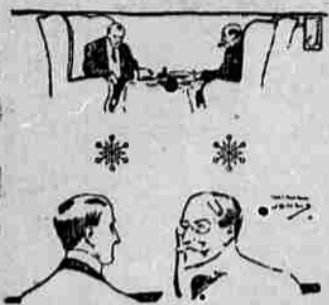


Jane Cable

By George Barr McCutcheon

Author of "Beverly of Graustark," Etc.

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CHAPTER XXX.

JANE was ill and did not leave her room during the two days following the visit to the penitentiary. She was haunted by the face of James Bansemmer, the convict. It was beyond her powers of imagination to recall him as the well-groomed, distinguished man she once had known. Graydon was deeply distressed over the pain and humiliation he had subjected her to through Droom's unfortunate efforts. The fact that she could not or would not see him for two days hurt him more than he could express, even to himself. The day before he left for New York, however, she saw him in their parlor. She was pale and quiet. Neither mentioned the visit to the prison. There was nothing to say. "You will be in New York next week?" he asked as he arose to leave. His spirit was sore. She again had told him that he must not hope. With a hysterical attempt to lead him on to other topics she repeated her conversations with Teresa Valesquez, urging him, with a hopeless attempt at bravado, to seek out the Spanish girl and marry her. He laughed lifelessly at the jest.

"We will leave Chicago on Monday. Father will have his business affairs arranged by that time. I would not let him resign the presidency. It would seem as if I were taking it away with him. We expect to be in Europe for six or eight months; then I am coming back to New York, where I was born, Graydon, to work."

He went away with the feeling in his heart that he was not to see her again. A single atom of determination lingered in his soul, however, and he tried to build upon it for the future. Rigby's wedding invitation had come to him that morning, almost as a mockery. He tore it to pieces, with a scowl of recollection.

Droom's effects were on the way to New York. He hung back, humbly waiting for Graydon to suggest that they should travel east on the same train. His grim, friendless old heart gave a bound of pure joy, the first he had known, when the young man made the suggestion that night.

Together they traveled eastward and homeward, leaving behind them the gray man in stripes.

Jane's six months in Europe grew into a year, and longer. It was a fair but a profitable year for Graydon Bansemmer. He had been enriched not only in wealth, but in the hope of ultimate happiness. Not that Jane encouraged him. Far from it. She was more obstinate than ever with an ocean between them. But his store of determination had grown to a purpose. His face was thinner, and his eyes were of a deeper, more wistful gray. They were full of longing for the girl across the sea and of pity and yearning for the man back there in the west.

He had toiled hard and well. He had won. The shadow of '30 was still over him, but the year and a new ambition had lessened its blackness. Friends were legion in the great metropolis. He won his way into the hearts and confidence of new associates and renewed fellowship with the old. Insultations came thickly upon him, but he resolutely turned his back upon most of them. He was not socially hungry in these days.

Once a week he wrote to his father, but there never was a reply. He did not expect one, for James Bansemmer, in asking him to write, had vowed that his son should never hear from him again until he could speak as a free man and a chastened one. True to his promise, Graydon instituted no movement to secure a pardon. He did, by a strong personal appeal, persuade Denis Harbert to drop further prosecution. There were enough judgments against his father to have kept him behind the bars for life.

Elias Droom had rooms in Eighth avenue, not a great distance from Herald square. He was quite proud of his new quarters. They had many of the unpleasant features of the old ones in Wells street, but they were less garish in their affront to an aesthetic eye. The incongruous pictures were there, and the oddly assorted books, but the new arrangements had a chance for life in the broader windows; the cook stove was in the rear, and there was a venerable Chinaman in charge of it; the bedroom was kept so neat and clean that Droom quite feared to upset it with his person. But, most strange of all, was the change in Droom himself.

"I've retired from active work," he informed Graydon one day when that young man stared in astonishment at him. "What's the use, my boy, in Elias Droom dressing like a dog of a workman when he is a gentleman of leisure and affluence? It surprises you to see me in an evening suit, eh? Well, by Jove, my boy, I've got a dinner jacket, a Prince Albert and a silk hat. There are four new suits of clothes hanging up in that closet," he said, adding, with a sarcastic laugh: "That ought to make a perfect gentleman of me, oughtn't it? What are you laughing at?"

"I can't help it, Elias. Who would have dreamed that you'd go in for good clothes!"

"I used to dream about it long ago. I swore if I ever got back to New York I'd dress as New Yorkers dress—even if I was a hundred years old. I've got a servant too. What d'ye think of that? He can't understand a word I say, nor can I understand him. That's why he stays on with me. He doesn't know when I'm discharging him, and I don't know when he's threatening to leave. What do you think of my rooms?"

