

GRAND CHRISTMAS DOUBLE NUMBER
THE EMPIRE
ENLARGED LIBRARY

Vol. I. (New Series) No. 5.



PANTHER GRAYLE'S CHRISTMAS EVE

A Thrilling Tale of a NEW Detective.
By JACK LANCASTER.



CHAPTER I.

PANTHER GRAYLE frowned as he pressed the receiver of the telephone close against his ear. It was a trunk call, and at first he could hear little beyond a dull,

grinding, whirring noise, as of machinery in motion.
"Speak a little more distinctly," he begged.
A voice that sounded thin and metallic reached his ears above the din.
"You are Gordon Grayle, are you not?"

"Yes."
"Can you come down at once? Bring Mr. Martin, if you like. Hedley Towers, Little Wickham, Kent, is the address."
"Who is speaking, please?"
"Sir Leslie Chalteris. I want your help immediately, if you are willing to give it."

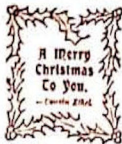
"What has happened?"
"I cannot explain now, but we are in sore trouble. You will be well paid. Can you catch the twelve thirty-five from Victoria?"
"Will you hold the line a minute, please?" the Panther replied.
He laid down his receiver and turned his face towards Mrs. He had only heard half the conversation that had been carried on, and was, of course, quite unable to fill in the gaps.
The Panther briefly explained everything.

"I am wanted down in Kent about a couple of hours from town," he said. "Care to catch the twelve thirty-five and come with me?"
"You may chalk my name up," I said, with alacrity, for I was always glad to accompany the Panther when he was engaged in any of his cases.
"Good!" he said. "You'd better run up and pack. We haven't much time."
I turned on my heel at once and made for the door, for it takes me a long time to hustle my belongings together. At I went, the Panther

(Continued on next page.)

COUSIN ETHEL'S SCHOOLDAYS

A TALE OF TOM MERRY'S CHUM
BY MARTIN CLIFFORD



Dolores is Missing!
MISS PENFOLD came into the school-room in her hat and walking-dress, blowing that she had been out that morning, which accounted for no one having caught a glimpse of her. But it was her face that the pupils looked at.

Miss Penfold was usually so grave and calm and self-possessed that any emotion in her face was certain to attract attention. And now she was evidently labouring under a deep emotion.

They felt that there was to be an explanation of the strange mystery at last. They were to learn what had happened in the night. Miss Penfold stood at her high desk, and made a sign for silence. Every eye was fixed upon her.

"I have a very strange and painful announcement to make, my dear girls," she said. "You are aware that your fellow-pupil, Dolores Pellam, has been in disgrace lately. Last night she left St. Freda's."

"There was a general gasp," murmured Dolly Carew, aghast. "Run away!" "Oh!" "Run away!" "Great gracious!" "My hat!" said the slangy Dolly. "She's bolted!"

Ethel did not speak. She was watching Miss Penfold's white, worn face. "I have been making inquiries all the morning," said Miss Penfold. "There is no doubt that the foolish girl took the earliest train for London, and I have wired there. She will be stopped, and brought back here, and will arrive this afternoon. That is all."

And Miss Penfold left the school-room. The girls poured out into the Close and a babel of tongues. Dolores's action had taken all by surprise. "Bolted!" said Dolly. "I never expected that."

GLANCE OVER THIS.
Ethel Cleveland is a new girl at St. Freda's, and on her first day at school is attracted by the personality of Dolores Pellam, a high-spirited girl of Spanish descent. Dolores confides to Ethel that she hates the school, and intends to run away that night. In spite of all Ethel's attempts to stop her, (See page 30 with the story.)

"Yes," and she agreed to wait for the rest.
"Yes!" said Enid impatiently. "I've told you so! Don't you believe me!"
"Yes," said Dolly, in surprise. "Why shouldn't I believe you? How strange you are this morning, Enid. Didn't you sleep well last night?"
"I never woke up once."
"You look awfully sleepy."

