

Scott's Sister

A PUBLIC SCHOOL STORY

By
P. C. Wodehouse



What would you do if your chum's sister asked you not to try and get her brother "out" in your most important cricket match? That is what Charteris was up against!

Illustrations by Saville Lumley.

THE FIRST CHAPTER.

A Cricket Enthusiast.

OH, woman, woman! As somebody once said. I forget who.

Woman, always noted for serpentine snakiness, is perhaps more snakily serpentine at the age when her hair is wavering on the point of going up and her skirts hesitating on the brink of going down than at any other moment in her career. It is then most of all that she will bear watching. Take, for example, Scott's sister. Which brings me to my story.

Charteris first made the acquaintance of Scott's sister when Scott asked him home to spend the last week of the Easter holidays with him. They were in different houses at Locksley, Scott being a member of the School House, while Charteris was in Merevale's; but as they were both in the first eleven they saw a good deal of one another. In addition, Charteris frequently put in an evening in the winter and Easter terms at those teas which Scott gave in his study, where the guests did all the work and the host the greater part of the feeding. So that it came as no surprise when he received the invitation.

He hesitated about accepting it. He was

a wary youth, and knew that scores of school friendships have died an untimely death owing to one of the pair spending part of the holidays at the other's home. Something nearly always happens to disturb the harmony. Most people are different in the home circle, and the alteration is generally for the worse. However, things being a little dull at home with illness in the house, and Scott's letter mentioning that there was a big lawn with a cricket net, where they could get into form for next term, he decided to risk it.

The shades of night were beginning to fall when the train brought Charteris to his destination.

Looking up and down the platform he could see no signs of his host. Former instances of his casualness, for which quality Scott was notorious, floated across his mind. It would be just like him to forget that his guest was to arrive that day.

The platform gradually emptied of the few passengers who had alighted. He walked out of the station, hoping to find a cab which would convey him to Scott's house.

"I say!" said a voice, as he paused outside and looked round about him.

Through the gathering dusk he could see the dim outline of a dog-cart.

"Hallo!" he said.

"Are you Charteris?"

"Somebody's been telling you," said he in an aggrieved voice.

His spirits had risen with a bound at the prospect of getting to his destination at last.

"Jump in, then. I thought you couldn't have come. I was just going to drive off."

"Don't talk of it," said Charteris.

"Billy couldn't come to meet you. He had to get the net down. You mustn't leave it up all night. The gardener's boy is a perfect idiot, and always gets it tangled up. So he sent me. Have this rug. Is the box all right? Then gee up, Peter. Good night, Mr. Brown."

"Good night, miss," said the station-master affably.

Charteris examined her out of the corner of his eyes. As far as he could see through the darkness she was pretty. Her hair was in the transition stage between mane and bun. It hung over her shoulders, but it was tied round with a ribbon. He had got thus far with his inspection when she broke the silence.

"I hope you'll like our wicket," she said.

"It's slow, as there's a good deal of moss on the lawn, but it plays pretty true. Billy smashed a bedroom window yesterday."

"He would!" said Charteris.

The School House man was the biggest hitter at Lockstey.

"What do you think of Billy as a bat?" asked the lad, turning to face him.

"He can hit," said Charteris.

"But his defence isn't any good at all, is it? And he's nervous before he gets started; and a man who goes in for a forcing game oughtn't to be that, ought he?"

"I didn't know he was nervous. He's not got that reputation at school. I should have thought that if there was one chap who went in without caring a bit about the bowling, it was Scott."

It surprised him in a vague sort of way that a girl should have such a firm and sensible grasp on the important problems of life. He had taken his sister to Lord's one summer to watch the Gentlemen v. Players match, and she had asked him if the light screens were to keep the wind off

the players. He had not felt really well since.

"Oh, no," said the girl. "He's as jumpy as a cat. He's often told me that it all depends on the first ball. If he can hit that he's all right. If he doesn't he's nervous till he gets out or slogs a four. You remember his seventy-one against M.C.C. last year. He managed to get Lee round past mid-on for three the first ball. After that he was as right as anything. Against Haileybury, too, when he made fifty-four. He didn't see his first ball at all. He simply slogged blindly, and got it by a fluke, and sent it clean into the pavilion."

"Did you see those games?" inquired Charteris, amazed.

