

A SCHOOLBOY'S LOVE-LETTER

by Frank Richards.

Stebbings' House,
Barcroft.

Dearest Loo,

I'm sitting down to write to you, just as I said I would as soon as I got back. At least almost as soon, because there are some things that a fellow can't dodge. First of all I had to see old Moon—you remember I told you Moon was my beak. There was a spot of bother owing to my losing my medical certificate, through that goat Carter assing about on the train down. Of course it's all rot: they don't really look at it, but if you haven't got it there's a row. Luckily I thought of telling Moon that I'd slipped it into one of my books for safety. That's all right with Moon, because he never remembers anything the next day. Still it was annoying at the time, because he kept me a good five minutes, and Parkinson was waiting in the passage to speak to me, and when I came out at last he'd gone off with Ling.

My study's in a pretty state, as you may guess on the first day of term. Everything at sixes and sevens. The table's loaded like a bargain counter, and I've hardly room to write this letter. There's my bag, and my football boots, and most of a cake I've just unpacked, and a lot of my books, as well as heaps of Sutton's things. Sutton is the chap I mess with here, I think I told you about him. Not a bad chap in his own way, but frightfully untidy. His slippers are on the table this very minute.

I'd rather have had Parkinson really, we get on together splendidly. But Sutton seemed to take it for granted that we should be together this term the same at last, and a chap can't very well let a chap down. Besides you have to be jolly careful about this, as it's all settled on the first day. If you're too slow you might get left without anybody, and then the mob would think nobody wanted you, and it would be against you all the term.

I got left like that my first term in the Fifth, and had to put up with Pug Smith in the end, and was really lucky to get even him at the last minute, but it was rotten all round. This term I hoped to get old Parkinson. I thought of getting Sutton to go in with Brown major, who, as I know, would be glad to have him, because nobody wants to mess with Brown, whose people are rather so-so. His father came down last term in elastic-sided boots, and after that the fags used to squeak when Brown passed them, which put him into a terrific bait.

But I should have had to fix it with Sutton before speaking to Parkinson, and then it might have turned out that old Parky was snapped up already, he being the most popular man in the House. I noticed that he seemed rather thick with Potter in the train, and I jolly

well know that that greasy smug Walker meant to bag him if he could. There's hardly a man in the Fifth who wouldn't be glad to have Parkinson: even Bowes-Fletcher, I think. Well, I might have got left, and have had to put up with some nobody like Pug Smith again, so now I'm fixed with Sutton as before, and perhaps it's all for the best for he certainly does get very good hampers. Only I wish he wouldn't leave his slippers on the table, or plug in his smokes among my instruments. Of course, he has to keep them out of sight.

I shall never forget that last evening, Loo. It's just like a dream. What you could see in me I don't know, because I'm not worthy of you in any way I can think of. I'm going to try hard to be, and this term I've made up my mind to have nothing whatever to do with Chowne and his set. I shall bar them utterly. I told Sutton so, and he said I'd better mind my step, because Chowne being a prefect, and in the Sixth, he could make it pretty tough, for a Fifth-Form man who set out to bar him. I said I don't care, and I don't either. I can tell you that I started before we'd been back at Barcroft ten minutes. Chowne was in the quad, and he called out, "Hullo old thing!" and I just walked on with my bag pretending to think that he was speaking to somebody else. Of course with a pre. you have to be a bit tactful.

When I think of that last evening with you, Loo, it seems to bring back something in Tennyson, or perhaps Browning, though I can't remember it just at this minute. Ever since meeting you I seem to see a lot more in poetry than I used to do. I shall go strong on English Literature this term. This will give me a leg-up with Moon, too, for he actually likes it himself, and likes fellows who make out that they do too. You'd never dream how easy it is to pull his leg in English Literature. Old Parkinson is very clever at it. He knows how to get Moon spouting, so that we get through perhaps half the hour practically doing nothing.

But I shall take it very seriously this term, because I am convinced that it is not by any means the tosh I always thought it. I have recently found that I like poetry, and have little doubt that there is a lot in it I never thought of before. Of course, a fellow gets a bit fogged with poetry, because so often it doesn't seem to have any sense in it. But I realize now that football isn't everything: though of course I would not like to say so in the day-room.

Speaking of football, there's practically no doubt that I shall play for School. This may sound like swank, but I assure you that it is not. Parkinson thinks so, which I think as good as settles it. Sutton says that what Parkinson thinks to-day, Barcroft thinks to-morrow: a very neat way of putting it, I thought. Sutton's no fool.