"Nonsense!" said Enid brusquely. And she hurried out of the gates. Dolly glanced after her curiously, and shook her head.
"She looks cut up about something, doesn't she?" Dolly remarked.
"She may be worried about Dolores," Ethel suggested.
Dolly Carew laughed.
"Not likely! She didn't like Dolores; she was always down on her."

"That may make her all the sorer now that poor Dolores is in trouble. It would some people," said Ethel.
"If I'm, yes! But I don't think Enid is one of those people. Poor old Dolores! I suppose she will be expelled now?"
Ethel started.
"Expelled!"
"Yes; nothing else, after trying to run away from school. Why, it might have got the school into the papers! I really don't believe Miss Penfold would ever have got over it if it had."

Ethel's brow was clouded. She thought it very probable that Dolores would be expelled from St. Freda's, when she came to think of it, and her heart ached for the wayward girl.

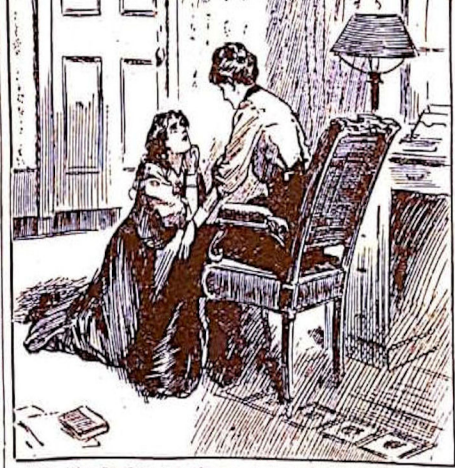
Dolores's Return.
THE St. Freda's girls looked forward anxiously for the return of Dolores Pellam. Miss Penfold had spoken so assuredly that they had not the least doubt that her statement was correct, and that the runaway would arrive that afternoon.

Doubtless the police had been communicated with, and probably they had been ready for poor Dolores to alight when the train stopped in London. At all events, the girls had not the slightest doubt that Dolores would be brought back in the afternoon, as Miss Penfold had declared. And they were right.

Dolores carries out her rash determination, and in the morning is missing from the school. The girls think nothing of her absence, supposing that she is detained in the punishment-room; but the fact that the principal, Miss Penfold, does not appear until the eleven o'clock recess causes much speculation.

door was opened every neck was turned, every eye was upon that part of the hall that could be seen from the school-room, and teachers and lessons were for the moment totally forgotten.
Two figures had entered—one that of a burly policeman-officer, the other that of a slim, pale girl in a cloak—and at the sight of her there was a murmur.
"Dolores!"
It was Dolores!
Miss Tyrrell closed the door upon the hall, but it was in vain to attempt to reduce the girls to attention again.

"Oh, Miss Penfold, I am innocent—I am innocent!" panted Dolores, her voice broken and husky. "I am not a thief—oh, believe me!"



Buzzes of talk would break out again and again, and at last the school was dismissed, a few minutes early, to the equal relief of mistresses and pupils.

Meanwhile, Dolores had gone to Miss Penfold's room. The policeman-officer had brought her to St. Freda's, and departed just as the girls poured out of the big school-room. They watched him with awed and interested eyes as he strode majestically across the Close and disappeared.
"Brought back by a policeman!" said Milly Pratt. "How awful! It was like being arrested! Terrible!"
"Then what?"
"Do not attempt to deceive me, Dolores; you cannot think I am

"Why should Dolores be arrested?" she asked.
Enid turned away without replying.

Cousin Ethel would gladly have seen Dolores. But the girl was about up in Miss Penfold's room with the principal of St. Freda's.
Little did the girls dream of what was passing. In that room Dolores was sitting bolt upright upon a chair, her hands clasped in her lap, when Miss Penfold entered. The headmistress's face was hard as granite, but Dolores did not look at her. Her own face was hard with defiance. She had been recaptured, but not conquered.

