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1^D THE EMPIRE 1^D

THE POPULAR NEW STORY BOOK

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Vol. 1. No. 17.

A DRAMATIC INCIDENT!

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The Dark Lantern



At the end of the cavern half-a-dozen men were squatting round a barrel playing cards. They were so absorbed in their game that they did not hear Charlie Peace enter.

START NOW!

A NEW TALE OF CHARLES PEACE.

This Story Shows the Baneful Influence of Bad Companionship on a Young Boy, and the Result of Weakness of Character Coupled with a Clever but Distorted Mind.

Good-bye to Jagger's Circus. AGING like a bull, Milo tore along the passage, forgetting his approaching "turn," and intent only on his vengeance. His eye his audacious assailant standing perfectly cool and collected at the entrance to the ring.

Stella, her face wreathed in smiles, and waving her hat right and left, was catering off amid thunders of applause. Charlie joined in, clapping his hands and shouting.

The sight was maddening to Milo, who had tried to make love to Stella, and had been unmercifully unthrottled for his pains. Reluctant as it was to think a boy of thirteen could be his rival, a wave of jealousy swept over the giant. He didn't care who saw him, and he rushed, game, uplifted, to take Charlie by surprise.

The cane flourished in the air, but it never reached the mark; it was aimed at Stella's quick eye took in the scene at a glance, and at a touch of her foot, Dick Tarpin bounded forward between Milo and Charlie, and in a flash his riding whip descended on the bully's cheek, leaving a livid stripe as a memento of its visit.

"You coward!" cried the girl, her flushed cheeks and sparkling eyes flashing to her beauty.

"I'll have my own back for this!" lashed the giant, panting with suppressed rage. "Ay, not only on the urchin, but on you, too, my grand madam!"

What would have happened but for Jagger, it is hard to say. Stella who, under ordinary circumstances, was the soul of merriment and good humour, was like a tigress when roused. Jagger knew her nature thoroughly.

"Stop it!" he roared. "I'll have no rows while the show's going on. Settle your quarrels afterwards, Stella. You're a little silly. You want all your nerve for Uiz, and here you're upsetting yourself!"

"It's all right, gov'ner, only understand that whenever I see that big brute showing off I'll have something to say!" cried the girl.

She darted a glance of defiance at Milo, another of sympathetic friendliness at Charlie, and the horse bore her away.

"Look here, Jagger, I'm not going to stand cheek from anybody. My position in your company—"

"Your position, Jim Rudge, is in the ring," snapped Jagger. "The crowd are waiting. If you don't pull yourself together and get on with it, you can do the other thing. You know what that is. I've pretty well had enough of you and your beast of a temper!"

Jagger was not a man to be trifled with. Jim Rudge, otherwise Milo, knew this well enough, and growling in undertones, and with a thundercloud on his earthy face, he entered the ring.

Meanwhile, Charlie had slipped among the audience. He could get away from this part better than from behind the scenes, as no one was likely to stop him.

Milo's performance did not interest him in the least. The fellow as a "strong man" was a bit of a fraud, and the audience must have thought so, too, for the applause was very languid.

But everybody woke up when the great cage of lions was wheeled in on a huge trolley drawn by one of the elephants. Presently, Stella, or rather Uiz, entered, and had a great reception.

Charlie was in the front row. He hardly knew which took his fancy most—pretty Stella or the lithe, sleek, loopy, with their gleaming yellow eyes, and their square massive lower jaws.

There must have been something in his blood akin to the nature of the creatures. As a matter of fact, when he had made that ferocious spring upon Milo he had drawn himself up precisely as a cat does. Probably Charlie Peace was quite unconscious what a close resemblance he had to an animal.

