

A Humorous Complete Yarn of Tom Merry & Co., the Chums of St. Jim's.

ROUGH ON RATTY!



By Martin
Clifford.

Gussy's a giddy genius—
for making mistakes!
But for once a mistake
of his has happy results
—except for Mr. Ratchiff
and a bullying prefect!

CHAPTER I.

Whose Half-crown?

"THIS yours?" asked Figgins. George Figgins, of the Fourth Form at St. Jim's, was standing in the quadrangle with his chums, Kerr and Wynn. All three of them had their eyes fixed on a round, silvery object on the ground at their feet. At a casual glance it looked like a half-crown that had dropped from some fellow's pocket. The three New House fellows seemed interested in it; but they did not stoop to pick it up. And Figgins called out to D'Arcy of the Fourth as that elegant youth came sauntering along.

Arthur Augustus D'Arcy stopped and turned his celebrated eyeglass on the silvery disc.

"Bai Jove, it's a half-crown!" he remarked.

"Yours?" asked Figgins.

"I hardly think so, dear boy. I do not remember havin' dropped a half-crown."

"Well, it's not ours," said Kerr. "Tom Merry was along here a few minutes ago! Better pick it up and ask him if it's his."

"Yass, watah!" assented Arthur Augustus.

He stooped to pick up the half-crown. Figgins & Co. watched him with grinning faces.

D'Arcy's slim and elegant fingers touched the silvery disc, but they did not lift it from the ground. It seemed to be secured there.

"Bai Jove, it's stuck to the stone!" ex-

claimed Arthur Augustus in surprise, "and — Yess watah ass! It is not a half-crown at all!"

"Ha, ha, ha!" roared Figgins & Co.

Arthur Augustus straightened, pink with wrath. A closer inspection revealed the fact that the silvery disc was not a half-crown, but a penny, carefully covered with silver foil. And it was glued fast to the old flagstones of the path.

"If you fellows regard a silly trick like this as a joke——" began the swell of the School House wrathfully.

"Ha, ha, ha!"

"Oh, wats!" Arthur Augustus D'Arcy walked away with his noble nose in the air, and Figgins & Co. were left chuckling.

Three juniors came over from the direction of the School House—Blake and Herries and Digby, of the Fourth. They glanced at the grinning New House fellows, and then at the silvery object on the ground.

"Hallo, that's a half-crown!" said Blake. "What are you leaving it lying there for? Belongs to somebody, I suppose."

"Not ours," said Fatty Wynn blandly.

"Well, it had better be picked up!"

Jack Blake stooped to pick up the half-crown. He rose again with a red face and a gleaming eye.

"You blithering idiots!" he said. "You potty, piffing, pie-faced chumps! You burbling bandersnatchers——"

"Ha, ha, ha!" yelled Figgins & Co. Herries and Dig chorled, and Blake glared at them.

"What are you suggesting at?" he de-

manded. "A silly, idiotic trick—just like a burbling New House fathhead—"

"Chuck it!" grinned Figgins. "Here comes Tom Merry—give him a chance."

"Oh, all right!"

Tom Merry and Manners and Lowther, of the Shell, came along the path. Having been taken in himself, Blake was not averse from seeing other fellows fall into the same trap. His wrath vanished all of a sudden, and he grinned.

"Anything on?" asked Tom Merry, as he came up to the group. "Hallo, that's a half-crown there! Who's dropped it?"

"Nobody here," said Blake. "Is it yours?"

"I don't think so. I had one, but—" Tom ran his hands through his pockets. "No—mine's here! Better not leave it there, though—better take it to our Housemaster, and the owner can claim it."

"Oh, you take it!" said Blake.

Tom Merry stooped to pick up the half-crown. Like D'Arcy and Blake before him, he failed to detach it from the ground, and rose with a red face.

"You burbling cuckoo!" he said. "Is that what you call a joke? You fooling, frajvous fathhead—"

"Ha, ha, ha!"

pected him of backing horses on the strict q.t.

"Thanks for telling me," said Sefton, quite genially.

"You—you—you're sure you dropped it?" gasped Tom Merry.

"Oh, yes, quite! I came up this path about a quarter of an hour ago, and I remember hearing a clink, but I didn't notice it at the time specially."

"Oh, crikey!"

