

THE POPULAR NEW STORY BOOK

THE EMPIRE

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The Mystery of the Empty Compartment.

A Thrilling New Tale of
PANTHER GRAYLE,
DETECTIVE.

CHAPTER I.

The 8.12 Express

IT was seldom indeed that Panther Grayle took a holiday. Certainly he rarely pressed to take one.

Occasionally he would wake up in the morning with the decision already fixed in his mind that he needed a short rest, and if business were not too pressing he would take one forthwith.

I, Geoffrey Martin, his friend, and occasionally his assistant, was used to his erratic ways. Consequently, I was not greatly surprised when, one cold morning in January, he came round to my bed-room before it was light and informed me that he intended spending the day pike-fishing in Loamshire.

"You'll come too," he said, seizing me by the shoulders with a pair of icy hands.

I replied that his suggestion suited me down to the ground, whereat he ejaculated "Good!" and requesting me to be down within half an hour, hurried off, the long tassels of his dressing-gown sweeping the floor behind him.

While the housekeeper was hastily preparing our breakfast we packed our rods and tackle, and immediately afterwards set out for Liverpool Street.

We took train for Saffron Ashley, and reached our destination at about half-past ten.

We had a good day with the famous Loam pike, killing seven in all, including one twelve-pounder that gave the Panther a merry twenty minutes.

"We may as well stop here for the night," Grayle said, as we wended our way back to the inn where we had ordered supper.

So we booked rooms, and sat down to a solid meal, the sort of meal you can only get at a country hostelry—English food well cooked in an English style, and plenty of it.

Afterwards, when our pipes were alight, the Panther suggested a stroll.

"Don't be so sluggish," he said, seeing me deeply embedded in an armchair. "A good brisk walk will help you to digest, and you'll be able to sleep after it."

There was truth in his arguments, so I got up and slipped my arms into the heavy overcoat I had been wearing all day.

A minute later we were out in the
(Continued on the next page.)

**CAN YOU TELL
WHAT HAPPENED?**

READ "THE MYSTERY
OF THE
EMPTY COMPARTMENT."

COUSIN ETHEL'S SCHOOL DAYS

A TALE OF TOM MEEDY'S CUM
BY MARIAN CURTIS

(Continued.)

She had seen Mrs. Scruton come and go, and she realised that she was lost. The wretched girl seemed hardly able to stand as she paused before the stern figure of the head-mistress.

Miss Penfold's face was very stern. "I have only a few words to say to you," said Mrs. Scruton, "and you had better listen to me. I know now who took it from my desk last night, and who tried to throw the blame of that wicked act upon Dolores."

Enid gave a choked cry. Dolores's glance had been bitter and scornful, but it changed now to one of pity, and she threw her strong arm round Enid, who seemed to be about to sink to the floor. Enid hardly knew who was supporting her.

"You confess, Enid?" said Miss Penfold quietly.

"Yes," moaned Enid miserably. "I—I—"

"You knew that Dolores was going to run away, and you hoped that the blame of your action would fall upon her?"

"I—I thought it would not hurt her, as she was going away," said Enid, with dry lips. "I was afraid Mrs. Scruton would come to you, and—and I should be expelled. I—I was horribly afraid. Oh, I—I—"

"I shall not expel you," said Miss Penfold. "You will leave St. Freda's, of course, but I will spare you the disgrace. This matter need not be spoken of. Dolores, I am sure, will say nothing. You must pack your box to-night, Enid, and leave the school to-morrow morning. I will write to your parents and explain."

Enid fell upon her knees. "I—I dare not go home!" she moaned. "Oh, Miss Penfold! Let me stay! I will never—never—"

"You cannot stay!"

Enid moaned again. Dolores's strong arm was round her; it was strange to see Dolores playing the protectress to the girl who had insulted and injured her. But that was the better and nobler side of the wayward nature.

"Dolores," said Enid, "you have pardoned me," said Dolores hesitatingly. "Will you not give Enid a chance? She was frightened by that woman; she did not know how wicked she was. She will never do anything like it again—will you, Enid?"

"Oh, never, never, if Miss Penfold will let me stay."

The head-mistress looked curiously at Dolores.

"Do you speak for Enid, Dolores?" she exclaimed. "You, who were very nearly disgraced for life by her wicked action?"

"Yes," said Dolores. "Miss Penfold's face softened.

"Perhaps—perhaps I may forgive her," she said slowly. "If you can do so, I should. And if I believed that Enid really repented—"

"Oh, I do—I do!"

"I will take you at your word, Enid," said Miss Penfold. "I will give you another chance. And remember, too, that you owe it to the girl you have injured. You may go."