At all events, he had not been looking long before he quite forgot Stella, and saw only the four legs. In some surreptitious way he seemed to know quite well the nature of each, and how they varied. The biggest, he decided, was stupid and lazy, and would do nothing unless spurred up to his work. The second was formidable, but was mechanical. The third was clever and handsome, and evidently Stella's favourite. The fourth was a lioness-cub, beautifully shaped. Uncertain of her temper, she could, when in the mood, exert the rest in activity and smartness, but when not so disposed could hardly be induced to do anything.

Charlie Peace read all this as in a book, and he saw also how Stella never took her eyes off the lioness. Evidently she mistrusted the creature. But the animal was fairly obedient and nothing happened. For all that, its calmness was that of a sea in fine weather. Just as a gale would transform the rippling waves into a raging mountain of water, so a fit of irritability would change the placid, graceful lioness into a savage brute, which could not distinguish between friend and foe.

It was a quarter-past eleven when the performance was over. Charlie fled out with the audience, and when he was outside, paused for a few moments overcast by a horrible feeling of doubt and uncertainty.

For aught that he could tell he might never see Stella again. He was about to take a leap in the dark. It was vain to resist. All that he could see was that he would have to battle through it, if he could.

"Shall I get free from the gang to-night, or shall I go on wearing their fetters?" he asked himself.

An odd fancy took him. He had in his pocket a metal button. It had dropped from one of Stella's fancy dresses, and he had picked it up and kept it. He tossed the button in the air, deciding that if it came down shank upmost it would mean that the Red Thimble would continue to hold him in their clutches.

The button rattled on the stones. The shank was downwards.

"Right-ho!" he cried joyfully, and set out for the Ecclestone Road with quite a light heart.

New Readers should turn to the foot of next page.

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The Most Popular School Story.

THE RIVALRY OF ST. WODE'S



THIS HAS TAKEN PLACE.

Pen was a sturdy Cornish lad who had been to a Council school and won a scholarship at St. Wode's. He arrived there he received his new arms by Blagden & Co. ...

What Mr. Bush Overheard.

MEAN that Bushes doesn't dislike you merely for being a Council-school chap, ...

Pen looked on with glistering eyes. He was a keen footballer, and in the village team at home he had been a great hero. ...

Pen looked on with glistering eyes. He was a keen footballer, and in the village team at home he had been a great hero. ...

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Mystery of the Garden.

Pen looked on with glistering eyes. He was a keen footballer, and in the village team at home he had been a great hero. ...

one, but the rest seemed to Dick Penwyn's eye to be merely fumbling. He made no remark on the subject, but stood looking on. ...

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or you're coming to my study to have the biggest hiding you ever heard of!" he said grimly. ...

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An Amusing Complete Story.



GORDON GAY'S SNOWBALL WAGER

A Splendid Tale of the Chums of Rylcombe Grammar School. By PROSPER HOWARD.

CHAPTER 1. Tadpole is Puzzled.

"SNOW!" Harry Wootton, of the Fourth Form at Rylcombe Grammar School, sprang out of bed at the first sound of ringing-bell, and looked out of his dormitory window just over his head.

"He gave this startling piece of information in a tone of great satisfaction, and there was a general chorus of approval.

"Snow!" "My hat!" "Good egg!" "What's a snowball-fight?" "Hear, hear!" The juniors sprang up with quite unusual alacrity. As a rule, most of the dormitory allowed themselves a good ten minutes' snooze after ringing-bell had gone. But this morning they were anxious to be up and out, to take the freshest advantage of the late fall of snow which Harry Wootton had been the first to announce.

"We'll take you on, Gordon Gay," cried out Frank Monk, who, with the juniors were hurriedly dressing themselves. "Study 1 against Study 13, with snowballs—no stones in the center allowed."

"Ha, ha, ha!" "That wouldn't be fair, anyway," said Harry Wootton. "We're fair, and you're only fair."

"That's true," asserted Jack Wootton. Gordon Gay's following consisted of Harry Wootton and Tadpole, while Frank Monk had only two study mates—Carboy and Lunc.