Dolores did not rise.
Miss Penfold stopped, and looked fixedly at the Spanish girl.
"Dolores!" she said quietly. "Half unwillingly Dolores rose to her feet. She meant to be defiant, but there was something in Miss Penfold's manner that impelled respect.
Her eyes met Miss Penfold's steadily enough, however.
"I am sorry for this, Dolores," said Miss Penfold quietly. "I should never have believed it of you. I could hardly credit it when I found it was the case. In spite of all your faults, I should never have deemed you capable of this."

Dolores's eyes flashed.
"I hate St. Freda's!" she said, in a low, firm voice. "I detest the place—and the people. I will not stay here. You have had me brought back, but I will not stay. If my people will not take me away, I will run away again!"
"There will be no necessity for that," said Miss Penfold quietly. "You will not be allowed to remain at St. Freda's now, whether you wish or not. There is no place for you in this school."

Dolores's lip curled.
"I am glad of it."
"You are glad to be expelled!"
Dolores winced.
"No, no—not that! But I want to

Dolores's eyes were wide open in horror.
"But—but—but—" She faltered and stammered. "But—you do not think that I have taken the money!"
"Dolores!"
"Do you think I have taken it?" demanded Dolores fiercely. "No, no. You are saying this to frighten me—to punish me—you do not think I am a thief!"
"Dolores!"

"Why do you not speak?" said Dolores, her voice breaking. "Miss Penfold! You do not—you cannot think I took money from your desk!"
Miss Penfold was silent. This passionate denial quite confounded her. She had not dreamed of thinking otherwise for a moment; the fact that Dolores and the money were missing at the same time had seemed conclusive enough, without much thinking about the matter.

She was startled now, and strangely disturbed.
"Do you mean to say that you did not take it?" she exclaimed.
"I did not—I did not!"
"It was taken—it was gone during the night," said Miss Penfold. "St. Freda's certainly was not entered from outside. Dolores, why do you not confess the truth?"
Dolores burst into a dry sob.
"I am telling the truth. I did not take it—I did not know it was missing. Oh, believe me!"
Miss Penfold shook her head.
"I cannot believe you," she said.

Guilty or Innocent?
THERE was a long silence in the room.
Miss Penfold sat cold and stern, her face very hard and pale. She did not believe Dolores; she could not believe her.
Dolores seemed to be stunned. Her handsome, dusky face was pale and almost haggard. The terrible accusation had burst like a thunder bolt upon her.
She had been prepared to face her punishment for running away; she had expected that, and she was ready to be defiant, whatever was inflicted.

This was disgrace—this was shame the girl's brain seemed to reel as she thought of it.
She realised how she had placed her self under suspicion—her flight, coinciding with the theft from the principal's desk, had made it inevitable that she should be suspected. And how was she to prove her innocence? She would be expelled from St. Freda's—as a thief!
And at the thought of it, the

COUSIN ETHEL'S SCHOOLDAYS

(Continued from the previous page.)

Spanish girl's stubborn pride broke down, and the tears came into her eyes and ran down her cheeks. Miss Penfold watched her severely. "Well, Dolores," she said, at length. "I am innocent!" "Cause, cause!" "You will not believe me!" "I cannot!" "Oh, but I am innocent! You may search if you like, you will not find the money!" the Spanish girl exclaimed. "You must be searched, Dolores, if you do not give up the money," said Miss Penfold. "Think, you foolish child! Even if you have parted with the money, it can be traced, and the thief brought home to you. I had, fortunately, not left any gold in the desk; there were two banknotes for five pounds each. One was taken. I suppose you are aware that banknotes are numbered. It will be quite easy for the police to trace the one you took, if you have parted with it. "I did not take it!" "Dolores!" "I did not take it!" The head-mistress was silent. Dolores sobbed, and then dashed her tears angrily away. "I am innocent," she said. "I had no thought of taking money—I have money of my own, which I have saved—three or four pounds. You know my father sends me a great deal of money." "I know it. But—"

