

## TOM, DICK, AND HARRY

This story will interest and amuse all cricketers, and while from the male point of view it may serve as a good illustration of the fickleness of woman and the impossibility of forecasting what course she will take, the fair sex will find in it an equally shining proof of the colossal vanity of man.

"It's like this."

Tom Ellison sat down on the bed, and paused.

"Whack it out," said Dick Henley encouragingly.

"We're all friends here, and the password's 'Portland.' What's the matter?"

"I hate talking to a man when he's shaving. I don't want to have you cutting your head off."

"Don't worry about me. This is a safety razor. And, anyhow, what's the excitement? Going to make my flesh creep?"

Tom Ellison kicked uncomfortably at the chair he was trying to balance on one leg.

"It's so hard to explain."

"Have a dash at it."

"Well, look here, Dick, we've always been pals. What?"

"Of course we have."

"We went to the Empire last Boatrace night together----"

"And got chucked out simultaneously."

"In fact, we've always been pals. What?"

"Of course we have."

"Then, whenever there was a rag on, and a bonner in the quad, you always knew you could help yourself to my chairs."

"You had the run of mine."

"We've shared each other's baccy."

"And whisky."

"In short, we've always been pals. What?"

"Of course we have."

"Then," said Tom Ellison, "what are you trying to cut me out for?"

"Cut you out?"

"You know what I mean. What do you think I came here for? To play cricket? Rot! I'd much rather have gone on tour with the Authentics. I came here to propose to Dolly Burn."

Dick Henley frowned.

"I wish you'd speak of her as Miss Burn," he said austerely.

"There you are, you see," said Tom with sombre triumph; "you oughtn't to have noticed a thing like that. It oughtn't to matter to you what I call her. I always think of her as Dolly."

"You've no right to."

"I shall have soon."

"I'll bet you won't."

"How much?"

"Ten to one in anything."

"Done," said Tom. "I mean," he added hastily, "don't be a fool. There are some things one can't bet on. As you ought to have known," he said primly.

"Now, look here," said Dick, "this thing has got to be settled. You say I'm trying to cut you out. I like that! We may fairly describe that as rich. As if my love were the same sort of passing fancy that yours is. You know you fall in love, as you call it, with every girl you meet."

"I don't."

"Very well. If the subject is painful we won't discuss it. Still, how about that girl you used to rave about last summer? Ethel Something?"

Tom blushed.

"A mere platonic friendship. We both collected autographs. And, if it comes to that, how about Dora Thingummy? You had enough to say about her last winter."

Dick reddened.

"We were on good terms. Nothing more. She always sliced with her brassy. So did I. It formed a sort of bond."

There was a pause.

"After all," resumed Dick, "I don't see the point of all this. Why rake up the past? You aren't writing my life."

"You started raking."

"Well, to drop that, what do you propose to do about this? You're a good chap, Tom, when you aren't making an ass of yourself; but I'm hanged if I'm going to have you interfering between me and Dolly."

"Miss Burn."

Another pause.

"Look here," said Dick. "Cards on the table. I've loved her since last Commem."

"So have I."

"We went up the Char together in a Canader. Alone."

"She also did the trip with me. No chaperone."

"Twice with me."

"Same here."

"She gave me a couple of dances at the Oriel ball."

"So she did me. She said my dancing was so much better than the average young man's."

"She told me I must have had a great deal of practice at waltzing."

"In the matter of photographs," said Tom, "she gave me one."

"Me, too."

"Do you mean 'also' or 'a brace'?" inquired Tom anxiously.

"Also," confessed Dick with reluctance.

"Signed?"

"Rather!"

A third pause.

"I tell you what it is," said Tom; "we must agree on something, or we shall both get left. All we're doing now is to confuse the poor girl. She evidently likes us both the same. What I mean is, we're both so alike that she can't possibly make a choice unless one of us chucks it. You don't feel like chucking it, Dick. What?"

"You needn't be more of an idiot than you can help."

"I only asked. So we are evidently both determined to stick to it. We shall have to toss, then, to settle which is to back out and give the other man a show."

"Toss!" shouted Dick. "For Dolly! Never!"

"But we must do something. You won't back out like a sensible man. We must settle it somehow."

"It's all right," said Dick. "I've got it. We both seem to have come here and let ourselves in for this rotten little village match, on a wicket which will probably be all holes and hillocks, simply for Dolly's sake. So it's only right that we should let the match decide this thing for us. It won't be so cold-blooded as tossing. See?"

"You mean----?"