"Oh, that doesn't matter!" grinned Frank Monk. "We'll chuck the snowballs from below, and you'll be in on your side as a make-weight."

"Ha, ha, ha, hear, hear!" came from Lunc and Carboy, and Harry Wootton indignantly. "You—"

"Of course, that's all rot, Monk," said Gordon Gay, interrupting young Wootton's flow of indignation. "Fair's fair, of course! But I fancy we needn't bother much about sides not being equal, as Taddy's not very quick at snowball-fights. Are you, Taddy?"

But a perfect yell of laughter from the dormitory was the only answer Tadpole got to his murmured question.

"Ha, ha, ha!"

CHAPTER 2. The End of the Snowball Fight.

"O!" "Sock it to 'em!" "Hurrah!" "Huck it! Study 13!" "Give 'em beans, Study 1!" "Slosh 'em!"

The rival Co's were in the thick of a wild and whirling combat, and the snowballs were flying fast in the Grammar School quad.

The combatants had set to with furious vigour after five minutes' grace had been allowed by mutual consent for the preparation of a stock of snowballs.

"Biff! Squash! Crash!" The freezing missiles flew through the air and broke upon heads and caps and shoulders as the lads raged.

Harry Wootton gave a sudden yell as a well-aimed ball from Carboy quivered on the back of his neck as he bent to make fresh ammunition, soaking his collar, and trickling in a freezing stream down his back.

"Ow! You! M-m-mny hat! I'll pay you for that, Carboy!" Carboy chuckled. "Right you are, my son! I—Ouch! Grouch!"

"Ha, ha, ha!" "Grouch—ouch! Grouch!" "Ha, ha, ha!"

A snowball had flown hand and true from the hands of Jack Wootton, Harry's older brother, exciting Carboy's fall in the mouth as he was still reaching for the hat in his shirt at Harry. Carboy had stopped chuckling at once, and fallen to creaking, a fact which caused the Woottons' great amusement until the stress of the fight turned their attention elsewhere.

Taking advantage of Carboy's temporary discomfiture, Study 13 were now pressing their opponents hard, and Study 1 found themselves being slowly forced back towards the school entrance.

"Huck up, claps!" panted Frank Monk. "Sock it to 'em!" And he made a desperate attempt to chuck snowballs at the Thirds.

Gordon Gay replied with a renewed assault, and a perfect fusillade of snowballs flew, while the combatants creaked and grunted desperately as they lurched the missiles.

"B-b-b-b! How—how dare you!" Mr. Sharpe was by no means an amiable gentleman at the best of times. He had a very nasty temper, and it was not likely to be improved by the forcible application of snowballs to his person as the six juniors very well testified.

Mr. Sharpe fairly spluttered with rage as he ricked himself painfully up from his undignified position and wiped his red and streaming face.

"This—this is outrageous! You—you storming me! You—You—You—You impudent young hoodlums!" "It was quite an accident, sir," ventured Gordon Gay.

"We—w-w-wonderfully sorry!" added Frank Monk diffidently. The accident had been coming enough, now, but the juniors did not laugh. They knew that Mr. Sharpe being the victim, it was likely to be a serious matter for them.

And so Mr. Sharpe seemed to think. "An accident! Sorry!" he rasped, controlling himself, but with his greenish eyes gleaming vindictively. "Don't tell lies!"

The juniors coloured indignantly, and Gordon Gay's eyes flashed. "We—no," he began. But Mr. Sharpe turned on him like a tiger.

"Silence, boy! I say it was no accident! You were behaving like a crew of hoodlums, and on coming out to check your abominable behaviour, I am grossly assaulted! I warn you to offer me no further impertinence."

The juniors were silent. They held their tongues, and did not attempt any explanations. But a bright spot in either of Gordon Gay's cheeks as Mr. Sharpe allowed his bitter tongue to vent his spite.