"No. Oh, how I wish I had! But I made Billy promise faithfully when he goes back to school that he'll write me a full account of every match. And he does it, too, though those are about the only letters he does write. He hates writing letters. But he's awfully good about mine. I love cricket. Billy says I'm not half a bad bat. Here we are."

The dog-cart swung into a long drive, at the end of which a few lighted windows broke the blackness. A dog barked inside the house as they drove up, and rushed out as the door opened, and Scott's drawl made itself heard.

"That you, Charteris?"

"It looks like me, doesn't it?" said Charteris, jumping down.

"How many times has Molly spilt you on the way here?" inquired Scott.

"I drove jolly well," protested his sister with indignation. "Didn't I?"

"Ripping!" said Charteris.

"It's very decent of you to hush it up," said Scott. "Come along in and brush some of the mud off!"

THE SECOND CHAPTER

An Early Morning Practice.

Charteris woke abruptly on the following morning at twenty-three minutes and eight seconds past seven. What woke him was a cricket ball. It hummed through the open window, crashed against the opposite wall—an inch lower and an engraving of "The



As Scott paused outside the railway station, he saw through the gathering dusk the dim outline of a dogcart.

Fallowfield Hunt" would have needed extensive alterations and repairs—and, after circling round the room, came to a standstill under the chest of drawers. Charteris hopped out of bed and retrieved it.

"I say," said a penetrating voice from the regions of the drive.

Charteris put on a blazer and looked out. Scott's sister was standing below. She held a bat in her hand. In the offing lurked a shirt-sleeved youth whom he took to be the gardener's boy. He was grinning sheepishly. Across the lawn stood the net and wickets.

"Hallo, are you awake?" inquired Molly.

"More or less," said Charteris.

"Did you see a ball come in just now?"

"I thought I noticed something of the sort. Is this it?"

She dropped the bat, and caught the descending ball neatly. Charteris looked on with approval.

"I'm sorry if I disturbed you," said Miss Scott.

"Not at all," said Charteris.

"Jolly good way of calling people

in the morning. You ought to take out a patent. Did you hit it?"

"Yes."

"Rather a pull," said Charteris judicially.

"I know—I can't help pulling. It runs in the family. Billy will do it, too. Are you coming out?"

"Ten minutes," said Charteris. "Shall I do some bowling for you?"

The lady expressed surprise.

"Can you bowl?" she said.

"Rhodes isn't in it," replied Charteris.

"It's an education to watch my off-break."

"They never put you on in first matches."

"That," said Charteris, "is because they don't know a good thing when they see one."

"All right then. Don't be long."

"Well," said Molly half an hour later, as the gong sounded for breakfast and they walked round to the door, "I think your bowling's jolly good, and I don't know why they don't give you a chance for the first. Still, you couldn't get Billy out, I don't think."

"Billy!" said Charteris. "As a matter of fact, Billy is a gift to me. He can't stand up against my stuff. When he sees my slow,

hanging ball coming he generally chucks down his bat, hides his face in his hands, and bursts into tears."

"I'll tell him that!"

"I shouldn't," said Charteris. "Don't rub it into the poor chap. We all have these skeletons in our cupboards."

Molly regarded him seriously.

"Do you know," she said, "I believe you're very conceited?"

"I've been told so," replied Charteris complacently, "by some of the best judges."

The dining-room was empty when they arrived. The Scott family was limited to Molly, her brother, and Mrs. Scott, who was a semi-invalid and generally breakfasted in bed. Colonel Scott had been dead some years.

Molly made the tea in a business-like manner, and Charteris was half-way through his second cup when his host strolled in. Scott had been known to come down in time for the beginning of breakfast, but he did not spoil a good thing by doing it too often.

"Slacker," said Charteris. "We've been up and out for an hour!"

"What do you think of the wicket?"

"Very good. Miss Scott——"

"You can call me Molly, if you like," interrupted that lady, biting a section out of a healthy slab of bread-and-butter.

"Thanks," said Charteris. "Molly has got that stroke of yours to the on. She pretty nearly knocked a corner off the house with it once."

"Molly is always imitating her elders and betters," replied her brother. "At a picnic last summer——"

"Billy, stop! You're not to!"

