

# Jane Cable

By GEORGE BARR McCUTCHEON,

Author of "Beverly of Graustark," Etc.

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## CHAPTER XXIV.

**W**HEN the beautiful and mysterious nurse whose fame had gone up with the soldiers into Third pass arrived with others to take charge of the Red Cross hospital on the day following the battle she found the man she had been longing to

see for many weary, heartsick months. She found him dying.

To the surprise of the enthralled command, she fell in a dead swoon when she looked upon the pallid face of Graydon Bansemmer. She had gone eagerly from one patient to another, coming upon his near the last. One glance was enough. His face had been in her mind for months, just as she was seeing it now. She had lived in horror of finding him cold in death.

It was Teresa Velasquez who first understood. She knew that Bansemmer's one woman had found him at last. Her heart leaped with hatred for one brief instant, then turned soft and contrite. If she had learned to care for the big American herself during the hard days when he had been so tender, she also had learned that her worship was hopeless. She had felt his yearning love for another. Now she was looking upon that other. While the attendants were bending over their unconscious companion the Spanish girl stood guard over the man who had been her guardian, the man whose life was going out before her miserable, exhausted eyes.

Jane Cable stirred with returning life. Teresa was quick to see that words, not medicine, would act as the restorative. She went swiftly to the American girl's side and, clasping her hands, cried sharply into her half-conscious ears:

"He is not dead! He is alive! He needs you!"

The effect was magical. Life leaped into Jane's eyes, vigor into her body. She recovered from the swoon as mysteriously as she had succumbed to it. Her sudden breakdown had puzzled her companions. It is true that she was new in the service; she had seen but little of death and suffering; but, with all that, she was known to possess remarkable strength of purpose and fortitude. That she should collapse almost at the outset of her opportunities was the source of wonder and no little contempt among her fellow workers. The words of the strange girl in men's clothing opened the way to smart surmises. It was not long before every one in the command knew that the "beautiful Red Cross nurse" was not wearing the garb of the vocation for the sake of humanity alone; in fact, it was soon understood that she did not care a straw for the rest of mankind so long as Graydon Bansemmer needed her ministrations.

Ignoring the principles of the cause she served, she implored the doctors to confine their efforts to one man among all of them who suffered; she pleaded and stormed in turn, finally offering fabulous bribes in support of her demands. For the time being she was half crazed with fear and dread, woefully unworthy of her station, partially divorced from reason.

The more desperately wounded were left in the village with an adequate guard, the rest of the command departing with Major March. A temporary hospital was established in the convent. There were two doctors and four or five nurses, with a dozen soldiers under command of Lieutenant Bray. It was while the apparently dead Bansemmer was being moved to the improvised hospital that Jane presented herself, distraught with fear, to the young southerner who had so plainly shown his love for her. She pleaded with him to start at once for Manila with the wounded, supporting her extraordinary request with the opinion that they could not receive proper care from the two young surgeons. Bray was surprised and distressed; he could not misunderstand her motive.

He had gone on caring for her without suspecting that there was or had been another man. She had not confided in him during those weary, pleasant months since they left San Francisco behind them. To learn the true situation so suddenly and unexpectedly stung his sensibilities. He found difficulty in grasping the importance of the change an hour or two had made. He had fought valiantly, even exultantly, in the pass that morning, her face ever before him, her words of praise the best spoils of the victory should they win. He had come down to the village with joy and confidence in his heart, only to find that he was not and could never be anything to her while the life or memory of this fallen comrade stood as a barrier.

Bray's hour following the discovery that she had deliberately sought out and found this stricken private was the most bitter in his life. His pride suffered a shock that appalled him. His unconscious egotism, born of hereditary conquests, revolted against the thought that his progress toward her heart was to be turned aside by the intervention of a common soldier in the ranks. Gentleman though he was, he could not subdue the feeling of exultation that came over him when

she approached with her plea. He knew that it was a base sense of power that made him feel that he could punish his pride's offender by either denying or granting her appeal. The attitude of self sacrifice appealed to his wounded vanity. He was tempted to profit by an exhibition of his own pain and generosity.

He went with her into the convent and to the pallet on which was stretched the long, still figure of Graydon Bansemmer. A surgeon was standing near by studying the gray face with thoughtful eyes. Bray's first glance at the suffering face sent a thrill of encouragement through his veins. The man was beyond all human help. The grip of death was already upon his heart.