"Thank you, Miss Penfold," said Dolores quietly.

And Enid tottered from the room leaning upon the shoulder of the Spanish girl. Ten minutes later Dolores rejoined Ethel Cleveland in the dormitory.

Cousin Ethel looked up quickly. "It is all right?" she asked.

Dolores ran into her arms and hugged her.

"Yes, it is all right," she said, "and Miss Penfold has forgiven Enid, and we are to keep it a secret. I am sorry for Enid. She is such a coward. I don't like her, but I am glad she is to stay."

"And you?"

"I shall not leave St. Freda's. I don't want to leave St. Freda's now," said Dolores, with her arm round Ethel's waist, and looking fondly at the English girl. "We are going to be good friends, Ethel."

Ethel smiled brightly.

"Yes, indeed we are," she said. "Chums, Dolores."

"And chums they were from that day."

Nothing to Say.

"TELL us all about it, Ethel."

"About what?"

"It!" said Miss Penfold.

Cousin Ethel smiled.

"I have nothing to tell you," she said.

"You should not keep secrets," said Milly, waving a fat forefinger at Ethel. "It is like—secretive to keep secrets."

Ethel laughed.

"But I have nothing to tell you."

"But something has happened," urged Claire Pomfret.

"Yes, but—"

"But you don't want to tell us?" said Ethel North.

Ethel coloured a little.

"Not exactly that," she said. "But there is no need to talk about it, is there? It is not my business."

"Which is a polite way of telling us that it is not ours, either," said Claire, laughing. "Well, perhaps it isn't. Don't ask questions, Milly."

"Nonsense!" said Milly.

"Let's ask Dolores," suggested Emily.

But there was a general pause.

The Spanish girl was not one to be questioned with ease. The almost haughty reserve of her nature had broken down to Ethel, but to no one else. But the curiosity of the St. Freda's girls to know what had passed in Miss Penfold's study was too great. A group of them surrounded Dolores as she came towards Cousin Ethel.

"What has happened?"

"Are you going to leave?"

"What is it about Enid?"

"Won't you tell us, Dolores?"

Dolores's black eyes shone for a moment.

"No," she said.

"Oh, Dolores!"

"Don't bother."

Even Milly Pratt could not ask questions after that. Cousin Ethel and Dolores were left to themselves.

The girls went to look for Enid Craven. She, at least, could be depended upon to tell them what the news was; at least, so they thought. Enid was well known to be a lover of tattle.

It was not easy to find Enid. But she was discovered at last in her cubicle. She was lying on her bed, and she turned a red and tear-stained face to the girls when they came in. The rims of her eyelids were very red, and her face, never beautiful, was more unprepossessing than usual.

"Good gracious!" exclaimed Claire. "What is the matter, Enid?"

"Nothing," said Enid.

"What are you crying about?"

"Nothing!"

"What has Miss Penfold said to you?"

"Nothing!"

And Enid turned her face to the wall.

The girls were amazed. Even Enid was silent; and Milly Pratt exclaimed:

"What are we to do about it?"

"Let us mind our own business," suggested Claire Pomfret, who was somewhat given to sarcasm, especially at Milly's expense.

Milly sniffed. But that was what had to be done. That Dolores had been under an accusation, and that she had been proved to be innocent, the girls knew from Miss Penfold. More they were not to know.

Dolores made a gesture of disdain as the girls left her with Ethel.

"They are very curious," said Ethel; "but it is natural."

"Oh, it is insufferable!" said Dolores, with a curl of her red lip.

"But there," she added, with a sudden change of tone, "I am not going to be impatient any more. I hope the wretched affair will be forgotten; but I suppose it will be a long time before they allow me to forget that I tried to run away from school. I am going to try and like Miss Penfold."

Ethel smiled.

"You will succeed if you try," she said. "Miss Penfold is very kind. Have you seen Enid lately?"

Dolores gave a shrug of her shapely shoulders.

"No; and I do not wish to. I cannot bear the sight of her."

"She must be feeling very unhappy."

"Let her!"

"Dolores!"

"Well, it is not more than she deserves," said Dolores. "What does it matter? You must not waste your thought upon her."

"I was just thinking of her," said Ethel quietly. "After all, she is very weak and foolish, and—and—"

Dolores laughed a little bitterly.

"And you are feeling concerned about her?" she exclaimed. "You want to make a fuss of her—that bad girl, and my enemy?"

to say, gone away. Then we thought that perhaps something had happened to you, especially as Squire Lacy is hanging round the school, and we saw him dodging in the Close."

Talbot gave a violent start.

"You have seen Squire Lacy in the Close?"

"Yes."

"I knew it—I know he would come!"