"Now, I can't do the dashing host, and make the home bright and lively," said Scott complainingly, "if you go interrupting my best stories. Molly went to a picnic—grown-up affair—last summer. Wanted to be taken for about ten years older than she is."

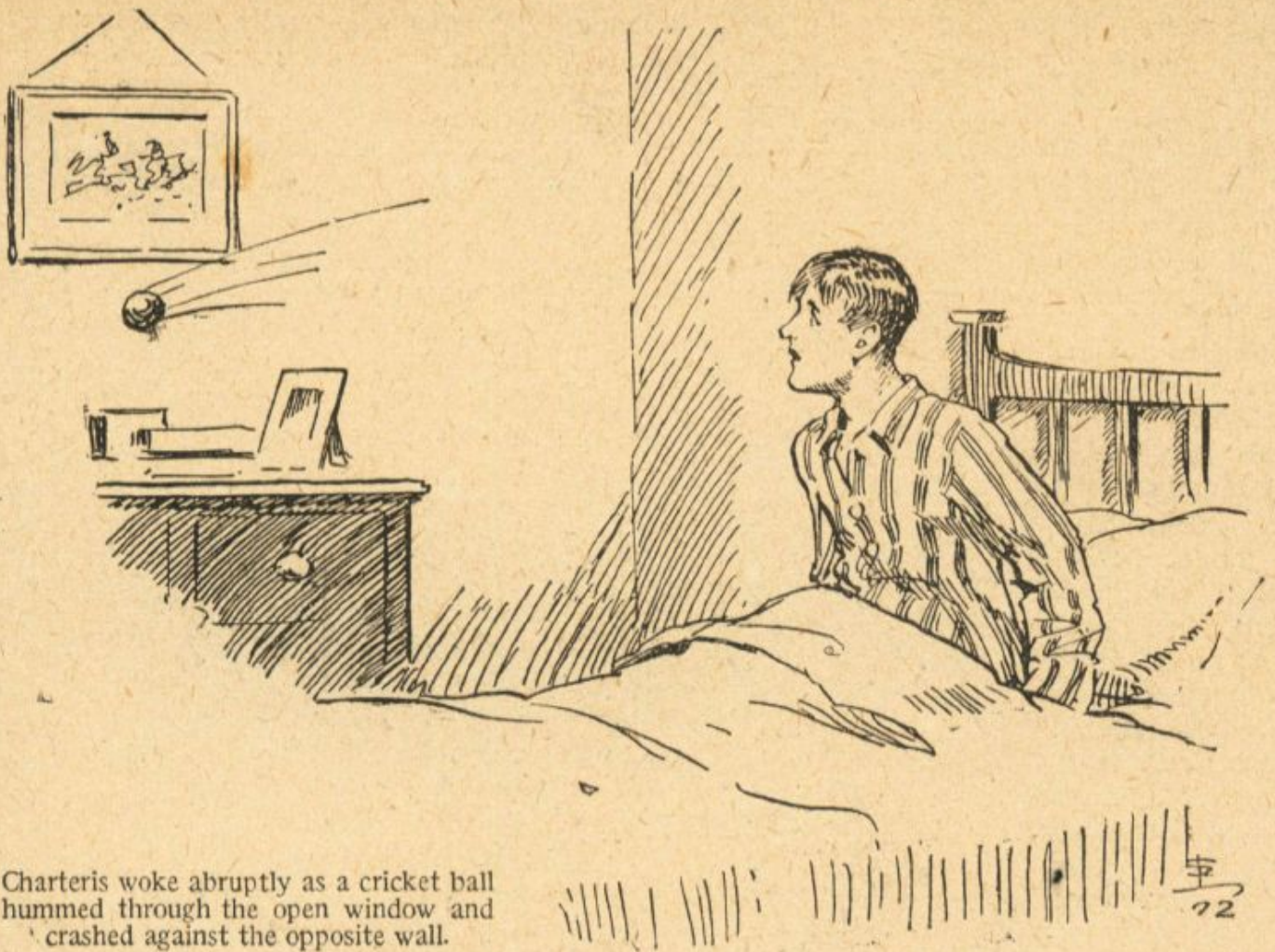
"Be quiet, Billy!"

The story becomes jerky from this point, for the heroine was holding the narrator by the shoulders from behind and doing her best to shake him.

