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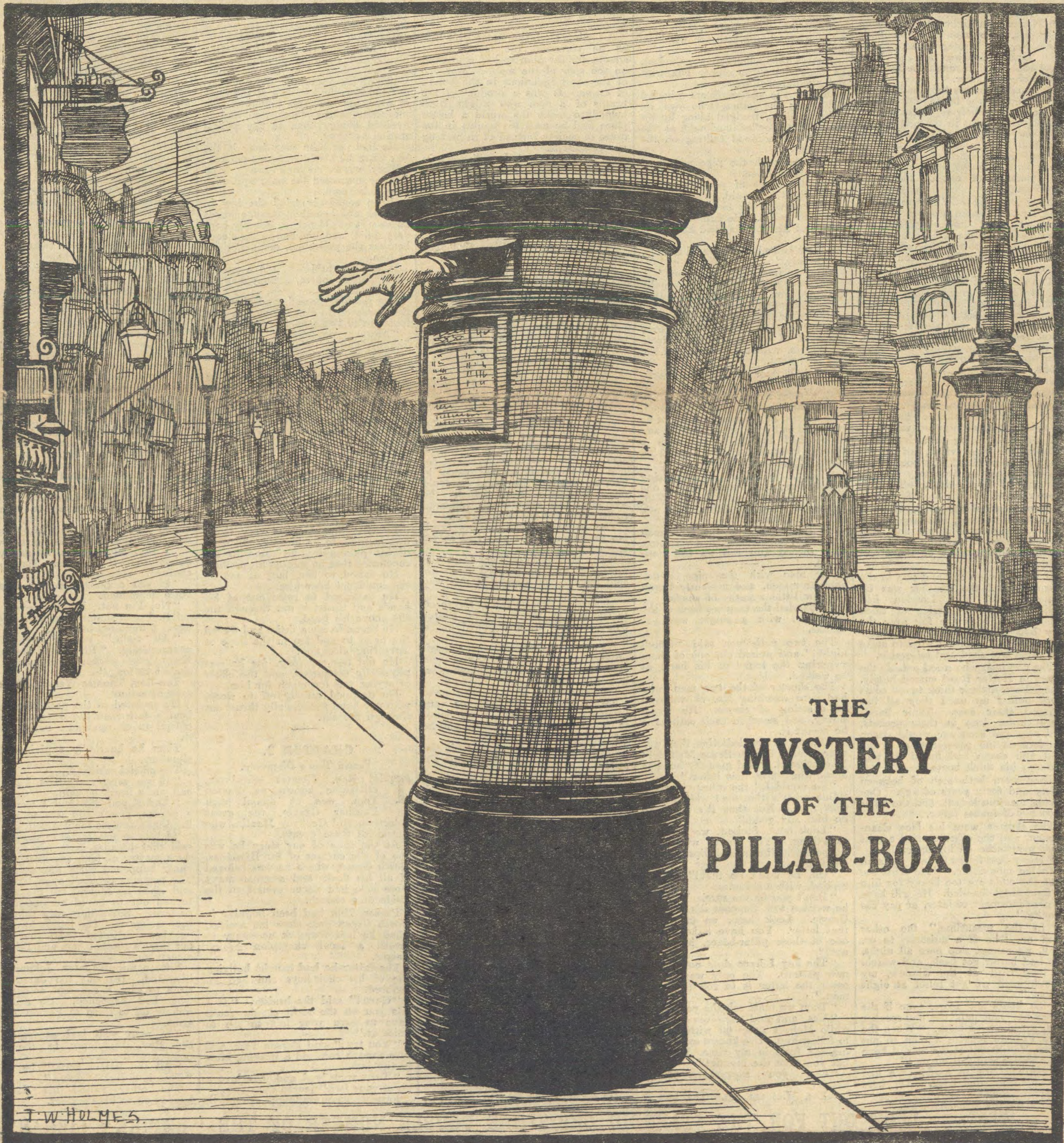
"PANTHER" GRAYLE!