Talbot muttered the words unconsciously aloud. Pat heard them with amusement.

"What's the meaning of this very strange vigil, Talbot?" said Pat.

"Greene suggests that perhaps your worries have made you go off your rocker; but, upon the whole, I don't think that's the true explanation. But I'm blessed if I know why you should be spending a night leaning against a wall in a beastly draughty passage!"

"There will be no harm in telling you. I want you to keep secret that you have seen me here. But I may as well explain. I am keeping watch over the safety of Seth Black."

"But he's not in any danger."

"He is, I firmly believe, in terrible danger. You know that he was murdered and attacked and hurled into the river, and has not yet recovered consciousness!"

"Yes, I know that; but—"

"When he recovers he will

"I want to see her, certainly."

"Don't see her. You should not speak to her again. You would not, if you were a true friend to me!" exclaimed Dolores passionately.

"Dolores!"

Ethel's tone was very quiet, but the colour had flashed into her cheeks. Dolores looked at her with flashing eyes for a moment; then the big black eyes softened, and the proud lip trembled.

"I am sorry, Ethel," she said, in a low voice. "I—I won't speak like that again. Let us go and look for Enid."

"I will," said Ethel. "But you—"

"I will come, too."

There was no denying Dolores. After her passionate outburst, she was all repentance. Nothing would satisfy her but finding Enid and ministering to her at once, and Cousin Ethel did not say her impulsive friend nay.

"I think she went to lie down," said Ethel. "Let us see."

They ascended to the dormitory. The crowd of inquirers came out of Enid's cubicle as they reached it.

"She won't tell you anything," said Milly Pratt.

Cousin Ethel smiled, and passed into Enid's room with Dolores. The girls dispersed, with the exception of Milly. Milly was curious; and she had no great scruples in gratifying her curiosity; and she slipped into the next cubicle, where it was quite easy to hear what was said in Enid's room unless the voices were purposely lowered. The partitions between the rooms did not reach to the ceiling. But Milly was not destined to hear anything of great interest to her.

Enid said Ethel softly.

Enid Craven did not move. She lay with her face to the wall, her hair all loose, one arm thrown over her head.

"Enid!"

She stirred at last, and turned her rimmed eyes upon the two girls.

"What have you come for?" she exclaimed angrily. "Miss Penfold has pardoned me, and you can let me alone!"

Ethel coloured.

"Did you think that either of us had come to reproach you, Enid?" she said.

Enid's look was resentful and uncompromising.

"What have you come for, then?" she asked.

"Because we want to help you."

"I don't want to be helped," said Enid sullenly.

"Yes, you do," said Ethel brightly. "You have a headache, dear, and you would like your forehead bathed, for one thing. Then you would like to see that Dolores has no illwill towards you."

Enid looked at them doubtfully for some moments, and burst into miserable tears.

"I am the most wretched girl in the world!" she sobbed.

"Don't cry!" said Ethel softly. "It is all over now. Let me—"

Enid made no resistance. Her head was indeed throbbing, and her forehead was hot and dry. Her tears were shed, leaving her eyelids aching

denounce the man who attacked her."

"That's Squire Lacy," said Pat. "There's no doubt upon that point."

"So I believe. But, whomsoever it was, the scoundrel must be trembling in his shoes, and awaiting with fear the hour of Black's recovery."

"Yes, rather! I shouldn't like to be in his place."

"He is a desperate man, and he has much to lose by the truth becoming known," said Talbot quietly.

"He has attempted Black's life once, and may do so again. The only way he can be saved from denunciation is by Black's never recovering consciousness. Do you understand? I think that he will make some attempt to prevent Black ever speaking again."

Pat Nugent shuddered.

"This—this scoundrel! I believe you are right."

"He will find it easy to obtain admission to the school. At the time he desires to enter, his brother will let him in. Eldred Lacy is at the orders of the squire."

"Then, when we saw him he was—"

"He was coming here. Seeing you has doubtless scared him off for a time. He may give up the idea for this night, or he may simply fear it till later."

"You are going to keep on the watch?"

"Yes, until dawn."

and hot. Cousin Ethel's gentle touch was like balm to her.

Dolores stood looking on. There was a disdainful look upon her face, a handsome face at first, and a pouting expression, as if she never would understand as Ethel. The Spanish girl could understand nothing of a defeated enemy. But this she could not understand.

But her expression softened as the minutes were away—softened till the big tears stood in her eyes. There was a sound in the next cubicle. Milly Pratt had gone on her way in disgust. There was nothing for her to listen to here.

A Letter for Ethel.

"LETTER for you, Ethel," said Milly Pratt.