"There are six of you, I see," continued Mr. Sharpe viciously. "Very well! I have a great mind to report you all to Dr. Monk for a flogging, which is what you undoubtedly deserve. As it is, however, you can each do me five hundred lines, to be shown up on Monday if you do not wish them doubled."

And Mr. Sharpe turned on his heel, and stalked into the School House as a Lanc whistled. "Phew! My hat! Did you ever know such a vindictive beast!"

No wonder, then, that the Thirds had hate him so! "added Carboy. "Five hundred lines each for accidentally snowballing a chap we didn't know was ignorant," exclaimed Jack Wootton indignantly.

"The best—the mean beast!" said Harry Wootton viciously. "He ought to expect to get snowballed if he shoves his nose into a snowball-fight."

"Old Sharpe knew too much to send us to the doctor to be flogged," said Frank Monk, the doctor's son, with a slight grin. "I should have explained things to the governor, and probably have let us off altogether. What do you say, Gay?"

"You're right, Monkey," said Gordon Gay, who had been looking silent as a tomb. "Sharpe knew that five hundred lines would punish us more, anyway. I no knew we'd rather take a flogging any day than come out to school in a lump, and called us liars, too," continued Gordon Gay, with rising colour. "He's a beast, and a cad, and a rotten bully!"

"Hear, hear!" said Frank Monk heartily. "And I only wish someone would tell him so to his face!"

"I've a jolly good mind to do so," said Gordon Gay slowly. "What?" exclaimed the juniors, in chorus. "I mean it."

There was an amazed silence for a moment, and then Frank Monk's face relaxed into a quiet grin. "I'll bet you don't do it, though," he remarked. "I'll wager a study feed that you don't!"

Gordon Gay looked up suddenly. "I'll stake that wager on, Monkey, and if I fail to tell Sharpe to his face that he's a beast, a cad, and a rotten bully, I'll stand you and your Co. a study feed. That's fair, but, it's claps?"

And the schoolboy actor looked round with a quiet smile. "But—!" began Harry Wootton, stammered. "And what's more, he won't punish me for it at all," added Gordon Gay. "It's a wager! But mustn't the word, mind!"

"But you won't—!" stammered Frank Monk. "You'll see!" And with a nod and a mysterious smile, Gordon Gay ran into the House as the bell rang for breakfast.

CHAPTER 3. How Gordon Gay Won His Wager.

"MONK! Monkey! Wake up!" "It was night in the Fourth Form dormitory at the Grammar School, and Frank Monk had only just got to sleep when he felt someone pulling at his arm and shaking him gently.

"Loggo! I'm asleep!" he grunted. "Rats! Wake up!" came the whisper in Gordon Gay's voice; and Frank Monk suddenly became wide awake.



Gordon Gay faced the unpopular master of the Thirds. "You are a bully!" he said in a queer, level voice.

"What's up?" he asked quickly. "Shove a few things on, and come quietly, and watch me," said Gordon Gay reproversly. "Right—!" answered Monk excitedly.

He slipped on trousers and slippers, and followed Gordon Gay out of the dormitory, just as the school clock struck eleven. In the glimmer of the gas-light in the passage he noticed that the schoolboy actor had only his nightgown on, without even the addition of slippers.

"Stay here," whispered Gordon Gay, pausing at the head of the stairs. "But—"

"Shut up, and watch!" was the terse reply. Gordon Gay marched down the stairs, with his eyes fixed in a peculiar kind of stare, while Frank Monk followed him, fascinated.

The white-clothed figure reached the lighted hall, and stumbled somewhat clumsily against a chair, it being dark, making for the direction of Dr. Monk's study.

There was an exclamation from the Head's dining-room. Mr. Sharpe had been dining with Dr. Monk, as Gordon Gay very well knew, and was sitting chatting with him in the dining-room, when a slight noise in the hall attracted the attention of both the masters.

room door, and looked out into the hall. There he stood, petrified at the sight of the doctor's white-clothed figure, who was in the midst of the Thirds, who were saying "G'good' good!"