It was Graydon's first visit to the place, weeks after their return to New York. He had not felt friendly to Droom since the day at the prison, but now he was forgetting his resentment in the determination to wrest from him the names of Jane's father and mother. He was confident that the old man knew.

"Better than Wells street, eh? Well, you see, I was in trade then. Different now. I'm getting to be quite a fop. Do you notice that I say 'By Jove' occasionally?" He gave his rancorous laugh of derision. "Dined at Sherry's the other night, old chap," he went on with rhy mimicry. "They thought I was a Christian and let me in. I used to look like the devil, you know."

"By the Lord Harry, Elias," cried Graydon, "you look like the devil now."

"I've got these carpet slippers on because my shoes hurt my feet," explained Droom sourly. "My collar rubbed my neck, so I took it off. Otherwise I'm just as I was when I got in at Sherry's. Funny what a difference a little thing like a collar makes, isn't it?"

"I should say so. I never gave it a thought until now. But, Elias, I want to ask a great favor of you. You can—"

"My boy, if your father wouldn't tell you who her parents are, don't expect me to do so. He knows; I only suspect."

"You must be a mind reader," gasped Graydon.

"It isn't hard to read your mind these days. What do you hear from her?" Graydon went back to the subject after a few moments. "I am morally certain that I know who her father and mother were, but it won't do any good to tell her. How's your father?"

After this night Graydon saw the old man often. They dined together occasionally in the small cafes on the west side. Droom could not, for some reason known only to himself, be induced to go to Sherry's again.

"When Jane comes back I'll give you both a quiet little supper there after the play maybe. I'll be my treat, my boy."

The old man worked patiently and fruitlessly over his "inventions." They came to naught, but they lightened his otherwise barren existence. There was not a day or night in which his mind was wholly free from thoughts of James Bansemmer.

He counted the weeks and days until the man would be free, and his eyes narrowed with these furtive glances into the future. He felt in his heart that James Bansemmer would come to him at once and that the reckoning for his single hour of triumph would be a heavy one to pay. Sometimes he would sit for hours with his eyes staring at the Napoleon above the bookcase, something like dread in their depths. Then again he would laugh with gleeful eyes at the consternation of Chang, and exclaim as if addressing a multitude: "I hope I'll be dead when he gets out of there. I hope I won't live to see him free again. That would spoil everything. Let me see, I'm seventy-one now. I surely can't live much longer. I want to die seeing him as I saw him that day. The last thing I think of on earth must be James Bansemmer's face behind the bars. Ha, ha, ha! It was worth all the years—that one hour. It was even worth while being his slave. I'm not afraid of him. Not that! His ridiculous. Of course I'm afraid of him. I only want to know he's lying in a cell when I die out here in the great, free world. By my soul, he'll know that a handsome face isn't always the best. He laughed at my face, curse him. His face won't be his good looks! Well, well, well, I only hope she's where she can see his face now!"

He would work himself into a frenzy of torment and gloom combined, usually collapsing at the end of his haranguing. It disgusted him to think that his health was so good that he might be expected to live beyond the limit of James Bansemmer's imprisonment.

At the end of the week Graydon was coming home. The old man and Graydon from London and the newspapers announced the calling of the Cables.

"I am coming home to end all of this idleness," he wrote to him. "I mean to find pleasure in life, in doing good, in lifting the burdens of those who are helpless. You will see how I can work, Graydon. You will love me more than ever when you see how I can do so much good for my fellow creatures. I want you to love me more and more, because I shall love you to the end of my life."

The night before the ship was to arrive Graydon dined with the Jack Percivals. It was 1 o'clock when Graydon reached his rooms. There he found a note from Elias Droom.

"I have an especial reason," he wrote, "for asking you and Miss Cable to dine with me on Monday night. We will go to Sherry's. Let me know as soon as you have seen her."



CHAPTER XXXI.

GRAYDON was mystified and not a little upset by this almost peremptory summons from the old man. He hurried over to Droom's quarters the next morning after ascertaining that the steamer would not reach the dock until 2 or 3 o'clock. Droom was at work on one of his amazing models.

"Hello!" he said ungraciously. "I thought I invited you for tonight."

"I want to know something about it, Elias," said Graydon, sitting upon the end of the workbench. "She'll not get in before the middle of the afternoon, and she may not feel like going to Sherry's tonight."

"Just as she likes," said Droom pettishly. "You mean that she would not like to be seen there with me unless there is to be something in it for her, eh?"

"Nonsense! You've got something on your mind, Elias. What is it? Why do you insist on going tonight?"

"I don't. It's tonight or not at all, however. I'm not in the habit of letting people decide when I shall dine at Sherry's. If she doesn't want to come, let her say so. That was all Graydon could get out of him, so he left in a more perplexed frame of mind than before.