"So," continued Scott, "she turned up the collar of her jacket and shoved—shoved her



Molly Scott stood in the drive with a cricket bat in her hand.



Charteris woke abruptly as a cricket ball hummed through the open window and crashed against the opposite wall.

hair underneath it. See? Looked as if it was up instead of down her back. Palled up with another girl. Other girl began to talk about dances and things. 'Oh,' said Molly, 'I haven't been out a great deal lately.' After a bit it got so hot that Molly had to take off her jacket, and down came the hair. 'Why,' said the other girl, 'you're only a child after all!'

And Scott, who had been present at the massacre, howled with brotherly laughter at the recollection.

Molly looked across at Charteris with flaming cheeks. Charteris' face was grave and composed. This, he felt, was not the place to exhibit a sense of humour.

"I don't see the joke," said Charteris. "I think the other girl was a beast!"

Charteris found a note on his dressing-table when he went to his room that night.

It was a model of epistolary terseness.

"Thanks awfully for not laughing," it ran.

THE THIRD CHAPTER

The House Matches

CHARTERIS went back to Locksley at the end of the Easter holidays fit both in body and mind. In the first card match, against the local regiment, he compiled a faultless eighty-six. The wretched Scott, coming to the crease second wicket down, outwardly confident but inwardly palpitating, had his usual wild swing at his first ball, and was yorked.

A long letter from Molly arrived in the course of the next week. Apparently Scott sent her details of all the matches, not only of those in which he himself had figured to advantage. One sentence in the letter amused Charteris:

"I'm sorry I called you conceited about your bowling. I asked Billy after you had gone, and he said he was more afraid of you

till he got set than of anyone else in the school."

This was news to Charteris. Like many people who bat well, he had always treated his bowling as a huge joke. He bowled for the House first change, but then Merevale's were not strong in that department. Batting was their speciality. It had never occurred to him that anyone could really be afraid of his strange deliveries, and Scott, of all people, who invariably hit him off after three overs! It was good news, however, for the School House was Merevale's chief rival in the House matches, and Scott was the School House star performer. If there was a chance of his being too much for Scott, then Merevale's should win the cup.

The House matches at Locksley were played on the knocking-out system, and this year a great stroke of luck befell Merevale's. (The only other house with any pretensions to the cup) Dacre's drew the School House for their first match.

The School House won, Scott making 102 in an hour; and it was now evident that the cup lay between Merevale's and the School House. These two easily disposed of their opponents and qualified for the final.

There was much discussion in the school on the merits of the two teams. The general impression was that Merevale's would fail

for want of bowling. Scott, it was thought, ought to have a day out against the inferior bowling of Merevale's. If he got out early anything might happen, for Merevale's had the strongest batting side in the school.

Then it was that Charteris went to Venables, the captain of Merevale's, on the evening before the match.

"Look here, Venables," he said, "I'll start by saying I'm not ragging, or you might have your doubts. I want you to put me on to-morrow when Scott comes in. Whoever's bowling, take him off and give me an over. I shall only want one. If I can't get him in that I sha'n't get him at all."

"Have you developed a new ball?" inquired Venables.

It was Charteris' habit to announce every other day that he had developed a new ball.

"Don't rag," said Charteris earnestly. "I'm quite serious. I mean it. I happen to know that Scott's in a funk for his first over, and that my rotten stuff worries him till he gets set. You might give me