Then his brows creased in a puzzled frown. "Boys, what's the meaning of this?" he asked sternly. "You are a beast!" he said, in a level, toneless voice.

Mr. Sharpe gasped—and so did the waiting Co. behind him. "W-what?" "You are a cad and a rotten bully!" said Gordon Gay, in the same level voice.

Mr. Sharpe's pallid face flushed, and his eyes glittered furiously. "Why, then, may I ask, Mr. Sharpe?" he began, in a rasping voice, when the white-clothed Dr. Monk interrupted from behind him. "Bless me!" exclaimed the doctor, in a tone of amazement. "Why, the boy's walking in his sleep, Mr. Sharpe!"

Gordon Gay began to move slowly towards the two masters, while Mr. Sharpe's brow grew as black as thunder. "The boy is impertinent, sir!" he rapped out, when Dr. Monk interrupted again.

"The boy is sleeping without out doing so," said Dr. Monk, agitatedly. "Is it possible that you do not see that he is walking in his sleep?" "Sharpe?" Gay-Gay, answered me!"

Gordon Gay walked slowly on, as if he heard nothing. "Mr. Sharpe stared at him suspiciously. "It certainly looks like it," he muttered. "But—"

"It's a doubtful case," said Dr. Monk, testily. "We must be very careful not to wake him, or the shock may be very harmful to him. Gay, come with me, my boy."

The good old doctor touched Gordon Gay gently on the arm, and smiled him the smile which Frank Monk watched fascinated. "What nerve!" he whispered to himself, excitedly. "My hat! What nerve!"

Up the stairs went the junior and the head-master, side by side, in perfect silence, while Mr. Sharpe watched them from below, frowning angrily, and Frank Monk dazed from above.

"Right back to his bed the doctor accompanied Gordon Gay, saying no word. Frank Monk had just time to dash back and jump into bed before he arrived in the dormitory.

Gordon Gay stepped quietly into bed, and drew the sheets round him, laying his head on the pillow with a sigh. "Extraordinary!" he muttered, time and again. "Most extraordinary!"

"Mr. Sharpe," he remarked, when he joined the juniors in the dormitory, "I think that something on that boy's mind. Have you any idea what it can be?"

Mr. Sharpe bit his lip and flushed. "He certainly has five hundred lines to do for me, sir."

"Oh!" exclaimed the doctor. "What for, may I ask, Mr. Sharpe?" "For—for snowballing me, sir," said Mr. Sharpe, looking somewhat confused. "He and some other boys—"

"I think that is what they would call it, undoubtedly, Dr. Monk, but—"

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COUSIN ETHEL'S SCHOOLDAYS

A TALE OF TOM MERRY'S CHUMS

BY MARTIN CLIFFORD

THE FIRST CHAPTERS.
Ethel Cleveland, of St. Freda's, is much troubled at receiving a note which troubles her to meet her cousin, Arthur D'Arcy, at the vicarage in the school grounds. She obeys the summons, however, taking her friend's name, and goes to the vicarage. She is surprised to find Arthur has just returned from the raven, the sneak of St. Freda's, appears. Arthur is hastily dressed behind some bushes, but Ethel suspects something, and fetches Miss Tyrrell.

"There's no one here," says Miss Tyrrell.
"There was just now," says Ethel.
"I can't tell you at once, as I can't know wrong it is for girls to meet boys from outside secretly."
(Read on from here.)

MISS TYRRELL looked hard at Ethel.
"It is certainly very wrong and very bold to act in such a way," she said, "I hope no other girls at St. Freda's do so. It is almost impossible for me to believe that Ethel Cleveland had the guilty of such an act. But I shall certainly question her."
"Pshaw excusa me, Miss Tyrrell!"
"Oh!" ejaculated Miss Tyrrell.
Arthur Augustus D'Arcy had suddenly stepped into view from behind the laurel-bush, silk topper in hand, with his very best bow.