"Whichever of us makes the bigger score today wins. The loser has to

keep absolutely off the grass. Not so much as a look or a remark about the weather. Then, of course, after the winner has had his innings, if he hasn't brought the thing off, and she has chucked him, the loser can have a look in. But not a moment before. Understand?"

"All right."

"It'll give an interest to a rotten match," said Dick.

Tom rose to a point of order.

"There's one objection. You, being a stodgy sort of bat, and having a habit of sitting on the splice, always get put in first. I'm a hitter, so they generally shove me in about fourth wicket. In this sort of match the man who goes in fourth wicket is likely to be not out half a dozen at the end of the innings. Nobody stays in more than three balls. Whereas you, going in first, will have time for a decent knock before the rot starts. Follow?"

"I don't want to take any advantage of you," said Dick condescendingly. "I shan't need it. We'll see Drew after breakfast and get him to put us both in first."

The Rev. Henry Drew, cricketing curate, was the captain of the side.

Consulted on the matter after breakfast, the Rev. Henry looked grave.

He was taking this match very seriously, and held decided views on the subject of managing his team.

"The point is, my dear Ellison," he said, "that I want the bowling broken a bit before you go in. Then your free, aggressive style would have a better chance. I was thinking of putting you in fourth wicket. Would not that suit you?"

"I thought so. Tell him, Dick."

"Look here, Drew," said Dick; "you'll regard what I'm going to say as said under seal of the confessional and that sort of thing, won't you?"

"I shall, of course, respect any confidence you impart to me, my dear Henley. What is this dreadful secret?"

Dick explained.

"So you see," he concluded, "it's absolutely necessary that we should start fair."

The Rev. Henry looked as disturbed as if he had suddenly detected symptoms of Pelagianism in a member of his Sunday-school class.

"Is such a contest quite----? Is it not a little--um?" he said.

"Not at all," said Dick, hastening to justify himself and friend. "We must settle the thing somehow, and neither of us will back out. If we didn't do this we should have to toss."

"Heaven forbid!" said the curate, shocked.

"Well, is it a deal? Will you put us in first?"

"Very well."

"Thanks," said Tom.

"Good of you," said Dick.

"Don't mention it," said Harry.

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There are two sorts of country cricket. There is the variety you get at a country-house, where the wicket is prepared with a care as meticulous as that in fashion on any county ground; where red marl and such-like aids to smoothness have been injected into the turf all through the winter; and where the out-fielding is good and the boundaries spacious. And there is the village match, where cows are apt to stroll on to the pitch before the innings and cover-point

stands up to his neck in a furze-bush.

The game which was to decide the fate of Tom and Dick belonged to the latter variety. A pitch had been mown in the middle of a meadow (kindly lent by Farmer Rollitt on condition that he should be allowed to umpire, and his eldest son Ted put on to bowl first). The team consisted of certain horny-handed sons of toil, with terrific golf-shots in the direction of square-leg, and the enemy's ranks were composed of the same material. Tom and Dick, in ordinary circumstances, would have gone in to bat in such a match with a feeling of lofty disdain, as befitting experts from the civilised world, come to teach the rustic mind what was what.

But on the present occasion the thought of all that depended on their bats induced a state of nerves which would have done credit to a test match.

"Would you mind taking first b-b-ball, old man?" said Tom.

"All r-right," said Dick. He had been on the point of making the request himself, but it would not do to let Tom see that he was nervous.

He took guard from Farmer Rollitt, and settled himself into position to face the first delivery.

Whether it is due to the pure air of the country or to daily manual toil is not known, but the fact remains that bowlers in village matches, whatever their other shortcomings, seldom fall short in the matter of speed. The present trundler, having swung his arm round like a flail, bounded to the crease and sent down a ball which hummed in the air. It pitched halfway between the wickets in a slight hollow caused by the foot of a cow and shot. Dick reached blindly forward, and the next moment his off-stump was out of the ground.

A howl of approval went up from the supporters of the enemy, lying under the trees.

Tom sat down, limp with joy. Dick out for a duck! What incredible good fortune! He began to frame in his mind epigrammatic sentences for use in the scene which would so shortly take place between Miss Dolly Burn and himself. The next man came in and played flukily but successfully through the rest of the over. "Just a single," said Tom to himself as he faced the bowler at the other end. "Just one solitary single. Miss Burn--may I call you Dolly? Do you remember that moonlight night? On the Char? In my Canadian canoe? We two?"

"S THAT?" shrieked bowler and wicket-keeper as one man.

Tom looked blankly at them. He had not gone within a mile and a half of the ball, he was certain. And yet--there was the umpire with his hand raised, as if he were the Pope bestowing a blessing.