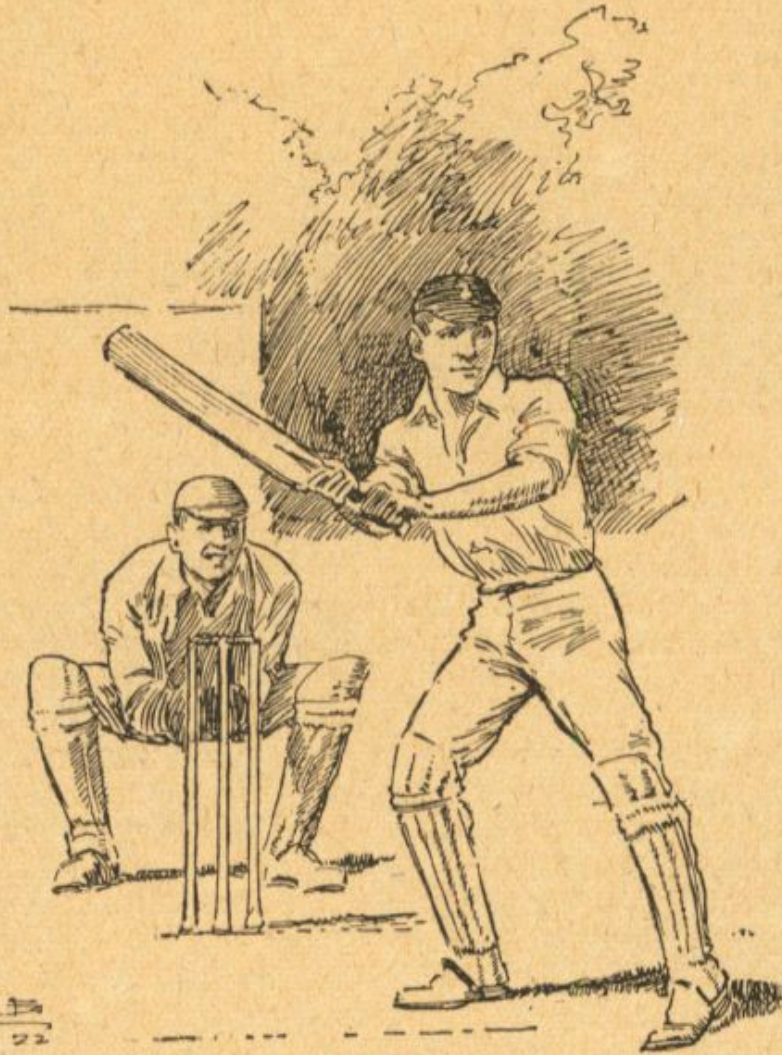
a shot; it can't do any harm."

"You really aren't pulling my leg?"

"I swear I'm not! Of course, it's a million to one that I sha'n't get him out, but it's quite true that he doesn't like my bowling."

"I don't wonder," said Venables. "It's uncanny stuff. All right."

"Thanks," said Charteris.



Scott made his usual wild swing at the first ball and was yorked!

THE FOURTH CHAPTER

Playing the Game !

WE now come to that portion of the story which more particularly illustrates the truth of the profound remarks with which it began on the serpentine snakiness of woman. Coming down to breakfast on the day of the match, Charteris saw a letter by the side of his plate. It was from Molly.

Their correspondence had become, since her first letter, quite voluminous. Writing to Molly was like talking to a sympathetic listener. No detail of a match or of school gossip was too small to interest her, and when, as he had been doing frequently that term, he made a fifty or even a century, there was no need for him to slur modestly over the feat. He was expected to describe it vividly from beginning to end.

The bulk of the letter was not unusual. It was in the postscript that, like most feminine letter-writers, she had embodied her most important words. Charteris re-read them several times before the colossal awfulness of them dawned upon him.

This was the postscript :

"Now, I want you to do me a favour. I wish you would. Poor old Billy is quite cut-up about his luck this season. You know how badly he has done in matches. That century against Dacre's is the only really good thing he's done at all. Can't you give him an easy ball when the School House play

you? I don't mean to hit, but just so that he doesn't get out. He told me that he hated your bowling, and he is so serious in his first over. Do! It is such hard lines on him, making ducks, and I'm awfully fond of him. So you will, won't you?

"P.P.S.—If you do, you shall have that photograph you wanted. The proofs have just come back, and they are very good. I like the one best where I've got my hair sort of done up."

Charteris did not join the usual after-breakfast gathering of house-prefects in Venables' study that morning. He sat in his own den and pondered. At a quarter to nine he might have been overheard to murmur a remark.

"And that," he murmured, "is the girl I thought really understood the finer points of cricket!"

It is a pity that the problem story has ceased to be fashionable. I should have preferred this narrative to have ended at the above point. As it is, I must add two quotations, one from the school magazine, the other from a letter from Miss Molly Scott to Charteris. Place aux dames! Here is the extract from the letter :

"I am sending the photograph. I hope you will like it."

And here is the quotation from the magazine :

"W. L. Scott, b. Charteris, 0; c. Welch. b. Charteris, 2."