He was at the dock long before the steamer came to a stop after its eight days of ceaseless throbbing. She was waiting for him from the rail, her face beaming with happiness. It was just as he had seen it in his dreams of this day. More than ever he arrayed his love against her principle. More than ever was he determined to overcome the obstacles which she had thrown up in her self-arrangement.

There was a cold, biting wind blowing, with the suggestion of snow in the skies. The passengers came down with rosy cheeks, colored by the frost laden hours on deck. After the tedious, disagreeable hour with the customs officials the Cables were driven to their hotel. Graydon Bansemmer, sitting opposite to Jane in the carriage, was almost speechless with joy and eagerness. The old restraint was still upon him, but it was being worn down by degrees as he gathered encouragement from the clear, inviting eyes of the girl he worshipped. The love in those happy, glowing eyes could not be mistaken for loyal indifference.

She was more beautiful than ever to his hungry, patient eyes. She was more desirable, more priceless. David Cable and his wife had been immensely benefited in every way by their months abroad. Jane had found the sunshine for them, and it had been her purpose in all these months to keep them free from the shadows. They had traveled Europe over, and they had lived in the full warmth of pleasure.

Cable took Graydon aside as they entered the hotel. The latter had implored Jane to give him a few minutes alone at the earliest possible moment.

"Tell me about your father, Graydon," said David Cable.

"He is still in—Joliet," replied the young man quietly.

"He has not offered to help us in clearing up the mystery?"

to know the truth. She has said so—"It won't matter, sir, so far as I am concerned. She"—

"She has come back, my boy determined to go on with her plans. I am sorry, Graydon, but I am at last convinced that she means to give her life to the work."

"By heaven, Mr. Cable, she shall not do it! I can't live without her!" cried Graydon miserably. Cable smiled sadly as he shook his head.

At half past 7 o'clock Jane Cable and Graydon met Droom at Sherry's. She was paler than usual, and there was a queer chill in her heart. Bansemmer was more nervous than he had ever been before in his life.

Elias Droom, the strangest creature in the big restaurant, arose to greet them as they entered the doors. He had been waiting in the and out for half an hour, and his welcome was quite in keeping with his character. He uttered a few gruff words of greeting to her, accompanied by a perfumery smile that gave out no warmth; then he started with rude haste toward the table he had reserved. Not a word concerning her welfare, her health, her return to the home land—no sign of interest or consideration. They followed him silently, anxiously.

The old man was conspicuously repulsive in his finery. It is unnecessary to say that his clothes did not fit his lank figure; tailors cannot perform miracles. His long chin was carefully shaven, but the razor could not remove the ruts and creases that hid the thick stubble of gray and black. Not one, but a hundred diners, looked with curiosity upon the nervous, uncontented old man. There was a buzz of interest and a craning of necks when the crowd saw the handsome couple join him at the table in the corner.

"I wish you'd order the dinner for me, Graydon," he said rather plaintively. "I can pay for it, Miss Cable," he added, with an attempt at joviality, "but I'm not good at ordering. These young swells know all about it. Get champagne, Graydon. Order something nice for Miss Cable. Anywhere up to \$20. I'm not a millionaire, Miss Cable. Tell the waiter I'll pay for it, Graydon. This is a swell place, isn't it, Miss Cable? I've never been in Europe, but they say they can't touch our restaurants over there. Get oysters, Graydon."

"By Jove, Elias, you are giving us a treat," laughed Graydon. The old man's mood had changed suddenly. He was beaming in his effort to be agreeable. A glance around the room had convinced him that the prettiest woman there was sitting at his table. He felt a new sense of pride.

"I am proud of myself," said Droom, and he meant it.

"It's very good of you to ask me to come, Mr. Droom," said Jane, her bright eyes meeting his before they could lift themselves into the customary stare above her head.

"I'm not so sure about that," said Elias. From time to time he glanced uneasily toward a table at his left. It was set for six persons, none of whom had arrived. "I trust it will not be the last time you will honor me, Miss Cable. I am getting very hospitable in my old age. If you don't mind, Graydon, I won't drink this cocktail. I may take the champagne. I'm quite a teetotaler, you see. Milk, always. By the way, Graydon," he said, turning suddenly to the young man, "I suppose you've led her to believe that I had a motive in asking her to dine tonight—I mean other than the pleasure it would give to me."

"I rather thought something of the sort," stammered Graydon.