Then the true manhood that had been his through all generations revolted against the thought that was in his mind. The man should not die if it was in his power to prevent. No matter what the cost to him, he would give his aid to her and hers. He tried to put aside the feeling that death was certain, and very soon at that.

He sought honestly to justify himself in the hope that Bansemmer's life could be saved after all.

"Leave me alone with the doctor, Miss Cable," he said. She was kneeling beside the man on the cot. Without a word, but with a dark, appealing look into the Virginian's eyes, she arose and went swiftly away. "What chance has this poor fellow, doctor?"

"None whatever, sir. He'll be dead in an hour. I'm sorry on her account. Strange case. I've heard she belongs to a fine family in the east. Poor devil, he's got an awful hole in his side."

"Have you made a careful examination? Is it possible that no vital spot has been touched?"

"We haven't had time for a thorough examination. It was better not to waste the time on him when there were others whom we have a chance to save."

"You will oblige me, doctor, by giving him the quickest and most careful attention. There may be a chance. He is one of the bravest men in the army. Don't let him die if there is a chance for him. Miss—er—the nurse—has asked if he can be moved today."

"No. But wait; I don't see why, if it will satisfy her. He will die anyhow, so why not tell her that we will start south with him tomorrow?"

"It isn't fair. She should be told the truth."

"He'd die, that's all—anyway you put it."

"You will make the examination?"

"Yes, in—at once."

"But you—you feel that it is hopeless?"

"Certainly, sir."

"I'm—I'm sorry," said Bray, walking away. The doctor looked after him with a queer expression in his eyes and then called his confere to the pallet.

Bray found Jane waiting for him outside the door. Teresa Velasquez was standing beside her, holding her hand. "What does he say?" cried Jane, gray with anguish.

"He cannot be moved. There is no—but little hope, Miss Cable. They are to make another examination."

"He must be saved! He must! Let me go to him now. I will help. I will give my life to save his," she cried. Bray stood between her and the door his arms extended.

"Don't go in now, I implore. Wait. There may be good news."

"He is everything in the world to me!" she pleaded.

"Come with me," whispered Teresa. Bray looked at the Spanish girl, and a new light broke in upon his understanding. What was this refugee to Bansemmer? The answer shot into his brain like a flash, and he turned cold.

"Miss Cable, I think I understand your anxiety," he said, his voice trembling. "Won't you let this young lady take you away for half an hour or so?"

"But I am a nurse. Why should I be kept from him? I am here to care for all of them," she protested.

"You are not fit to do duty just now," he said. "Miss Cable, I understand why you are here. It is noble of you. I am truly sorry that there is so little hope." He was leading her away from the building, leaving Teresa standing there with her eyes fastened upon the door with a look that could not be mistaken. "I would give my own life to have his spared for your sake, Jane. Forgive me. I would willingly give all I have in life for you. But I am afraid it is impossible to save him."

"Don't say that," she whispered.

"You—you would be his wife?" he asked.

"No, that cannot be. I could not be his wife."

"You mean he is married?"

"No, no, not that! You can't understand. I can never marry him. Never!"

Bray struggled for a moment with the puzzle. His eyes went slowly to Teresa. Then he suddenly understood why Jane Cable would not marry the man she had come to find. He asked no questions of himself, but Teresa would have been the result of every

conjecture had he done so. "He might better be dead," he thought, his eyes hardening. "She's found him out. Gad, I hope— But he put it from him. Graydon Bansemmer did not die within the hour nor that day. The careful examination of the surgeons gave him the additional hope. It did, however, reveal the fact that no vital organ had been destroyed or injured. The ball had torn a great hole in his left side and had gone through the body. Probing was not necessary. The flow of blood was frightful. There was a spark of life left on which to build a frail hope, and they worked with new interest.

The attention of every one was directed to this tragic struggle. The efforts of all were lent to the successful end. Jane Cable, dogged and tireless, came to be his nurse now that the life thread still held together. It is not the purpose of this narrative to dwell upon the wretched, harrowing scenes and incidents of the wilderness hospital—the misery of those who watched and waited for death, the dread and suffering of those who gave this anxiety, the glow of spiritual light which hovered above the forms of men who had forgotten their God until now.