Luttrell—I've told you about our skipper—well, Luttrell nodded to me on the landing when I came up. He didn't speak, but he distinctly

nodded, I'm absolutely certain of that. Luttrell, of course, won't be thinking of much beside football this term. He can't very well, in his position. And I think the way he nodded, which I'm quite sure he did, looks as if he has his eyes on me.

I don't mind telling you about this, Loo, because I know you don't look at games in the silly way girls so often do. The first time it came to me that I cared for you so much, was that evening in the hotel garden, on that seat you remember, when I was telling you about the Tatcham match, and you sat listening with your eyes closed, and never interrupted me once. It seemed so splendid to be talking to a girl who really understood. I can tell you that any of my sisters would have shut me up before I'd said a dozen words about Soccer. A fellow's sisters never understand him, as I've noticed. I've got four, and all of them would have said, "Oh, chuck it, Aubrey," if I'd started on Soccer. I was so glad you were interested because it really was a great match. In my opinion Barcroft only pulled it off by a combination of luck and sheer good play. At half-time almost anybody would have said that it was Tatcham's game. In fact right up to ten minutes from the finish the outlook was pretty grim. But after Luttrell equalized, we let them have it—how I wish you'd been there!

It was just luck that I was in the team, being only in the Second eleven at the time, through a man getting crocked at the last minute. Luttrell had to shove in somebody, and he shoved me in. I think the result justified it. I couldn't expect goals, against men like Tatcham: but several fellows said afterwards that my passing was as good as any on the field, and nobody can deny that it was from a pass I gave him that Ling scored the winning goal, though he was rather stand-offish about it when I mentioned it afterwards. But facts are facts, whether Billy Ling likes them or not. To my mind, Ling isn't a First eleven man at all, being altogether too sketchy in his style, though I admit he has luck. If I were in Luttrell's place, I should certainly not play him against a team like Tatcham. I should think it too risky.

Luttrell noticed my play that time. Several fellows said so. I wonder whether he remembers that pass I gave Ling. It looks like it, nodding to me as he did.

That last evening at Vevey was the happiest day of my life, Loo. It seems like a glorious dream when I look back at it now. I was so jolly glad to get away from the hotel crowd and get a spot of quiet, in the garden, with you. How lovely the moonlight looked on the lake. And that jolly little seat under the tree where we sat. I was feeling awfully sorry about catching my foot in your dress in the dance. I know I'm a rotten dancer, but I shall try to improve. Do you know, I thought just for a second that you were stuffy with me when we heard it tear. But the next

minute I knew it was all right, you had such a lovely smile. But I was glad you owned up that you were tired of dancing, and said what about sitting it out. I mean to say I was sorry you were tired, but glad to get out into the garden and the moonlight, with you, Loo. I'd wondered and wondered whether I should have a chance of speaking to you before we left, and it made me very miserable to think of that early train in the morning, and going without seeing you again. I'd even thought of coming round very early, before my people had to start for the station, on the off chance that you might be up. But it was all right as it happened.

Will you ever forget that evening, Loo? I never shall, not if I live to be sixty or seventy. Wasn't it jolly luck that my people took me to Vevey for the hols., while you were there at the same time? This was one of those wonderful coincidences that do happen sometimes. But for that I might never have met you. We came near to going to Scotland instead, only the pater thought on the whole Switzerland would be cheaper, also there was the food. A poet whose name I forget said what great events from little causes spring. We had it in English Literature with Moon last term. I think more and more that poets very often hit the right nail on the head, and that there is much more in it than fellows think.

About you being a trifle older I don't think that matters a bit, as I told you. Men really are older than women, even if younger by a year or two, being so much more practical and having so much more knowledge of the world. I feel that I could protect you, and that is what I want to do all my life. That was how I felt that day we had the trip on the lake steamer to Montreux. Looking after a woman, and taking care of her, is a man's job in my opinion. I was so sorry I left your parasol on the steamer, it was a bit of luck that that American chap brought it off and gave it to you. Wasn't that a lovely afternoon at Montreux? Do you remember how we lost our way because I thought it was a turning to the right, and you thought it was to the left, and it turned out to be the left after all? And how jolly nearly we lost the boat back, because it left at 5.30 and not six as I thought.

There's an awful din going on in the passage outside my study. Of course there's always a lot of noise first day of term. I can hear that goat Carter giving one of his imitations of Moon, and all the fellows laughing. Carter's a very funny ass, and I wish you could hear him doing old Moon, saying "Now, now, that's quite enough, we must remember that we are here to work."—he gets his wheezy voice to a T. You might think it was old Moon speaking, and it certainly is very funny and entertaining. It's not much use trying to write a letter with all that row going on, so I may as well go along, and I will close now with dearest love from your own.

XXxxxAubrey Briggs