applicant. He even urged him to abandon the thought of becoming a lawyer and was ably seconded by Elias Droom, whose opinion of the law, as he had come to know it, was far from flattering.

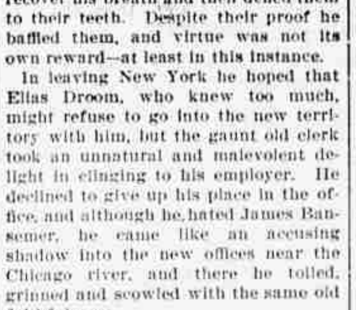
Just at this time Bansemer was engaged in the most daring as well as the most prodigious "deal" of his long career. With luck it was bound to enrich him to the extent of $50,000. The plans had been so well prepared and the execution had been so faultless that there seemed to be no possibility of failure. To take his fair minded son, with the mother's eyes, into the game would be suicidal. The young fellow would turn from him forever. Bansemer never went so far as to wonder whence came the honest blood in the boy's veins nor to speculate on the origin of the unquestioned integrity. He had but to recall the woman who bore him, the woman whose love was the only good thing he ever knew, the wife he had worshiped while he sinned.

"Good afternoon, Mrs. Cable! And how is the baby?"

For years and years he had plied his unwholesome trade in reputations, sometimes evading exposure by the narrowest of margins, and he had come to believe that he was secure for all time to come. But it was the "big job" that brought disaster. Just when it looked as though success was assured the crash came. He barely had time to cover his tracks, throw the figurative pepper into the eyes of his enemies and get away from the scene of danger. But he had been clever and resourceful enough to avoid the penalty that looked inevitable and came off with colors trailing, but uncaptured.

Perhaps no other man could have escaped. But James Bansemer was cleverest when in a corner. He backed away, held them at bay until he could recover his breath and then defied them to their teeth. Despite their proof he baffled them, and virtue was not its own reward—at least in this instance.

In leaving New York he hoped that Elias Droom, who knew too much, might refuse to go into the new territory with him, but the gaunt old clerk took an unnatural and malevolent delight in clinging to his employer. He declined to give up his place in the office, and although he hated James Bansemer, he came like an accusing shadow into the new offices near the Chicago river, and there he toiled, grinned and scowled with the same old faithfulness.



CHAPTER VI.

AT first it was hard for James Bansemer to believe that his henchman had not been mistaken. Droom's description of the lady certainly did not correspond to what his memory recalled. Investigation, however, assured him that the Cables in the mansion near the lake were the people he had known in New York. Bansemer took no one into his confidence, not even Droom. Once convinced that the erstwhile fireman was now the rich and powerful magnate, he set to work upon the machinery which was to extract personal gain from the secret in his possession. He soon learned that the child was a young woman of considerable standing in society, but there was no way for him to ascertain whether Frances Cable had told the truth to her husband in those dreary far west days.

Bansemer was rich enough, but avarice had become a habit. The flight from New York had deprived him of but little in worldly goods. His ill gotten gains came with him, and investments were just as easy and just as safe in Chicago as in New York. Now he saw a chance to wring a handsome sum from the rich woman whose only possession had been love when he first knew her. If the secret of Jane's origin still remained locked up in her heart the effort would be an easy one. He learned enough of David Cable, however, to know that if he shared the secret the plan would be profitless and dangerous.

It was this uncertainty that kept him from calling at the Cable home; likewise from writing a note which might prove a most disastrous folly. Time and circumstance could be his only friends, and he was accustomed to the whims of both. He read of the dinners and entertainments given by the Cables and smiled grimly. Time had worked wonders for them. Scandal, he knew, could undo all that ambition and pride had wrought. He could well afford to wait.

However, he did not have long to wait, for his opportunity came one night in Hooley's theater. Graydon and he occupied seats in the orchestra near the stage and not far from the lower right hand boxes. It was during the busy Christmas holidays, but the "star" was of sufficient consequence to pack the house. The audience was no end of a fashionable one. Time and again some strange influence drew his gaze to the gay party in one of the lower boxes. The face of the woman nearest to him was not visible, but the two girls who sat forward turned occasionally to look over the audience, and he saw that they were pretty, one exceptionally so. One of the men was gray haired and strong featured; the others were quite too insignificant to be of interest to him. The woman whose back he could see did not look out over the audience. Her indifference was so marked that it seemed deliberate.

At last he felt that her eyes were upon him. He turned quickly. True enough, for with lips slightly parted, her whole attitude suggestive of intense restraint, Mrs. Cable was staring helplessly into the eyes of the man who could destroy her with a word.

The one thing that flashed through Bansemer's brain was the realization that she was far more beautiful than he had expected her to be. There was a truly aristocratic loveliness in the rather piquant face, and she undeniably possessed "manner." Maturity had improved her vastly, he confessed, with strange exultation; age had been kinder than youth. He forgot the play, seldom taking his eyes from the back which again had been turned to him. Calculating, he reached the conclusion that she was not more than forty years of age. More than once he made some remark to his son, only to surprise that young man glancing surreptitiously at the face of the more beautiful of the two girls. Even in this early stage James Bansemer began to gloat over the beauty of this new found old acquaintance.

In the lobby of the theater as they were leaving he deliberately doffed his hat and extended a pleasant hand to the wife of David Cable. She turned deathly pale, and there was a startled, piteous look in her eyes that convinced him beyond all shadow of a doubt. There was nothing for her to do but introduce him to her husband. Two minutes later Graydon Bansemer and Jane Cable, strangers until then, were asking each other how they liked the play, and Fate was at work.