"Well, there is a motive. I've decided at last to tell all I know. Don't look like that, Miss Cable. You'll attract attention. Calm yourself. It will be some time before the story is forthcoming. Besides, I doubt very much whether you'll get any great satisfaction out of it, although it may clear things up a bit for you. If you've been hoping that your father and mother—well, we'll take our time. Here are the oysters. Oysters make me think of your father, Graydon. Don't choke, my boy," he chuckled as Graydon stiffened quickly. "He had a woman arrested at her own dinner party one night—right over there in Fifth avenue too. Search warrant and all that. The oysters were being served when the papers were served. Ah, he was a great man for effective revenge. She had dared him, you see. Did you ever hear of the other time when he permitted an ignorant host to invite two deadly enemies to the same dinner? One fellow had robbed the other fellow of his wife. Terrible scandal. Your father knew that they expected to kill one another on sight. And yet when the host told him whom he expected to invite he let him ask the two men. He told me about it afterward. It amused him. Everybody but the host knew of the row, and there was a panic in the drawing room."

"Good Lord," gasped Graydon, helplessly pushing the oysters away. "why are you telling me this?"

"Oh, it was a great joke. It's a good dinner story. The joke comes in at the end. Both those fellows got tight and went home with their arms about one another. By the way, Graydon, what do you hear from your father?"

Graydon looked uncomfortably at Jane, whose face was set with distress.

"Elias, you've got no right to—begin the young man coldly."

"I beg your pardon if I've offended," said Droom absently. "I—I don't know the etiquette of small talk. Forgive me. I was interested; that was all."

"It may interest you to know that I had a long talk with Mr. Clegg this afternoon. He says there is a movement on foot to secure a pardon for father. Father hasn't asked any one to intercede. It is known that he will

go to England as soon as he is released. That's an inducement, you see," he said bitterly.

Droom's face turned a frozen white. His steely eyes took on a peculiar glaze, and his hand grasped his leg as if it were a vice intended to hold him in his chair.

"I haven't told you about it, Jane," went on Graydon. "Mr. Clegg has been father, and he says he is indifferent about it. He intends to leave the country in any event. I am going to write to him tonight, asking him to let me apply for a pardon. It may save him from three years more of servitude. Mr. Clegg is sure he can get his release. What's the matter, Elias?"

The old clerk's body had stiffened, and the look on his face was something horrible to behold. Terror was visible in every lineament. His companions started from their chairs in alarm. With a mighty effort the old man succeeded in regaining a semblance of self-control. His body relaxed, and his jaw dropped. His voice was trembling and weak as he responded, an apologetic grin on his face.

"Nothing—nothing at all. A momentary pain. Don't mind me. Don't mind me," he mumbled. "I have them often. I think it's my heart. What were you saying, Graydon? Oh, yes, the pardon. I—I hope you'll mention me in writing to your father. Tell him I hope to see him if he comes to New York."

"I don't believe he likes you, Elias," said Graydon, half jestingly.

"What—what has he said to you?" demanded Droom sharply.

"He rather resented your taking Jane and me to Joliet that day." The old man's grin was malicious. "He won't forgive you that."

"I shall never forget how he looked at you, Mr. Droom," said Jane, with a shudder. Droom trembled with a new spasm of fear.

Attention was diverted by the arrival of the party of six. The men were distinguished in appearance, the women aristocratic, but spirited. That they were well known to many of the diners in these days at Sherry's was at once apparent. They were bowing right and left to nearby acquaintances. After much ado they finally relapsed into the chairs obsequiously drawn back for them, and the buzz of conversation throughout the place was resumed.

Graydon, lowering his voice, named the newcomers to Jane, who looked at them with fresh interest. The names were well known to New York and European society. For the moment Elias Droom was unnoticed. He took the opportunity to collect his nerves and to subdue his too apparent emotion. Jane was recalled from her polite scrutiny of the women at the next table by hearing her name mentioned in Droom's hoarsest voice, modified into something like a whisper.

"Miss Cable, I not only asked you to come here in order to tell you the name of your father, but to point him out to you."

There was an instant of breathless silence at the table. So startling was his announcement that every other sound in the room escaped the ears of his two listeners.

"There was a new hundred dollar bill found in the basket with you. Your grandfather's signature was on that bill. He was the president of the bank which issued it. Your mother was"—Here he leaned forward and whispered a name that fairly stunned his hearers. Graydon caught his breath, and a new light appeared in his eyes. He was beginning to believe that the old man's brain was affected. Jane leaned forward in her chair, an incredulous smile on her lips.

"Don't jest, Elias," began Graydon, somewhat roughly.

"I am not jesting. It is the truth; I swear it," snapped Elias.

"But, great heaven, man, consider what you've said! It's one of the best families in this country. It's preposterous to say—"

(Continued next Saturday).

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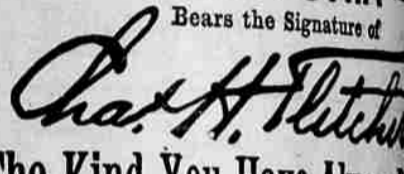
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