It was a bright, fresh morning, and Cousin Ethel had come in from a walk in the grounds with Dolores before breakfast.

Milly Pratt always knew when there was a letter for anybody.

She always knew when anybody wrote a letter, or received one, or expected one. She was especially well informed about postcards, and knew what was written on them, as a rule, before their recipients did.

There was a rack for letters at the end of the dining-room, where the girls' correspondence was put, to be taken down themselves. Milly always spent some time there after a visit of the postman, when the letters were put up. Milly was interested in everybody's business but her own.

"Letter for you."

"Where is it, Milly?"

"In the rack," said Milly. "I would have brought it to you, but letters have to be opened in the presence of the Form-mistress. That's one of the rules."

Ethel went to take her letter. Miss Tyrrell was in the room, and the maids were bringing in the breakfast.

Miss Tyrrell responded very kindly to Ethel's good-morning. She was beginning to like the new girl very much, as indeed most of the occupants of St. Freda's were.

The Form-mistress looked at all letters received by the girls, and they had to be opened in her presence, which was a precaution against clandestine correspondence of any sort.

But that did not always prevent unknown communication with the outside world, even in St. Freda's and under the careful eye of Miss Penfold.

Ethel's eyes brightened as she took down the letter. It was in the small and elegant calligraphy of her cousin, Arthur Augustus D'Arcy, of the Fourth Form at St. Jim's.

Dolores looked at her a little sadly.

"That is a letter from a relation!" she asked.

"Yes; from my cousin."

"Ah, you have a cousin?"

"More than one," said Ethel, smiling. "This is from Arthur, when I have mentioned to you Arthur is a tremendous swell, but one of the kindest-hearted fellows in the world. I hope you will see him, Dolores, and I am sure you will like him."

(Further Adventures of Cousin Ethel and Dolores will be described in next week's number of "The Empire" Library.)

"I say, let us stop with you, Talbot. It's beastly lonely; and, besides, there may be danger. We could lend a hand, you know, when the pinch comes."

Talbot shook his head in the darkness.

"No, my lad, I cannot allow you to remain. Now, go away to bed, my dear boys. You know I don't like to refuse you, after what you have done; but I must be firm upon this point. It is very probable that after such an alarm the squire will not come at all to-night, and you would lose your sleep for nothing."

"We shouldn't mind that. Still, if you want us to scout, scout's the word! Good-night, Talbot! Come along, kids!"

Outside, however, Pat exclaimed:

"We're not going to let Talbot tackle that scoundrel alone. Why, he might be in danger of his very life. We're going to keep on the watch, and if there's an alarm—"

"We shall chip in and help Talbot!"

"Exactly!"

"Good idea! I don't mind losing my beauty sleep for the good of the cause."

"Come on! We'll stay near the head of the stairs, and then we shall be able to hear any sound from where Talbot is."

(To be continued)

A SHORT INSTALMENT FOR MY OLD READERS.

CARNIVAL AT ST. KITS

By CHARLES HAMILTON.

Talbot's Vigil.

THE committee of investigation made their way silently to Talbot's room. Pat tapped lightly on the door; he could not venture to knock hard in case the sound should reach Mr. Slaney or Brooke. There was no sound from within, and Pat silently opened the door and looked into the room.

The blind was up and the window was wide open, for Talbot was a believer in fresh air. The pale starlight streamed into the room and fell upon the bed.

Pat advanced into the room.

"I say, Talbot—"

"What he broke off suddenly. "What's the matter?" whispered Blagden uneasily.

"He's not here!"

The chums of the end study left the room. They were really anxious about Talbot now; the meeting with the squire in the Close had filled Pat

with a vague fear when he thought of it in connection with Talbot.

Only in one window of the vast pile of St. Kit's was a light glimmer—only in the room where Seth Black lay in uneasy sleep, his senses not yet returned, perhaps never to return. The chums, scarcely knowing in which direction to first turn their steps, found themselves in the passage upon which the sick-room opened, hardly aware of it till they caught the glimmer of light under the door.

Pat stopped as he caught it.

"No good going this way," he whispered. "Talbot isn't likely."

"Nugent!"

It was Arthur Talbot's voice.

The chums were utterly amazed and startled by the unexpected meeting. Why Talbot should be spending the night outside the door of Seth Black's room was more than they could comprehend.

"Talbot! You here?"

"What are you doing, I say? Don't speak loudly—don't make a noise, or you may disturb the poor fellow yonder."

"I don't mind explaining," replied Pat. "We were looking for you."

"Looking for me?" said Talbot.

"Yes. You weren't in your room, and the bed hadn't been slept in, and we thought at first that you had slept—I mean, bunked—that is