"Have you met Ethel?"
"Yaas, wathah!"
"Then I am afraid you have made it necessary to punish her."
"No," Ethel looked dismayed.
"Bai Jove! I am speakin' up now so that you will know that Ethel was not to blame in the matter, you see."
Miss Tyrrell suppressed a smile.
"Please come with me to Miss Penfold," she exclaimed.
"Yes, wathah with pleasurh!"
And Arthur Augustus D'Arcy walked with Miss Tyrrell up the garden path, and then towards the vicarage. They proceeded directly to Miss Penfold's study, and she found both Ethel and Dolores with the Head.

Ethel's tale-bearing, Ethel had felt that there was but one thing to be done—to explain the whole matter to the Head.
That she had immediately proceeded to do, and Miss Penfold listened to the story with considerable amusement.
The absurd devices of Arthur Augustus for the purpose of providing the girls of St. Freda's with a dormitory feed made the Head laugh in spite of herself. She knew part of the story already, and the rest of it did not make her angry. She could not help laughing. She could see, of course, that every word Ethel told her was the exact truth—in fact, it never occurred to Ethel at all that her word might be doubted, and it seldom does occur to anyone who always tells the truth. It is that unconscious expectation, being believed natural to truthful people which gives the ring of truth to their statements.

Ethel had just finished her explanation when Miss Tyrrell came in with Arthur Augustus D'Arcy.
The swell of St. Jim's bowed gracefully to Miss Penfold over his silk hat.
"Good afternoon, madam!" he said. "I trust I see you vevy well."
The Head of St. Freda's smiled.
"You have been acting in a very foolish way, Master D'Arcy!" she said.
"Oh, madam!"
"You have been holding clandestine communication with a girl of my school."

"Oh, bai Jove, madam! What a howlid word!" he exclaimed.
"That is the correct word!" said Miss Penfold severely.
"Bai Jove!"
"Of course, you did not intend anything of the kind."
"Bai Jove, no!"
"But that is what it amounts to. You were also encouraging Ethel to disregard and disobey the rules of the college."
"Bai Jove!"
"Now, I don't know what may be your way of amusing yourself at St. Jim's," said Miss Penfold, "but I object very strongly to your transferring any of your activities to St. Freda's!"

Arthur Augustus was silent.
He felt that he had put his foot into it, and his only anxiety was that Ethel should not get into trouble over the matter.
"I trust you won't come down heavy on Ethel, Miss Penfold!" he said at last, "I am my own boss, you know, from first to last. Ethel told me I was a silly ass to start with, and that that effect."
"Yes, I am sure it was all your fault," said Miss Penfold. "Now, the absurd things you have sent here ought to be handed to the carrier, to be delivered to you at your school."
"Oh!"
"And if you ever—ever make such an attempt to introduce St. Jim's customs into St. Freda's, I shall be very angry!"
"Ya-a-a-a!"
"And that matter being settled—"

"You are not going to lick Ethel, then, Miss Penfold?"
The Head laughed.
"Ethel will not be punished at all. I am sure that the whole matter has been vevy enough for her already!"
"Bai Jove!"
"The matter being settled," said Miss Penfold, "you will kindly take your departure, and never enter St. Freda's in a surreptitious manner again. If you want to see your cousin on a half-holiday, you may come and ask permission in a frank and open way. I do not like secrecy in young people."
"I—I vevy much disapprove of secrecy myself, Miss Penfold. It was all owing to the vevy peculiar circumstances of the case—"

"I have no more of it to please, Miss Tyrrell, will you kindly assemble the girls to see Master D'Arcy off!"
Miss Tyrrell looked surprised for a moment, and then her eyes twinkled. She understood what the Head meant.
"Certainly!" she said, and she quitted the room.
"Bai Jove, that is very kind and attentive of you, Miss Penfold!"
"Good-bye!" said Miss Penfold.
"Good-bye, madam!" said Arthur Augustus D'Arcy shook hands with Ethel and Dolores.
"Good-bye, dear girls!" he murmured. "I'm avfery vevy sorry about that feud! But 'twad stand you a wippin' one when you come to St. Jim's again, so it will be all right!"