He walked quickly back to the trees, flung off his pads, and began to smoke furiously.

"Well?" said a voice.

Dick was standing before him, grinning like a gargoyle.

"Of all the absolutely delirious decisions----" began Tom.

"Oh, yes," said Dick rudely, "I know all about that. Why, I could hear the click from where I was sitting. The point is, what's to be done now? We shall have to settle it on the second innings."

"If there is one."

"Oh, there'll be a second innings all right. There's another man out. On a wicket like this we shall all be out in an hour, and we'll have the other side out in another hour, and then we'll start again on this business. I shall play a big game next innings. It was only that infernal ball shooting that did me."

"And I," said Tom; "if the umpire has got over his fit of delirium tremens, or been removed to Colney Hatch, shall almost certainly make a century."

It was four o'clock by the time Tom and Dick went to the wickets for the second time. Their side had been headed by their opponents by a dozen on the first innings--68 to 56.

A splendid spirit of confidence animated the two batsmen. The umpire who had effected Tom's downfall in the first innings had since received a hard drive in the small of the back as he turned coyly away to avoid the ball, and was now being massaged by strong men in the taproom of the village inn. It was the sort of occurrence, said Tom, which proved once and for all the existence of an all-seeing, benevolent Providence.

As for Dick, he had smoothed out a few of the more important mountain-ranges which marred the smoothness of the wicket, and was feeling that all was right with the world.

The pair started well. The demon bowler of the enemy, having been fêted considerably under the trees by enthusiastic admirers during the innings of his side, was a little incoherent in his deliveries. Four full-pitches did he send down to Dick in his first over, and Dick had placed 16 to his credit before Tom, who had had to look on anxiously, had opened his account. Dick was a slow scorer as a rule, but he knew a full-pitch to leg when he saw one.

From his place at the other crease Tom could see Miss Burn and her mother sitting under the trees, watching the game.

The sight nerved him. By the time he had played through his first over he had reduced Dick's lead by half. An oyster would have hit out in such circumstances, and Tom was always an aggressive batsman. By the end of the third over the scores were level. Each had made 20.

Enthusiasm ran high amongst the spectators, or such of them as were natives of the village. Such a stand for the first wicket had not been seen in all the matches ever played in the neighbourhood. When Tom, with a nice straight drive (which should have been a 4, but was stopped by a cow and turned into a single), brought up the century, small boys burst buttons and octogenarians wept like babes.

The bowling was collared. The demon had long since retired grumbling to the deep field. Weird trundlers, with actions like nothing else on earth, had been tried, had fired their ringing shot, and passed. One individual had gone on with lobs, to the acute delight of everybody except the fieldsmen who had to retrieve the balls and the above-mentioned cow. And still Tom and Dick stayed in and smote, while in the west the sun slowly sank.

The Rev. Henry looked anxious. It was magnificent, but it must not be overdone. A little more and they would not have time to get the foe out for the second time. In which case the latter would win on the first innings. And this thought was as gall to him.

He walked out and addressed the rival captain.

"I think," said he, "we will close our innings."

Tom and Dick made two bee-lines for the scorer and waited palpitatingly for the verdict.

"What's my score?" panted Tom.

"Fifty-fower, sur."

"And mine?" gasped Dick.

"Fifty-fower, too, sur."

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"You see, my dear fellows," said the Rev. Henry when they had finished--and his voice was like unto oil that is poured into a wound--"we had to win this match, and if you had gone on batting we should not have had time to get them out. As it is, we shall have to hurry."

"But, hang it----" said Tom.

"But, look here----" said Dick.

"Yes?"

"What on earth are we to do?" said Tom.

"We're in precisely the same hole as we were before," said Dick.

"We don't know how to manage it."

"We're absolutely bunkered."

"Our competition, you see."

"About Miss Burn, don't you know."

"Which is to propose first?"

"We can't settle it."

The Rev. Henry smiled a faint, saintly smile and raised a protesting hand.

"My advice," he said, "is that both of you should refrain from proposing."

"What?" said Dick.

"Wha-at?" said Tom.

"You see," purred the Rev. Henry, "you are both very young fellows. Probably you do not know your own minds. You take these things too seri----"

"Now, look here," said Tom.

"None of that rot," said Dick.

"I shall propose tonight."

"I shall propose this evening."

"I shouldn't," said the Rev. Henry. "The fact is----"

"Well?"

"Well?"

"I didn't tell you before, for fear it should put you off your game; but Miss Burn is engaged already, and has been for three days."

The two rivals started.

"Engaged!" cried Tom.

"Whom to?" hissed Dick.

"Me," murmured Harry.