"Bai Jovel!" murmured Arthur Augustus D'Arcy, who had joined the little group, and he turned his eyeglasses on Sefton in wonder. "I weally fail to see how Sefton can have heard that half-crown clink, when it is not a half-crown at all, and it is stuck to the gground with glue."

Sefton was stooping to pick up the half-crown.

The juniors watched him as if fascinated. Sefton grabbed at the coin. Then he rose to his feet, his face crimson with rage.

"It—it—it's a trick!" he stammered. "Who—who did this?"

"And he heard it clink when it dropped!" remarked Monty Lowther, to space. "He heard it clink, you know!"

"Ha, ha, ha!" yelled the juniors. They could not help it.

DON'T FORGET—

that all your "Nelson Lee" favourites will appear in next week's "GEM," with which this paper will in future be amalgamated. So next Wednesday, instead of "Nelson Lee"

—ASK FOR "THE GEM"!

"I've a jolly good mind—" began Tom Merry warmly.

"Ha, ha, ha!"

"Order!" murmured Kerr. "Here comes our jolly old prefect."

Sefton of the Sixth, a New House prefect, came down the path. Sefton was not looking in a good temper. The bully of the New House, as a matter of fact, was not often in a good temper. A recent discovery of gum in his best topper had not improved his naturally bad temper. Some junior of the New House, whom Sefton had "whopped" not wisely but too well, had evidently taken that peculiar method of getting his own back. Sefton was savagely wondering which young sweep it was, when he spotted the group on the path and came over to them.

"Now, then," he began, in his most bullying tone. "What—" He broke off as the glimmer of silver met his eyes.

"Lost a half-crown, Sefton?" asked Monty Lowther.

"As a matter of fact, I have," said Sefton. "I was wondering where I'd dropped it."

"Oh!" gasped the juniors, all together.

Sefton of the Sixth was a little of a black sheep. Fellows in his House more than sus-

pected his eyes glinted.

"Which of you stuck that coin there?" he demanded. He stamped with his heel on the dummy half-crown. "Now, then, I want to know which of you it was, and sharp."

"Weally, Sefton—"

"You, D'Arcy! I shall take you to your Housemaster—"

"It wasn't D'Arcy," said Figgins sturdily; "it was me! No harm in a little jape, Sefton!"

"You, was it?" Sefton slipped the ashplant down into his hand. "You young rascal!" Figgins, being a New House fellow, could be whopped by a New House prefect. "Bend over!"

"Look here, Sefton—" protested Figgins.

"Bend over!" yapped the bully of the Sixth.

Figgins' eyes flashed.

"It's not my fault that you told a rotten lie, and made out that it was your half-crown!" he blurted out. "And I—oh, my hat! Yaroooh!"

Sefton's grasp was on his collar. With a swing of his arm the bully of the Sixth twisted Figgins over, and the ashplant rose and fell.

Whack! Whack! Whack! Whack! Whack! Whack! It was "six"—and as tough a six as Figgins had ever experienced. The cane fairly rang on him.

Tom Merry & Co. looked on in silence, with grim and angry faces. Sexton, as a Sixth-Form prefect, had the power of the asphalt; and Figgins, certainly, was bound to bend over when ordered to do so by a prefect of his House. But even Mr. Ratcliff, the New House master, a very severe gentleman, would hardly have approved of the severity of that six.

"That's a tip for you, you young rascal!" said the bully of the Sixth, breathing hard when he had finished.

He tucked his asphalt under his arm again and walked away. Figgins stood with a white and furious face. He made a step after the Sixth-Form man, with his fists clenched. Kerr and Fatty Wynn hastily grabbed him by the arm. Punching a prefect—however satisfactory a proceeding in itself—meant the "sack," and that was not good enough. Figgy's chums, in silence, led him away.

"Bai Jove!" said Arthur Augustus, with a deep breath. "That man Sexton is a fearful wotah! If I was in the Sixth I would give him a fearful thrashing. Poor old Figgy!"

Figgy's little joke with the half-crown had had painful consequences. And those consequences were destined to lead to others.

CHAPTER 2.

The Hear and the Man!

"IT'S the sack!" said Kerr, with tearful earnestness.

"It's too jolly risky, Figgy!" said Fatty Wynn.

"I don't care!"