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THE
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T. W. HOLMES.

A New and Interesting Story for All.

COUSIN ETHEL'S SCHOOL DAYS

A TALE OF TOM MERRY'S CHUM

BY MARTIN CLIFFORD

YOU
CAN START
NOW.



Flight!

THERE was no response but the regular breathing. Miss Tyrrell moved away softly. No doubt crossed her mind for a moment but that the Spanish girl was asleep. Dolores did not stir when she was gone.

She lay quite silent while the girls with much talking through the partitions of the cubicles, went to bed. Miss Tyrrell switched off the light and retired.

The door closed.

Then Dolores's eyes opened wide in the darkness.

There was a bitter smile upon her face as she lay staring up into the darkness, wide awake, her heart beating with suppressed excitement.

All was well so far. She had only to wait for the rest of the Lower School girls to be asleep, and then—

She waited.

There was a tap, tap, tap, through the silence of the dormitory. It was Dolly Carew tapping good-night to Ethel Cleveland.

Then silence settled down.

The girls dropped off to sleep.

But three of them remained wide awake.

One of them was Dolores Pelham, lying with her big black eyes wide open, staring through the darkness, listening impatiently to the school clock every time it chimed.

Another was Cousin Ethel. Fatigued as she was by the experiences of the day, Ethel did not think of going to sleep. She was thinking of Dolores.

She kept her eyes open with difficulty.

There was another who was awake, and felt no desire to sleep, whose heart was beating as excitedly as Dolores Pelham's. It was Enid Craven. She sat up in bed, with the clothes huddled round her, not daring to think of sleep. She was wondering if Dolores would carry out her plan of flight.

But she made no sound to hint that she was awake. She was far from wishing to interfere with the movements of the Spanish girl now.

The night grew older.

At ten o'clock the girls of the Upper School had gone to their dormitory, and shortly after that, other doors closed softly in the silence of the school.

At eleven o'clock only one light was gleaming in the great building, and it shone from the window of Miss Penfold's room. And as the school clock rung out the hour, it was extinguished.

Dolores's heart beat almost painfully as she heard the eleven strokes following one another heavily through the silent night.

Eleven o'clock.

At that hour, she knew, all St. Freda's were gone to bed. At that hour, a light seldom remained in the school.

A half-hour more, for perfect safety, and then she could go. She set herself to wait, with grim patience.

The half-hour seemed terribly long.

How dark and silent was the night! To Dolores, who believed herself the only wakeful one in the long, lofty

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 Pelham, 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 Ethel's efforts to restrain her, the wilful Spanish girl persists in her rash determination, and, having made her preparations, retires to bed early. Miss Tyrrell, the second mistress at St. Freda's, looks into Dolores's cubicle when the other girls come up to bed. The girl is apparently fast asleep. "Dolores," whispers the mistress softly.

(Now go on with the story.)

dormitory, the silence seemed uncanny and eerie. But she did not falter. She did not obey the impulse to close her eyes and forget her troubles in sleep. She waited for the clock to strike again.

The quarter chimed out. Would that last half-hour never pass? she wondered fiercely. It seemed ages before it struck at last.

But it did chime.

Half-past eleven.

Dolores listened, and then listened again in the silence that followed. It was a deathly silence, as of the tomb, and she shivered a little.

There was no sound—no one was stirring.

The girl slipped quietly from the bed.

Quickly, silently, she dressed.

Then she stepped to the doorway of her cubicle—a doorway to which there was no door—and looked up and down the dormitory passage.

Silence as of the dead.

She took up the little bag she had packed, and stepped out of the cubicle.

Her hand was on the door leading out into the corridor, when a voice came through the gloom, and caused her heart to leap and thump wildly.

"Dolores!"

The girl paused, suffocating.

"Who is it?" she breathed.

"It is I—Ethel."

"Go back to bed," said Dolores, in a shrill whisper. "Go back to bed. Do you think you can stop me now?"

"Dolores, come back!"