"Good-bye, Arthur!"
The swell of St. Jim's quitted the study. He went down to the school-house door, and found that Miss Tyrrell had carried out instructions.
He waited for Arthur Augustus to pass along to the gates. They were smiling, and their smiles grew broader as the swell of St. Jim's appeared.
"Bai Jove!" murmured Arthur Augustus.
Wide smiles and soft laughter greeted him as he marched along between the double row of girls.
His face was crimson by the time he reached the end.
Corporal Brick let him out at the gates, grinning broadly.

"Bai Jove!" murmured Arthur Augustus, pushing back his hat and mopping the perspiration from his brow as he stood in the road. "Bai Jove, I wonder if that was a little job of Miss Penfold's? It made a fellow feel an awful ass!"
He turned pink as he descended the steps.
Wide smiles and soft laughter greeted him as he marched along between the double row of girls.
His face was crimson by the time he reached the end.
Corporal Brick let him out at the gates, grinning broadly.



Arthur Augustus D'Arcy glanced back over the wall. He could see that the girls were laughing, and his crimson complexion grew more crimson.

He glanced back over the wall. He could see the crowd of girls still, and he could see that they were all laughing now. His crimson complexion grew more crimson.
"Bai Jove, it's simply watten!" he muttered.

And Arthur Augustus D'Arcy stepped out in the direction of St. Jim's. He had seen Cousin Ethel and Dolores among the girls, and

Dolores was laughing. Ethel had tried to get a grave face.
"So there won't be any more food. How do you like the letter, Arthur?" taking Ethel's arm, and walking down the garden with her.
"No," Ethel laughed.
"No," she replied. "All the things will be taken, excepting those Milly had. How do you feel now, Milly?"
"I feel a little—a little strange," she murmured. "Of course, it wasn't the letter."
"Of course not!" said Ethel, laughing.
And she went on, leaving Milly Pratt to her meditations.

Au Revoir.
THERE'S a letter for you, Ethel," Dolly Carey remarked. "How do you like the letter, Arthur one morning, a week or two ago Augustus D'Arcy to St. Freda's." Thank you, Dolly! Cousin Ethel took the letter. A good many of the St. Freda's girls looked interestedly on while she opened it. The girls took a great interest in Arthur Augustus D'Arcy as a matter of course, and they were curious to know if the letter was from St. Freda's.
Ethel started as she saw the writing.
"It is from my mother," she exclaimed.
"Oh!" said Dolly.
Ethel did not note the comical disappointment in Dolly's tone. She held the letter close to a quiet corner with trembling hand. She wanted to be alone to read it. Her heart was beating painfully.
Her mother was in his health, abroad. That was why Ethel had come to St. Freda's, Mrs. Cleveland had not written letters herself for a long time. A letter from her mother's hand was a surprise to Ethel. Did it mean that Mrs. Cleveland was much better?
She opened the letter quickly.
Then her eyes danced as she read it.

It was a brief letter, but full of happy news to Ethel.
"My dearest Ethel,—You will be glad to know how much better I am, and that I am home again. I want my own dear girl to come to me now. I have written to Miss Penfold, and arrangements will be made for you to return home at once. Whether you go back to St. Freda's will depend upon the state of my health, but I shall keep you with me if I can."

Ethel's eyes danced and shone. She ran to the letter, and then ran off to find Dolores. Dolores was in the garden, and her dusky face lightened up at Ethel's approach.
"She caught sight of the letter in the girl's hand."
"Good news!" she said.
(Another instalment of this splendid school story appears next week.)

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