"Now, look here, Figgy——" said both George Figgins' chums together.

"Chuck it!" interrupted Figgins.

Obviously, Figgins of the Fourth was not to be argued with. Figgins, generally the best-tempered fellow in the New House at St. Jim's, was like a bear with a sore head. Like the prophet of old, he was angry, and considered that he did well to be angry.

It was some hours since he had had Sexton's six, but he was still feeling the effects. That was not the worst of it, however. Figgins was tough, and he could take a whopping. But that whopping, besides being unusually severe, had been unjust and vindictive. It was firmly fixed in Figgy's mind that he was going to make Sexton sit up for that whopping; and his comrades, anxious about the outcome, argued in vain.

In their study in the New House, Kerr and Wynn found Figgins occupied in a weird occupation. He had a large garden squirt there, apparently borrowed from Taggles' shed. He had filled a basin with the contents of innumerable bottles of ink. Now he was filling the big squirt from the basin

with ink. These strange proceedings were intended for the ultimate benefit of Sexton of the Sixth Form.

In principle, of course, Kerr and Wynn had no objection to drenching the bully of the Sixth with ink. Willingly they would have subscribed all their pocket-money to purchase ink for that excellent purpose. But it wouldn't do! They knew that it wouldn't do, as Figgy, if he had been cooler, would have known. Prefects of the Sixth Form were not to be inked with impunity. It was too awfully risky.

"If it was only six, all right!" said Kerr. "But it's the sack for going for a prefect, Figgy! The sack, fathead, see?"

"Shut up!" said Figgins.

"Bai Jove!" Arthur Augustus D'Arcy, coming along the passage towards Figgins' study, heard those remarks. "Bai Jove! That sounds as if they're wowing."

Arthur Augustus tapped on the door and opened it. The swell of St. Jim's had walked across from the School House, after tea, to give Figgins a kindly look-in and inquire how he felt. Judging by the remarks heard through the door, Figgins was not feeling his usual bonny self!

"Figgy, dear boy——" began Arthur Augustus, as he looked in.

"Buzz off, fathead!"

"I trust," said Arthur Augustus, with dignity, "that you are not allowin' a whoppin' to deteriorate your manners, Figgy. I have dropped in to ask you how you are, old chap."

Figgy's frown faded, and he grinned. "Oh, all right! Trust in and shut the door! Don't tell everybody at St. Jim's that you saw this squirt here."

Arthur Augustus closed the door, adjusted his eyeglass in his noble eye, and gazed at George Figgins very seriously. It was not difficult for Gussy to guess why Figgins was loading that squirt with ink.

"Bai Jove! If you are goin' for that cad Sexton, Figgy——"

"Just that!"

"It's twifghtfully wisky, old fellow. He's a prefect, you know——"

"I've had all that from Kerr and Wynn!" Figgins pointed out. "I don't want it all over again from a School House ass!"

"Gussy's talking sense, for once," said Kerr. "Look here, Figgy——"

"I tell you it's all right!" asserted Figgins. "I tell you I've got it all cut and dried. That cur Sexton is going out this evening—you know he's Ratty's favourite, and he's got an exam. Ratty's given him leave to go to the literary lectures at Wayland. I heard them. He's got to be back at half-past ten."

"Bai Jove," said D'Arcy in surprise, "I should hardly have thought that Sexton was the kind of chap to worry about a literary lecture."

Smart!—from Figgins. "That's the stuff he gives Ratty!" he grunted. "I fancy he's really going puthaunting—that's his style. But he couldn't

tell Ratcliff that he's going to the Green Man, could he?"

"Oh, bai Jove!"

"Anyhow, he will come in at half-past ten, or thereabouts," said Figgins. "Prefects have a key to masters' gate. Sefton will let himself in. It will be dark—and under the trees from that gate, at night, it's as black as pitch. Well, I shall be there—with this jolly old squirt! Sefton is going to get it, slap-hang! That's the programme! See!"

"Bai Jove! It's fearfully wicky."

"Too jolly risky!" said Kerr. "I tell you, Figgins, Sefton will jump to it at once. He will know it was you."

"He couldn't prove it, and that's good enough."

"Fathrad!" howled Kerr. "He will rush in to Ratty, and they'll come up to the dorm on the spot, and you'll be found out."