"I will not!"

"I tell you—"

"I will not! Betray me if you like!"

And Dolores opened the heavy door, stepped out into the corridor, and pulled it shut after her. Cousin Ethel stood in the darkness, shivering in the draught that came down past the row of cubicles, and hesitated. What should she do?

It did not take her long to decide. Dolores should never commit this mad action if she could prevent her. She hastily put her feet into a pair of slippers, and drew a cloak round her, and followed the Spanish girl from the dormitory.

As she left the dormitory, she thought she heard a sound as of someone rising from bed. She paused a second, but all was silent, and she hurried on her way.

C Cousin Ethel Means Business.

COUSIN ETHEL paused at the top of the great staircase.

Where was Dolores?

By what means did the rash girl intend to leave the house? As she had no one to aid her, as she had only herself to rely upon, she could not leave by a window. And the doors were all locked and bolted at night. Even if she could have ob-

tained a key, the noise of withdrawing the bolts would have betrayed her.

Where was she gone?

"Dolores!" breathed Ethel, in the silence of the staircase.

But only the faint echo of her own voice answered her.

"Dolores!"

Silence.

The girl must have descended the stairs. Cousin Ethel went slowly down, feeling her way in the darkness by the banisters. She dared not think of a light—even as it was, she was in terror of discovery. If one of the mistresses should be alarmed!

But Ethel would not think of that. She was there to save Dolores, and she knew that she was doing what was right.

But where was Dolores?

Ethel caught a glimmer of light as she trod the linoleum of the lower passage—the faint pale light of the stars through an open doorway.

She hurried on.

She did not know the interior of St. Freda's very well as yet, but she knew that that was the doorway of the principal's room.

That door would naturally be closed, and the fact that it was standing open was a clue to Ethel.

She paused at the doorway, and looked in, straining her eyes in the gloom.

Opposite her was a window, and the glimmer of the stars came in from without, showing that the blind had been raised.

A dim form showed up against the white muslin curtain of the window. It was that of Dolores.

Cousin Ethel drew a quick, deep breath. It was the Spanish girl; she had found her again. She hurried into the room, and stopped as she caught her foot on a chair. At the same moment the sash of the window was thrown up, and a keen gust of night air blew into the room.

Ethel paused with a suppressed cry. She had hurt her foot, and in that moment's pause the Spanish girl was gone.

Ethel ran to the window.

She leaned out and looked below.

"Dolores!"

"Go back!"

Dolores had dropped softly upon the flower-bed beneath Miss Penfold's study window. She had chosen Miss Penfold's room as the easiest mode of egress. The window had been fastened by a simple catch.

The starlight was clearer in the Close.

Cousin Ethel saw the Spanish girl, fully dressed, in a cloak, and with a bag in her hand. The stars caught Dolores's eyes as she looked up, and made them glint strangely.

"Good-bye, Ethel Cleveland!"

"You are not going!"

"I am going!"

"Stop! Stop!"

"Good-bye!"

The Spanish girl turned away. In a moment more Ethel had dropped, too, from the window-sill to the flower-bed. She almost fell, but she recovered herself and ran towards Dolores.

"Dolores, you must stop!"

Her hand fastened firmly upon the Spanish girl's arm.

Dolores tried to tear herself away. But she was not so strong as the active, lithe English girl.

"Let me go!" she breathed.

"I will not."

Dolores's white teeth came hard together.

"How dare you—how dare you interfere with me!"

"To save you," said Cousin Ethel resolutely. "I will not let you go. You are mad to-night, Dolores; you would not act so foolishly if you were calm. You must come back."

"I will not—I will not!"

"You must!"

"Let me go!"

"I cannot!"

Dolores struggled for a moment. But she could not release herself. Her voice was choking with passion as she went on.

"Leave me alone! How dare you! Listen! I shall strike you if you do not release me! Take care!"

"Dolores, you will come back, or I shall call out."

"Call out!"

"Yes, and awaken Miss Penfold." Dolores stood turned to stone.