The passionate outburst strangely moved Miss Penfold. "If I could only believe you, Dolores!" she said, in a low voice. "It is true—true!" Miss Penfold hesitated. In spite of herself, a feeling was growing within her that circumstances might have conspired to cast this black suspicion upon the Spanish girl. She raised Dolores gently enough. "Sit down, dear," she said quietly. "Let us talk this over. Calm yourself!" "But you believe me?" "Very well; I will send for her," she said. "But I really cannot see how a new girl at St. Freda's can throw any light upon the matter." She touched a bell. The maid who answered it was told to fetch Ethel, and in a couple of minutes Ethel Cleveland appeared at the door of Miss Penfold's study. "Come in, my dear!" said Miss Penfold, as Cousin Ethel hesitated. "You may sit down. Dolores thinks that your evidence may be of some use to her; it appears that you know something of her movements last night." Cousin Ethel coloured. "Yes," she said quietly. Her glance rested upon Dolores a moment. She had not expected the Spanish girl to draw her into the matter. But she had no thought but to tell the exact truth. Dolores understood her look, and broke out passionately. "You do not understand, Ethel—you do not understand yet! I am accused of stealing a banknote from Miss Penfold's desk when I ran away last night." Ethel gave a start of horror. "Stealing a banknote?" she said faintly. "Impossible!" "I hope it is impossible," said Miss Penfold quietly. "That is what we are to find out. Tell me what you know about the matter, Ethel." Cousin Ethel glanced at Dolores. "Yes, yes," explained the Spanish girl eagerly. "Tell Miss Penfold all about the matter—everything as it happened." "Very well." Cousin Ethel told what she knew, quietly and calmly. "Dolores had told me that she was going to run away from the school. I tried to persuade her not to do so; and I stayed awake to stop her if she should go." "Why did you not tell me?" said Miss Penfold gently. "I had promised to say nothing." "Stay a moment!" exclaimed Miss Penfold, remembering Enid Craven's visit to her the previous evening. "Did anyone else know of this?" "Yes. Another girl heard us speaking of it." "Was it Enid Craven?" Ethel looked surprised. "Yes, Miss Penfold." "Very well. You may go on." "I heard Dolores leaving the dormitory, and followed her," said Ethel. "She left the school by the window of this room, and followed her into the grounds. I persuaded her to return, and we went back to bed. I fell asleep, and then—then Dolores must have left the dormitory again, and I did not hear her." "I waited till you were asleep," said Dolores. Ethel nodded. "But what does this prove for you, Dolores?" asked Miss Penfold quietly. "Do you not see?" exclaimed Dolores eagerly. "Ethel followed me into the grounds. Did I go to Miss Penfold's desk, Ethel?" Ethel shook her head. "Certainly not. You would not have had time before I saw you here—besides, you had left the door of the room open all the time." "And I had gone out, intending to leave then?" asked Dolores hurriedly. "If I had wanted to go

to the desk, Miss Penfold, I should have gone then, when I first tried to leave the school. I did not know that Ethel was following me." Miss Penfold was silent. Certainly there was a great deal in what the Spanish girl said. If she had taken the banknote for the expenses of her flight, she would certainly have taken it when she left the house the first time. Yet it might have been an after-thought. Miss Penfold's mind wavered, but in spite of herself Dolores' earnestness was impressing her. She was no longer certain of the Spanish girl's guilt. "Was anyone else awake at this time?" she asked slowly. Dolores shook her head. "I think not." "But, my child, if you did not take the note from my desk, someone else must have done so," said Miss Penfold. "Someone else must have been up last night." Cousin Ethel gave a start. "Dolores!" she exclaimed breathlessly. "You remember the light—"



Two figures entered—one, that of a burly police-officer, the other that of a slim pale girl in a cloak—and at the sight of her there was a murmur "Dolores!"

the match that was struck in this room while we were in the grounds!" Then Dolores clasped her hands. "Yes, yes! I remember! Whoever struck that match was the thief!"