"I shall get back first."

"If they find a single stain of ink on you—"

"They won't!"

"That squirt leaks at the nozzle."

"Let it leak!"

Figgins, evidently, was not to be reasoned with. Having made up his mind, he was not to be moved from his purpose. Kerr and Wynn looked worried. Arthur Augustus looked deeply concerned. It was really rotten to see a fellow like Figgins rushing to his fate in this way. It was clear to everybody but Figgins that he was absolutely certain to be spotted. And it was not an affair of a whopping; it would be called an affair on a Sixth-Form prefect, with the serious offence of breaking bounds after lights-out added! Figgins was just asking to be expelled from St. Jim's.

Headless of the dismay in three troubled faces, Figgins finished filling the big squirt and wrapped it in an old newspaper.

"I'm going to shove that out of sight, near the gate," he said. "It will be ready for me to pick up when wanted. Under that seat near masters' gate. You fellows needn't worry! It will be all right."

"You can't do it, Figgy," said Kerr.

"We jolly well won't let you!" exclaimed Fatty Wynn.

"Pewwaps I can make a suggestion," said Arthur Augustus thoughtfully.

"Champ?"

"Weally, Figgins, that is not a polite remark!" said the swell of St. Jim's mildly. "If you are weolved on this weckless enterprize—"

"It's settled!" growled Figgins.

"Then pway allow me to make a suggestion," said Arthur Augustus. "If a fellow in this House plays that trick on Sefton, he is absolutely certain to be spotted. But a School House man could get away with it all wight."

Figgins & Co. stared at Arthur Augustus.

"You see, they will wash aafh you, Figgy, and find you in bed in your dorm, and you will be able to state, with perfect truth, that you haven't been out of the House," said

Arthur Augustus astutely. "You will be wight as wain! A School House man will have plenty of time to get back to his House, see? Nobody could spot him."

"You blithering ass," said Figgins. "That's true enough—but do you think that any School House man will take the risk of inking a prefect to please me?"

"Yass, wathah!"

"Who, then, fathrad!"

"Little me!" said Arthur Augustus modestly.

CHAPTER 3.

Smack!

MR. RATCLIFF, Housemaster of the New House, frowned.

He was standing by the door of his House, looking out into the sunset in the quadrangle.

Arthur Augustus D'Arcy had just left that House, "capping" the Housemaster respectfully as he passed him.

There had been rather an argument in Figgins' study; Figgy being unwilling to take advantage of Gussy's generous and rather reckless offer.

But Kerr and Wynn had backed up Gussy, and Figgy had given in.

Obviously, what was certain disaster for a New House fellow, in the circumstances, was safe enough for a School House man—and so long as Sefton got the ink, what did it matter by whose hand the goods were delivered!

Figgins, at long last, admitted that was so, much to the relief of his worried chums. And so it was settled! Arthur Augustus walked out of the New House satisfied in his noble mind. The whole thing was fixed up. Figgy would remain in his dormitory—guiltless, blameless—able, like the Village Blacksmith, to look the whole world in the face! D'Arcy, soon after tea, would get quietly out of his House, hook the inky squirt from its hiding-place, and wait on the dark path under the trees for Sefton—with startling and inky results for that unpleasant person.

Arthur Augustus shook his head. This delicate matter with his usual tact and judgment, and he walked away to his House with a cheery and satisfied smile on his noble face.

On his way he came on Tom Merry & Co., who hailed him.

"Come on, Gussy—we're going to chip that cad Sefton!"

Arthur Augustus shook his head.

"At pweasant, deah boy, I would wathah keep cleah of that wotah," he answered, and he walked on.

Sefton of the Sixth was lounging in the quad. Tom Merry and Manners and Lowther strolled near him—near enough for him to hear their remarks.

"Anybody seen a half-crown?" asked Tom.

"I dropped one on this path!" said Manners.

"I remember hearing it clink!" said Monty Lowther.

Sefton glanced round. The chums of the Shell were not looking at him, but the New House senior was well aware that those remarks were intended for his ears.

"Sure you heard it clink?" asked Tom Merry.

"Oh, positive!" said Lowther gravely. "It went clink, clink!—just like that half-crown that Sefton heard clink!"

Smack!