The first night passed. There were sleepless eyes to keep company with the faint moans and the scent of chloroform. Over the figure of Graydon Bansemmer hung the eager, tense face of Jane Cable. Her will and mind were raised against the hand of death. Down in her soul she was crying, "You shall not die!" and he was living. Living on in spite of death. The still, white face gave back no sign of life. A faint pulse and an almost imperceptible respiration told of the unbroken thread. Hoping against hope!

Dawn came and night again, and still the almost breathless girl urged her will against the inevitable. She had not slept nor had she eaten of the food they brought to her. Two persons, a soldier and a girl, stood back and marveled at her endurance and devotion. The harassed surgeons, new in experience themselves, found time to minister to the seeming dead man, their interest not only attracted by his remarkable vitality, but by the romance attached to his hope of living.

That night he moved, and a low moan came from his lips. The goddess of good luck had turned her face from the rest of the world for a brief instant to smile upon this isolated supplicant for favor. Jane's eyes and ears had served her well at last. She caught the change in him, and her will grasped the hope with more dogged tenacity than before. The word went out that there was a chance for him. Her vigil ended when Bray came to lead her away—ended because she dropped from exhaustion.

The next morning, after a dead sleep of hours, she returned to his side. The surgeon smiled, and the nurse clasped her hands with tears in her eyes. Bansemmer was breathing thickly and tossing in delirium. It was as if he had been lifted from the grave.

Lieutenant Bray was seated in front of the convent late that evening, moodily studying his own emotions. Teresa, still attired as she had been for weeks, hung about the chapel with the persistence of a friendless dog. He watched her and pitied her, even as he pitied himself for the wound he was nursing. What was to become of her? He called her to him.

"Senorita, they say he is better. Tell me, does it mean much to you?"

"Oh, senor, he has been noble and good and honorable. If he lives I shall always hold these weeks with him in absolute reverence."

"Then she does not understand?"

"She? What is there for her to understand? She loves him and he loves her. That is enough."

"She says she will not marry him. There must be a reason."

The girl's face darkened instantly and her breath came quickly.

"You—you think that I am the reason? Is it so? Because I am here in these hateful clothes? You would say that to me? How dare you!"

She burst out with tears of rage and shame and fled from his sight.

Jane came rapidly through the church door, out of the gloom and odor into the warm sunshine and the green glow of the world, her face bright, her eyes gleaming.

"He is conscious!" she cried. "He knows me!"

"How is he?" he asked. She started, and a warm glow came into her cheek.

"He is doing nicely. If he can bear up until we reach Manila he will surely live. Are we going as rapidly as we should, Lieutenant Bray?"

"Quite, Miss Cable. It isn't an easy march, you must remember. After a long silence he suddenly remarked: "Miss Cable, I've got a rather shameful confession to make. I've had some very base thoughts to contend with. You may have guessed it or not, but I care a great deal for you, more than for any one else I've ever known. You say he is to get well. For days I wished that he might die. Don't look like that, please. I couldn't help it. I went so far at one stage as to contemplate a delay in marching that might have proved fatal to him. I thought of that way and others of which I can't tell you. Thank God, I was man enough to put them away from me. Wait, please! Let me finish. You have said you will not marry him. I don't ask why you will not. I love you. Will you be my wife?"

She stared at him with consternation in her eyes. He had gone on so rapidly that she could not check his rash speech. Her hand went to her brow, and a piteous smile tried to force itself to her lips.

"I am sorry," she said at last. "I am sorry you have spoken to me of it. I have felt for some time that you—you cared for me. No, Lieutenant Bray; I cannot be your wife."

"I know you love him," he said.

"Yes, it is plain. I have not tried to hide it."

"You must understand why I asked

ly, tenderly, time and again. As if hearing some one calling from a great distance he moved and again looked upward, the consciousness of pain in his gray eyes. This time he stared hard at her. His eyes grew brighter and then darkened with wonder. At last she saw the look of surprise and joy and relief that she had been hungering for. He knew her, and he was beginning to understand.

If he heard her while she knelt and thanked God for this first great ray of hope he gave forth no sign. When she turned her eyes to his face, again he was asleep. But she went forth into the day with a song in her heart.