On the Track. MISS PENFOLD looked at the two girls in surprise. Her look demanded an explanation, and Ethel hastily explained. The head-mistress listened with deep attention. "Then someone else was downstairs while you were in the garden?" she said. "Yes." "You did not see her?" "No." "Have you any idea who it was?" "Not at all," said Cousin Ethel, with a shake of the head. "I saw nothing but the match burning for a few seconds." Miss Penfold compressed her lips. "This is a very strange story," she said. "I will not say that I believe Dolores to be innocent—that would be saying too much. But my belief in her guilt has been very strongly shaken, and I shall not act hastily in the matter. Dolores, you will go to your cubicle, and remain there for the rest of the day, while I consider the matter. Ethel, you will say nothing of what has passed in this room. This is not a matter that I wish to have discussed in the school." "I understand, Miss Penfold." "I can rely upon your discretion, I am sure. You may go." Cousin Ethel left the principal's study, with a smile of encouragement to the Spanish girl as she went. Ethel went out, with her brain almost in a whirl. The happenings of the last two days had been very rapid and very strange. Little had she dreamed of finding herself in the midst of such a whirl of events when she came to St. Freda's. Of one thing she was quite sure—Dolores was

innocent. Little as she knew of the Spanish girl, she was certain that Dolores was incapable of a despicable action, wild and wayward as she might be. The other girls gathered round Ethel at once as she came out into the loud, flagged passage, curious to know what had been sent for, and what had passed in Miss Penfold's study. But Ethel would not satisfy their curiosity. "Is Dolores going to be expelled?" asked Bella Hilton. "I don't know." "Was Miss Penfold very angry?" "Why did Dolores say?" "What did Miss Penfold send for you?" "What did you say?" Cousin Ethel laughed. "I am so sorry, but I have nothing to say," she replied. "Nonsense!" said Belle, in her decided way. "What are you keeping secrets for?" "I am not keeping secrets, but—"

"Stuff!" "Yes, stuff and rats!" said Dolly Carew. "Go ahead, Ethel!" But Ethel shook her head. The girls, though considerably surprised and somewhat exasperated, let her alone at last. Cousin Ethel walked away under the elm to think the matter over alone. Enid Craven followed her there. "Ethel Cleveland!" she said suddenly. Ethel looked round. She had not seen Enid following her, and she was not pleased. "Yes? What is it?" she said, curtly enough. "I wish you would tell me what Miss Penfold wanted you for. What did Dolores say? Was Miss Penfold angry with her?" "I suppose so." "About her running away?" "Probably." "And—anything else?" Ethel looked at Enid quickly. The girl's face was very white, and there was an eagerness there, as no mistaking in her look and tone. Did Enid know anything of that accusation which had been made in the seclusion of Miss Penfold's study? Had she been listening again? Ethel's lip curled. "Anything else?" she repeated. "What else? What else was there for Miss Penfold to be angry about?" Enid coloured. "Oh, I—I don't know!" she stammered. "But—"

A Visit to Mrs. Scruton. DOLLY kept up an incessant chatter all the way. She told Cousin Ethel everything, about the footpaths and the woods, about the surroundings of St. Freda's, and was so interested in her own conversation that she hardly noticed that Ethel said scarcely a word. Ethel was busy with her own thoughts. She felt that she possessed the clue to the mysterious happening at St. Freda's, and she alone. It was not pleasant to her to make any intrusion into the matter, but Dolores was accused—Dolores was in danger of being branded as a thief. To bring the girl home to the right person was Ethel's duty if she could do it. "And this is the village," said Dolly at last. Ethel, as a matter of fact, had hardly heard a word that the voluble Dolly had been saying all the way, but she nodded, with a smile. "Where does Mrs. Scruton live?" she asked. "Mrs. Scruton!" ejaculated Dolly. "Yes, the dressmaker, you know." "Yes, but—"