A New House prefect had no right whatever—not the shadow of a right—to smack the head of a School House man. Sefton of the Sixth forgot that, or did not choose to remember it. He smacked Lowther's head.

There was a yell from Monty.

"You cheeky cad!" he roared.

It was then that Mr. Ratcliff, standing in the doorway of his House, had his attention drawn to the scene. He had been looking in another direction, but Monty's indignant roar reached his ears and made him glance round. He frowned portentously. He had not seen Sefton smack the School House junior's head. All he knew was that School House boys, on the New House side of the quad, were slanging one of his prefects. He frowned.

"You cheeky rotter!" howled Tom Merry.

"Bump him!" shouted Manners. "Yah! New House cad!"

Mr. Ratcliff's frown became a thundercloud. He strode out of the House, his brow black as midnight, and rustled on the scene.

"Merry! Manners! Lowther!" he barked. "How dare you! How dare you address a Sixth-Form prefect—a prefect of my House—in such terms! I repeat, how dare you!"

"Did you see—" began Tom.

"I heard you!" thundered Mr. Ratcliff. "If you were boys of my House I should cane you with the utmost severity. As it is, I shall take you to your own Housemaster! Follow me!"

"But, sir—" began Lowther.

"Silence!" roared Mr. Ratcliff. "I will not allow you to bandy words with me, Lowther! I shall report your insolence to Mr. Railton at once—and shall insist upon a severe punishment. Follow me this instant."

And Mr. Ratcliff whisked away towards the School House, and Tom Merry & Co., after exchanging a glance, followed him. Sefton of the Sixth, perhaps a little uneasy as to the consequences of that hasty smack, was left staring. It was just like "Ratty" to pounce on the School House fellows and report them for punishment without inquiry. Ratty dearly loved to carry a complaint to the School House master. And he had rather a special down on the cheery chums of the Shell.

He rustled into the School House—a good many fellows there staring at his frowning

face. The three juniors followed him to Mr. Railton's study. The New House master rapped sharply on the door and whisked in.

"Mr. Railton—"

The School House master rose to his feet.

"Well, Mr. Ratcliff?" he asked.

"I have to report these boys, sir, for unexampled insolence to a prefect of my House!" roared Mr. Ratcliff. "I demand, sir, that they shall be punished with the utmost severity. Such insolence—"

"Kindly tell me what the boys have done, sir!" said Mr. Railton, with a touch of impatience.

"In the open quad, sir, in my hearing, they have addressed—indeed, shouted—opprobrious epithets at a prefect of my House, sir!" roared Mr. Ratcliff. "They, sir, may tell you what expression they used. I, sir, do not care to repeat them."

"Indeed! Merry, Manners, Lowther, repeat at once the expressions you used to a New House prefect!" said Mr. Railton sternly.

"I called Sefton a cheeky cad, sir!" said Lowther demurely.

"I called him a cheeky rotter, sir!" said Tom Merry.

"I called him a New House cad, sir!" said Manners.

"You hear them?" gasped Mr. Ratcliff.

"You hear—"

"I hear!" said Mr. Railton, reaching for his cane, "and I shall—"

"Are New House prefects allowed to smack our heads, sir?" asked Lowther.

"Eh? What? Certainly not! Do you mean—"

"Sefton smacked Lowther's head, sir!" said Tom Merry. "That's why we told him what we thought of him."

Mr. Railton laid down the cane.

"You did not mention that circumstance, Mr. Ratcliff!" he said dryly.

"I—I did not see. I—I do not believe—" stammered the New House master, quite taken aback.

"Look at my ear, sir!" said Lowther. Mr. Railton glanced at an ear that was burning red. His face became grim.

"Mr. Ratcliff, if you care to send for Sefton, and let me inquire—"

"I—I—I— It is—is not necessary!" stammered Mr. Ratcliff. "I did not see—I was certainly unaware—I—I—"

"You may go, my boys," said Mr. Railton; and Tom Merry & Co. left the study, and did not grin till they were in the passage.

"Now, Mr. Ratcliff," said the School House master quietly, "it appears that a prefect of your House has laid hands on a School House boy! I cannot allow this, sir! Unless you assure me, at once, that Sefton will be adequately dealt with by you, I shall place the matter before the headmaster."

Mr. Ratcliff gasped.