She looked about for Teresa. The girl was gone, no one knew whither. Bray alone could say that she had started toward the thickets. He pointed out the direction, but did not offer to accompany Jane when she hurried away to carry the good news to the Spanish girl who had been her staunch helper during the long vigil. Bray shook his puzzled head as he followed her with his gaze. It had come to him suddenly that the Spanish girl was not the solution to the puzzle after all.

Jane found the slim, boyish figure lying on the ground, deep in the wood. She had been crying and made no attempt to subdue her emotions when the American girl came up to her; instead she bitterly poured out her woe into the ears of the other. She told her of Bray's insult—as she termed his unfortunate speculation—and she told how it came about.

"I am a good girl, Miss Cable," she cried. "I am of a noble family. You do not believe it of me? No! He had no right to accuse me. I was a prisoner. Senor Bansemmer was my rescuer. I loved him for it. See, I cannot help it; I cannot hide it from you. But he is yours. I have no claim. I do not

ask it. Oh," and here her voice rose to a wall of anguish, "can you not procure something else for me to wear? These rags are intolerable. I hate them! I cannot go back there unless I have!"

"We can give you a few garments, dear," said Jane. "Come! You shall wear the nurse's uniform. We are to start on the long march to the coast tomorrow. They say that all of the wounded can be moved by that time."

It was three days, however, before the little company left the village and began its slow, lrisome march across the country toward the coast where the ship was to pick up the wounded men and convey them to Manila. Na-

ive carriers, cheerful amigos since the disaster to Pilar, went forward with the stretchers, the hospital wagons and guard following. Traveling was necessarily slow, and the halts were frequent. There were occasional shots from hidden riflemen, but there were no casualties. Food had been scarce. The commissary was thinly supplied for the hard trip. Lieutenant Bray grew strangely morose and indifferent. He was taciturn, almost unfriendly, in his attitude toward every one.

The little company stopped to rest in a beautiful valley beside the banks of a swift stream. He watched Jane as she moved away from the stretcher which held Bansemmer, following her to the edge of the stream where she had come to gaze pensively into the future.

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you to be my wife, knowing that you love him. It was to hear it from your own lips, so that I would not go through life with the feeling, after all, that it might have been. Will you tell me the reason why you cannot marry him? He must love you."

"Jettisoning Bray, he would marry me tomorrow, I think, if I were to consent. It isn't that. It would not be right for me to consent. You profess to love me. I have seen it in your eyes—oh, I have learned much of men in the past few months—and I determined if you ever asked me to marry you to ask a question in return. Do you really know who I am?"

He looked his surprise. "Why, the daughter of David Cable, of course."

"No; I am not his daughter."

"His stepdaughter?"

"Not even that. You come from a proud southern family. I do not know who my parents were."

"Good heaven, you—you don't mean you were a waif?"

"A waif without a name, Lieutenant Bray. This is not self abasement; it is not the pardoning of misfortune. It is because you have made the mistake of loving me. If you care less for me now than you did before you will spread this information throughout the army."

"Believe me, I am not that sort."

"Thank you. Knowing what you now do, could you ask me to be your wife?"

"Don't put it just that way," he stammered.

"Ah, I see. It was a cruel question. And yet it proves that you do not love as Graydon Bansemmer loves."

"Some day you may find out all about your parents and be happy. You may have been abducted and"—he was saying, his face white and set. Somehow he felt that he was chastening himself.

"Perhaps," she said quietly. "I might not have told you this had not the story been printed in every newspaper in the States just before I left. You see, I did not know it until just a few months ago. I thought you might have read of me. I—I am so notorious."

"Jane, dear Jane, you must not feel that way," he cried as she started quickly away. "It's—But she turned and motioned for him to cease. There were tears in her eyes. He stood stock still. "She's wonderful!" he said to himself as she walked away. "Even now I believe I could— Pahaw! It ought not to make any difference! If it wasn't for my family— What's in a name anyway? A name"—He started to answer his own question, but halted abruptly, squared his shoulders and then, with true southern, military bearing, strode away, murmuring:

"A name is something; yes, family is everything."

Jane went at once to Graydon. His great gray eyes smiled a glad welcome. She took his hand in hers and sat upon the ground beside him, watching his face until they were ready to resume the journey.

"Would it not be better if he were to die?" she found herself wondering with strange inconsistency to her purpose. "Why could it not have been I instead of he? How hard it will be for us to live after this! Dear, dear Graydon, if—I if only were different from what I am."