A few weeks after this scene at the theater young Mr. Bansemer dashed across the hall from the elevator and entered his father's office just as Elias Droom was closing up.

"Where's the governor, Mr. Droom?" he asked, deliberately brushing past the old clerk in the outer office.

"Left some time ago," replied Droom somewhat ungraciously, his blue eyes staring past the young man with a steadiness that suggested reproach because he was out of the direct line of vision. "It is nearly 6 o'clock. He's never here after 5."

"I know that he— I asked you if you knew of his whereabouts. Do you—or not?" The self confident, athletic youth did not stand in physical awe of the clerk.

"No," was the simple and sufficient answer.

"Well, then, I'm off," said Graydon a trifle less airily.

Droom's overcoat was on and buttoned up to his chin. His long feet were encased in rubbers of enormous size and uncertain age. There must have been no blood in the veins of this grim old man, for the weather was far from cold, and the streets were surprisingly dry for Chicago.

"I am closing the office for the day," said Droom. For no apparent reason a smile spread over the lower part of his face, and Graydon, bold as he was, turned his eyes away.

"I thought I'd stop in and pick up the governor for a ride home in my motor," said he, turning to the door.

"Yours is one of the first out here, I suppose," came from the thin lips of the old clerk.

Graydon laughed.

"Possibly. The company charges a nickel a ride, half a dime. Going down, sir?" Graydon had rung for the elevator and was waiting in front of the grating.

A look containing a curious compound of affectionate reproach and a certain senile gratification at being made the object of the boy's condescending raillery crossed Droom's countenance. Without, however, answering his question he slowly and carefully closed the door, tried it vigorously and joined Bansemer at the shaft. With Droom words were unnecessary when actions could speak for themselves.

"Still living over in Wells street, Mr. Droom?" went on Graydon, thoroughly at home with the man whom he had feared and despised by stages from childhood up.

"It's good enough for me," said Droom shortly. "'Tisn't Michigan avenue, the Drive or Lincoln Park boulevard, but it's just as swell as I am or ever hope to be."

"There's nothing against Wells street, but—it got ashamed of itself when it crossed the river."

"They call it Fifth avenue," sneered Droom, "but it isn't *the* avenue, is it?" Bansemer was surprised to note a tone of affectionate pride in the question.

"No indeed!"

"Oh, there's only one, Mr. Graydon," said the old clerk quite warmly; "our own Fifth avenue!"

"I had no idea you cared so much for swagger things, Mr. Droom," observed the other, genuinely surprised.

"Even Broadway is heaven to me," said Droom, some of the rasp gone from his voice. "Goodby. I go this way," he said when they reached the sidewalk a little later. The young man watched his gaunt figure as it slouched away in the semidarkness.

"By George, the old chap is actually homesick!" muttered he. "I didn't think it was in him."

Droom had rooms over a millinery shop in Wells street. There was a bedroom at the back and a "living room" in front, overlooking the street from the third story of the building. Of the bedchamber there is but little

There was a startled, piteous look in her eyes

to say, except that it contained a bed, a washstand, a mirror, two straight backed chairs and a clothespress. Droom went out for his bath—every Saturday night. The "living room," however, was queer in more ways than one. In one corner on a chest of drawers stood his oil stove, while in the opposite corner a big sheet iron heater made itself conspicuous. Firewood was piled behind the stove winter and summer, Droom lamenting that one could not safely discriminate between the seasons in Chicago. The chest of drawers contained his stock of provisions, his cooking and table utensils, his medicine and a small assortment of carpenter's tools. He had no use for an icebox.

A bookcase, old enough to warm the heart of the most ardent antiquarian, held his small and unusual collection of books. Standing side by side on the same shelf were French romances and the Holy Bible, much bethumbed and penciled. There were schoolbooks alongside of sentimental love tales, Greek lexicons and quaint old fairy stories, law books and works on criminology; books on botany, geology, anatomy and physics. In all perhaps there were 200 volumes. A life of Napoleon revealed signs of almost constant usage. There were three portraits of the Corsican on the dingy green walls.

The strange character of the man was best shown by the pictures that adorned or rather disfigured the walls. Vulgar photographs and prints were to be seen on all sides. Mingled with these cheap creations were excellent copies of famous Madonnas, quaint Scriptural drawings, engravings of the Saviour and an allegorical colored print which emphasized the joys of heaven. There was also a badly drawn but idealized portrait of Droom, done in crayon at the age of twenty. This portrait was one of his prized possessions. He loved it best because it was a bust and did not expose his longitudinal defects. If Droom ever had entertained a feminine visitor in his apartments, there is no record of the fact. But few men had seen the interior of his home, and they had gone away with distressed, perplexed sensibilities.

He cooked his own meals on the oil stove and, alone, ate them from the little table that stood near the heater. Occasionally he went out to a nearby eating house for a lonely feast. His rooms usually reeked with the odor of boiled coffee, burned cabbage and grease, pungent chemicals and long suffering bed linen. Of his "front" room it may be said that it was kitchen, dining room, parlor, library, workshop, laboratory and conservatory. Four flowerpots, in which as many geraniums existed with difficulty despite Droom's constant and unwavering care, occupied a conspicuous place on the window sills overlooking the street. He watched over them with all the tender solicitude of a lover, surprising as it may appear when one pauses to consider the vicious exterior of the man.

(Continued Next Friday.)

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