He was often a hasty man, but never had he repented of his haste so sincerely as at



Seton grabbed at the coin stuck to the ground. Then he rose to his feet, crimson with rage. "It—it's a trick!" he stammered. "Who did this?" "Ha, ha, ha!" yelled the junkies. They could not help it.

this moment! His face was crimson with mortification.

"I—I—I— Certainly," he stammered. "I—I—I will speak to Seton—most severely. I—I was unaware—I deeply regret—I—I—"

Mr. Ratcliff escaped from the study. He whisked back to the New House with an expression that made New House fellows, when they spotted him, give him a wide berth. Seton of the Sixth, however, was unable to give him an offing; Seton was called into his study. Anyone who had heard Mr. Ratcliff talking to Seton just then would never have guessed that the bully of the Sixth was his favourite. Mr. Ratcliff had been made to look a fool; he had had to back down; he had had to apologise. He took it all out of Seton.

For ten minutes or more Mr. Ratcliff scolded that hapless prefect with his acid tongue; and by the time the bully of the Sixth got away, he was in a state of perspiration. He went out, gasping, into the quad—where he passed Tom Merry and Manners and Lowther and Blake and Herries and Digby—all of whom immediately began to talk to one another about a half-crown! But Seton did not think of smacking any more heads! He turned a deaf ear and stalked away.

CHAPTER 4.

D'Arcy Does It!

ARTHUR AUGUSTUS D'ARCY sat up in bed in the Fourth Form dormitory in the School House. He rubbed his eyes and blinked round in the shadows.

Save for the steady breathing of the sleepers round him, all was still and silent.

Ten o'clock had chimed out! Only Arthur Augustus was awake in the dormitory.

Softly D'Arcy stepped out of bed. Quietly he dressed himself in the dark. On tiptoe he crossed to the door.

He opened the dormitory door without a sound, crept down the passage, and down a back staircase, where there was a window.

Had Arthur Augustus been a crackman he could not have opened that window more carefully and cautiously.

He climbed out, leaving the window ajar for his return, and dropped to the ground. Then he scudded away from the House.

There were a good many lighted windows; the masters were not in bed, and many of the Sixth were still up. With the caution of an Indian on the war-trail the swell of St. Jim's disappeared into the shadows.

He arrived, a little breathless, under the shadowy old elms near masters' gate.

"Wight as wain!" murmured Arthur Augustus.

He was in plenty of time. Sefton was not due till ten-thirty, and might be a few minutes late. It was hardly a quarter past yet.

Arthur Augustus chuckled softly. He groped to the seat under the elms, and groped under it. The squirt, loaded with ink, was there. Arthur Augustus picked it up.

All was ready now.

It was as black as a hat on the path from the gate, under the shady branches. All he had to do was to wait for Sefton's footsteps. As soon as the bully of the Sixth loomed up in the dark, he was going to let fly—and a quart of mixed inks would greet Sefton, and doubtless cause him great surprise. And the thought of Sefton, inky and enraged, rushing to the New House, to discover that Figgins had not been out of his dormitory, made Gussy chuckle.

But he chuckled silently. Quiet and deserted as the quadrangle seemed, it was quite possible that some "beak" was out of the House. He was aware that it was Mr. Rattcliff's custom to take a walk in the quadrangle before going to bed. And Ratty's eyes and ears were very keen. To be caught by Ratty meant a report to his Housemaster for being out of House bounds at night, which, in turn, meant a flogging. Which would have been a rather disastrous end to Gussy's adventure.

He waited.

Under the dark elms he was quite invisible if anyone had been taking a walk abroad. So long as he was silent, he was safe, even if half the beaks at St. Jim's had been strolling in the quad.

He waited. The minutes seemed long. It was too dark to see the time by his wrist-watch, and Gussy was tempted to strike a match to glance at it. But he resisted that temptation, and waited.

He was not feeling nervous, but his heart was beating rather fast. Waiting in the dark, like this, was a little disconcerting. He wished that Sefton would barge in and get it over.

Minute, however, followed minute. Sefton was surely late! If, as Figgins suspected, he had gone to see his disreputable friends at the Green Man, no doubt he found it hard to tear himself away from such congenial society. Anyhow, he was late. Minute followed long minute!