"You will betray me!"

"Rather than let you do this mad thing—yes."

"Oh!"

"Come back with me."

Dolores seemed to shake with passion. Her clenched hand rose, but Cousin Ethel did not shrink. In the starlight her clear eyes looked into the black, fierce ones of the



"Let me go!" hissed Dolores.

"I will not!" said Ethel resolutely. "Rather than let you do this mad thing, I will call out, and awaken Miss Penfold!"

Spanish girl, and Dolores's arm dropped to her side.

"Oh, I hate you!" she murmured.

"I am sorry for that; but I cannot let you go. Come in."

"I have no choice now," said Dolores passionately. "But I hate you—I hate you!"

Cousin Ethel did not reply.

There was no doubt that Dolores was in deadly earnest, while she was speaking, at all events, though probably enough the time would come when she would know that Ethel was right, that the English girl was acting the part of a true friend.

"I hate you!"

"Come!"

They turned back towards the window. Dolores made no further resistance. It was useless, for if Cousin Ethel had called out she would have had no chance of escape.

Suddenly she stopped.

"Look!" she breathed.

Her hand rose to point to the study window.

"We are discovered, then!"

A light was glimmering from Miss Penfold's window.

It was a wavering, flickering light, such as might have been given by a match, and even as the two girls looked, it was extinguished.

Darkness rushed upon their eyes again.

They looked at each other in consternation.

"Miss Penfold!" exclaimed Dolores.

Ethel nodded in dismay.

"I—I suppose so."

"We shall be found out."

"Yes."

"I don't care! Do you?"

"Yes," said Ethel quietly; "I care very much. But it cannot be helped. Let us go in."

"As you like! You have only yourself to blame. Why did you interfere with me?" said Dolores sullenly.

Ethel did not reply to that question. They approached the window, and looked in. There was no light, and no sound within.

Both the girls were puzzled. It was borne in upon them that it could not have been Miss Penfold who had struck that match. She would have made her presence known before this.

"What does it mean?" muttered Dolores.

Ethel shook her head.

"I don't understand."

"There was a light—you saw it as well as I?"

"Certainly."

"It cannot have been Miss Penfold," said Dolores, in a hurried whisper. "If she came down, she would have turned on the electric light. Why should she strike a match?"

"I cannot understand it."

"It was someone else—one of the girls spying on us," said Dolores. "Enid Craven, very likely."

Ethel nodded. It seemed to her very probable. But whoever had been in the room now, it was certain that the person was no longer there.

The two girls entered the window, and Ethel closed it and fastened it. Then she led the way back to the Lower School dormitory.

Dolores followed her without a word.

All resistance seemed to be gone from the Spanish girl now. It was as if the English girl's firm resolve had conquered her in spite of herself.

They reached the dormitory, and entered; all was dark and silent within. Ethel closed the heavy door.

"You will go back to bed, Dolores?"

"Yes."

"And will not leave it again?"

"I promise you nothing."

"But—"

"Enough."

Dolores drew herself quickly away. She stepped to Enid Craven's cubicle and struck a match, and peered in. Enid was in bed and breathing regularly.

But Dolores remembered how she had deceived Miss Tyrrell, and Enid's apparent slumber did not convince her.

The match went out, and she returned to her own cubicle.

Ethel heard her lie down, and then returned to bed. Ethel's mind was in a whirl of doubt and anxiety. Surely Dolores would not make a second attempt that night—yet—

Ethel resolved to remain awake.

An hour passed.

She heard midnight strike.

Her eyelids were weighed down with heaviness. Dolores had not made a movement. There was little doubt that she was fast asleep.

Ethel listened for the clock to strike again. She allowed her eyes to close for a moment to rest them. They did not open again.

Gone!

ETHEL!"

"Ethel!"

Cousin Ethel opened her eyes.

A ray of light danced in them, and she sat up in bed, for the moment trying in vain to recall where she was.

The cubicle, the grey wall of the passage that ran past the end of it,

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