Not a word of his father's conduct toward her, not a word of blame for the blow his father had struck. She held him to no account for the baseness of that father. Only did she hold herself unfit to be his wife.

Fortune and strength went hand in hand for the next two days, and the famished, worn-out company came to the coast. The wounded men were half delirious once more for lack of proper attention and the hardships of travel. But the ill wind had spent its force. Bray's instructions were to place his charges on board ship at San Fernando de Union and then await further orders in the little coast town. It meant goodbye to Jane, and that meant more to him than he was willing to admit despite all that she had said to him. He went to her when the ship was ready to leave port.

"Goodby," he said. "I'm more grieved than I can tell you, because I believe you think I am a cad."

"Lieutenant Bray, a cad never would have helped me as you have helped me in spite of yourself. Goodby!"

He went out of her life in that moment.

There were vexations delays, however, before sailing. Almost at the last moment Jane was approached by Teresa Velasquez, now partly dressed as a Red Cross nurse. The Spanish girl was nervous and uneasy. Her dark eyes held two ever changing lights—one somber, the other bright and piercing.

"I have decided to wait for the next ship," she announced briefly.

"You are not going with us?" cried Jane in surprise and distress. "What has happened?"

"It is impossible. I cannot go with you. Pray do not ask for my reason. Goodby. Will you say goodby to—to him for me?"

Jane was silent for a long time, studying the eyes of the Spanish girl.

"I think I understand," she said at last, taking Teresa's hand in hers.

"It is better that it be ended here," said Teresa. "I have endured it as long as I can. I have been good to me, and I want to say goodby while there is love for you in my heart. I am afraid to stay near you—and him. Don't you see? I cannot go on in this way."

"Oh, Teresa?"

"Yes, yes; I know it is wrong. But how can I help it? I've loved him ever since I first saw him—saved his life."

Jane was astounded. The thirst pierced her to the quick.

"Saved his life?"

"Yes, though he does not know it. It was when we were prisoners of the

Filipinos. My poor brother was dying. From the convent Aguinado and his men were watching and directing the fight on the plaza. They paid no attention to me—a girl. The noise of the fighting men was terrible, and I climbed up to a window where I could see. Suddenly below me I saw two men fighting apart from the struggling mass. In an instant it flashed through my mind that the Filipino was overpowering the other—was going to kill him. Although I hated them equally, there was something in the young soldier's face—I could not see him murdered. I seized a pistol that was lying near me and fired. The Filipino fell. In terror of the deed and fear of discovery I ran to my brother. In a moment the Americans broke into the convent. You know the rest."

Jane was suffering the keenest pangs of jealousy and asked excitedly:

"You—you did that?"

"And finally, when I had learned to care for him and he was wounded, to have been denied the right of nursing him back to life—my place usurped by you! Surely I have as much to be proud of as you, and I love him a great deal more!"

"As much to be proud of"—Jane was saying, for the moment all the warmth gone from her voice, the flame from her cheeks, but her meaning could not have been understood by the other, who proudly, defiantly tossed back her head. Beautiful indeed was this brown-skinned, black-eyed girl as she stood there pleading her rights to an unrequited love, a heart already tenanted by another, and that other the woman before her.

"Now, can you imagine," the girl went on, "how it has hurt me to see you caring for him, to see his eyes forever searching for you? No?" They were silent a moment. A wistful look was in her eyes now and her voice unmistakably reconcilable when she resumed:

"Ah, he was so good and true when I was alone with them—before you came! I pray God now that he may be well and that you may make him happy."

"Alas, I am afraid that can never be! You cannot understand, and I cannot explain."

"Your family objects because he is poor and a common soldier? Yes?" She laughed bitterly, a green light in her eyes. "If it were I, no one could keep me from belonging to him. I would!"

"Don't! Don't say it! You don't understand!" Jane reiterated.

"Dios, how I loved him! I would have gone through my whole life with him! He must have known it too."

"He was true to me," said Jane, her figure straightening involuntarily, a new gleam in her eyes.

"Ah, you are lucky, senorita! I love you, and I could hate you so easily! Go! Go! Take him with you and give him life! Forget me as I shall forget you both!" And, impulsively taking from round her neck an Agnus Dei which she was