"Bai Jove!" murmured Arthur Augustus, rubbing his droozy eyes. "Is the feightful wottah nevah comin'?' Just like that bwute, to keep a fellow waitin' when a fellow's feightfully sleepy."

Arthur Augustus suppressed a yawn. The minutes seemed endless. He wondered what time it was.

There was no sound at the gate. And Arthur Augustus yielded to the temptation,

at last, to scratch a match and look at his watch.

He scratched the match, and the flame flickered up under the dark shadows of the elm branches.

"Bai Jove! Neahly a quartah to eleven!" murmured Arthur Augustus. "The feightful bwute can't be much longah."

The match went out.

Once more Arthur Augustus waited. He leaned back against an elm while he waited and almost nodded off. Gussy was keeping unusually late hours, and there was no doubt that he was sleepy.

But he started into wide wakefulness and watchfulness at the sound of a footstep on the gravel.

His heart thumped.

He had not heard the gate open; he realized that he must have nodded for a moment. But footsteps stirred the gravel in the darkness quite close to him, and a dark, shadowy form loomed up vaguely.

Up came the squirt.

The shadowy figure was not four or five feet from Gussy. Dark as it was, aim was easy.

Whooooooh! Slooooooh! Splash! Squish!

To discharge the squirt and back behind the elm under which he stood hardly occupied a moment.

"Urrrrrrgh!" came a startled, spluttering gasp. "Warrrrgh! Ooooooogh! Ooooooh! Gooooogh!"

Arthur Augustus suppressed a chuckle. He flew.

"Ooooooooh! Gug-gug-gug-gug! Ug! Wug! Wooooogh!" Horrid sounds followed him in the darkness as he fled.

Evidently the hapless victim had got it, fair and square! Smothered, drenched, choked, suffocated with a quart of mixed inks, the wretched victim staggered and spluttered and spluttered.

"Urrrrrrgh! Grourrrrgh!"

Arthur Augustus fled through the night. He dropped the squirt under the elms as he went; it was Taggles' squirt, and Taggles was welcome to find it in the morning now that it was done with. Breathless, the swell of St. Jim's fled round the House to the back window he had left open.

Arthur Augustus bolted in at the window, fastened it after him, and ran for his dormitory. He tore off his clothes and plunged headlong into bed. There was a sleepy voice—that of Jack Blake:

"Who's that? Anybody up?"

"It's all wight, deah boy! Wight as wain!" chuckled Arthur Augustus.

Blake sat up.

"You been out, you frabjous ass?"

"Fowwaps I had bettah not tell you that I have been out, deah boy! The less said about the mattah, the better.

"Oh, my hah!" said Blake.

And he went to sleep again; and Arthur Augustus, happy and satisfied with his success, followed his example.

Next Wednesday's Super "Gem" Programme!

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CHAPTER 5.

Mistakes in the Dark!

MR. RATCLIFF wondered whether it was some awful nightmare.

It seemed like one!

But it was no nightmare—it was awful, dreadful reality! It was real ink—indubitably real ink—that smothered him from head to foot, and filled his eyes and nose and his ears and ran down his neck!

He gurgled and spluttered, and puffed and blew!

He hardly knew what had happened for some awful moments.

Taking his nightly stroll in the quad, he had seen a light under the elm branches, on the path by masters' gate, and, naturally, he had walked there to see what it was.

Then this awful thing had happened.

"Grooogh!" spluttered Mr. Ratcliff, gurgling at ink. "Oooogh! Scoundrel! Who-groogh! What-oooogh! Whooooogh!"

His wild spluttering and gurgling drowned the sound of an opening gate. Sefton of the Sixth came in, blissfully ignorant of what awaited him on the shadowy path under the elms.

"Urrrrrgh!" gurgled Mr. Ratcliff. "Wurrgh! I am smothered—drenched—it is ink—ink—an outrage! Gurrrrrgh!"

Who had done this? It was clear—to Mr. Ratcliff—that some scoundrel—some wretch—some young villain—had been lurking there, had known that he was walking in the quad—had struck a match to attract his attention, and bring him there to investigate—and then drenched him with ink from a garden squirt! All this was clear—to Mr. Ratcliff!

"Urrrrrgh!" Mr. Ratcliff spat out ink. "Wurrgh! Drenched—you young moral-scoundrel—villain—where are you? Where—what——" He made a wild dash along the

path in the hope of catching the young villain.

The young villain was far away by that time, but Mr. Ratcliff did not fail to make a catch.

"Who—what——" gasped Sefton. "Here—what—leggo! What the thump—I say—Oh, cricky!"

Clutching hands grasped him.

"Villain!" roared Mr. Ratcliff. "Grooogh! Scoundrel! Ooooooh! Dastard! Gurrgrgh! You shall be—gurrgh—expelled—urrgh! You shall be—ooogh—flogged—grooogh—and expelled—woooogh—hooh!"

"I—I—leggo!" shrieked Sefton wildly. "I—yaroooooh!"

Smack! Smack! Thump! Bang!

Sefton yelled and struggled and roared. Mr. Ratcliff was letting himself go. He had—at least, he believed that he had—captured the perpetrator of this outrage before he had been able to get away. And he smote right and left.

"Stop!" shrieked Sefton. "Is that Mr. Ratcliff? What—why—whooop!"

"Sefton!" roared Mr. Ratcliff, recognising the prefect's voice. "You! Upon my word! Take that—and that—and that! This dastardly revenge—grooogh—because I had occasion to speak to you with some—grooogh—severity—oooogh! You shall be expelled—oooogh! Take that—and that—and that!"

"Leggo!" shrieked Sefton. "I didn't—I wasn't—I don't know—yaroooh! Wharrer you pitching into me for? Whooop! Oh, great Christopher Columbus! The man's mad! Help!"

Somehow Sefton tore himself away. Hardly knowing whether he was on his head or his heels, he fled.

"Stop!" roared Mr. Ratcliff. "I order you to stop! I have not finished yet. Stop, I say!"

Sefton did not stop. He fled for his life. And Mr. Ratcliff, panting, gasping and spluttering, followed him to the New House, with the deadly determination of seeing him socked in the morning.

"Gussy!" yelled Figgins.

Figgins of the Fourth Store across the quaid after breakfast the next morning. Figgins' face was bright and beaming.

"Good old Gussy!" cheered Figgins.

"What the thump—" exclaimed Tom Merry.

"Ain't he a genius?" gasped Figgins.

"Ain't he a giddy genius? Ain't he the last word? Ha, ha, ha!"

Figgins almost wept.

"Bai Jove! Bettah keep it dark, Figgyn, dear boy," said Arthur Augustus. "These fellows are to be trusted, of course; still, it is woolly wisah not to tell everybody that I inked Sefton last night."

"Ha, ha, ha!" yelled Figgins. "You inked Ratty!"

"Wha-a-at?"

"Ratty must have nosed in—he's always nosing in. Ha, ha, ha! Ratty got the ink!"

"Bai Jove!"

"And he thought Sefton had done it!"

"Gwan't Scott!"

"And gave him the thrashing of his life!"

"Oh, crumbs!"

"And the whole House is churling over

it!" roared Figgins. "Ha, ha, ha! Two birds with one stone! Ha, ha, ha! Ink for Ratty, and a thrashing for Sefton! Ha, ha, ha!"

"Ha, ha, ha!" yelled Tom Merry & Co.

"Bai Jove! It was washah, wuff on Watty."

"Ha, ha, ha!"

Tom Merry wiped his eyes.

"This has got to be kept dark," he said, "awfully, fearfully dark! Oh, Gussy!"

"Ha, ha, ha!"

Figgins & Co. had smiling faces that day. So had Tom Merry & Co. So had a good many other fellows. Mr. Ratcliff was convinced, at long last, that Sefton was not the guilty party, and gave up the idea of requesting the Head to sack him. But he could not undo the terrific thrashing he had given Sefton under that misapprehension. Sefton ached for days and days and days. Inquiry into that mysterious outrage only proved that Figgins had had nothing to do with it. Who had done it remained a mystery—so far as Mr. Ratcliff and Sefton of the Sixth were concerned. In their wildest surmises they never thought of Arthur Augustus D'Arcy—which was rather fortunate for that happy youth.

THE END.

(Caring, the circus coming! He "brings the house down" in "Gussy's Star Turn!" Don't miss this grand yarn of the changes of St. Jim's. It appears in next week's bumper issue of the "GEM.")

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