

CREEKET...

by L. R. Drake



MARIA WOLENSKA has only been in Australia for about six months. She was born in Poland. I met her at an afternoon tea party which had been arranged at one of the migrant centres to enable some Australian housewives to get to know some of the newcomers. We got on so well that I invited her to visit me one afternoon. She came yesterday, and I happened to be listening to a broadcast of the Test Match between Australia and South Africa when she arrived.

"Sit here, my dear," I said, after she had disposed of her hat and bag. "I'll just turn the radio down."

"What is it that you are listening?" she asked politely.

"A cricket match," I replied. "I don't really understand the game, but I get quite wrapped up in the broadcasts, the commentators do it so well."

"Do not turn it then down," said Maria, "I also shall like to find out what is this creeket about. But you say you are getting wrapped up. How is this, you are not warm enough?"

I laughed. "Sorry," I said, "silly of me to use such an expression. It's what-do-you-call-it..."

"Ah, yes, I know," said Maria, nodding her head, "the eedion, always it is the eedion"—she shrugged her shoulders and pursed her lips comically—"the dictionary is full of words nobody speaks and everyone speaks the eedion who is not in the dictionary."

"Getting wrapped up means being very interested," I explained.

"There's a change in the bowling," said the radio, and Maria held up a finger to me and adopted a listening attitude. "It's Miller," went on the radio; "he's got two slips, a square leg and a short fine leg."

Maria chuckled. "Is he wearing the slips to try and cover his funny legs?" she asked.

"Here comes the first ball," said the radio. "Oh, it's a short one and Endean steps out and pulls it hard to leg."

"Ah, yes," said Maria, "I know that one, the leg pull. It means he has

just pretend to hit it."

"Two to Endean... Miller again to Endean, and Endean packs up and pushes him through the covers."

"Pushes him through the cupboard?" wondered Maria.

"No, the covers," I said. "It's the things they wear on their legs, I think."

"McGlew to face Miller now... a good length ball, and he puts a straight bat in front of it and pats it back along the wicket."

"Ah, I see," said Maria, "he uses the different size ball to—what you say—confuse the batsman, first the short ball, then the good long ball, eh?"

"No, no," I said, "they only have one ball, but I think if it's easy to hit they call it a short ball, and if it's hard to hit they call it a good length ball. Goodness knows why."

"That's the end of the over," remarked the radio.

"Over?" said Maria, making a curving motion with her hand in the air, "over is... is... above? ... no?"

"Yes," I agreed, "but in cricket when a man has had as many bowls as he's allowed at one time, they call that an over."

"How long does the creeket game go on?" asked Maria. "All day?"

"Oh, several days," I said. "This one probably won't be over until tomorrow."

"Over...?" repeated Maria, her brow creased in bewilderment.

"Good heavens!" I said, "I had no idea English was as bad as this. Over means finished as well."

Maria smote her brow. "Ah, Gott!" she moaned, "I cannot bear it."

"You poor thing, I don't blame you. It must be ghastly trying to learn this weird language of ours. You need a cup of tea to revive you—or would you prefer coffee?"

"Thank you, I would like tea. Can I help you?"

"No, thanks very much. It won't take me a minute. You stay here and listen to some more cricket."

When I returned with the afternoon tea Maria said: "What is a gully, please?"

"It's a—let me see—do you know what a valley is?"

"Yes, yes, the valley is between the mountains."

"That's right—well, a gully is a small valley."



"A good length ball to confuse the batsman"

"But the man say that Endean has snick Miller into the gully."

"Yes," I said, "that always puzzles me, too. I think it must be the sort of gutter between the grass and the fence."

"And," went on Maria, "Waite has curl himself up almost in a knot and pick something off his toes. Surely he could do these things in the bathroom before the creeket start. And the Miller has beaten him all the way and bowl him neck and crop. The poor man, I am not surprise he have to go back to the pavilion."

"Well," said the radio, "that's the last over before tea and the players are leaving the ground."

While the creeketeers were having their afternoon tea we had ours and discussed the sort of thing that women of different nationalities do discuss when they don't know each other very well, such as food and ways of cooking it, how fashions in dress vary in different countries, and children. Maria has not been married long, and hasn't any children, though she hopes for some.

"Per'aps soon a little creeketer," she said with a smile.

I asked her whether she found the average Australian friendly to her and to other newcomers.

"Yes," she said, "some are very friendly, very kind, but some when they hear me speak not very good English—they look at me like I am some strange animal."

"Oh, dear," I said, "I'm afraid a lot of Australians are very insular. But I think we're improving, which is not sur-

prising with so many newcomers arriving in such a short time. I suppose in all countries the people are inclined to be a little suspicious of foreigners."

"Yes, it is true," agreed Maria: "different speech is like a fence between them... or a gully."

The cricketers came back on to the field and I asked Maria whether she wanted to listen to any more of the match.

"Oh, yes," she said, "it is fascinating."

"Hassett has thrown the ball to Lind-wall," said the radio. "He's coming into bowl the first ball, and Endean pulls this one hard past the square-leg umpire."

"So!" said Maria, "the umpire has square legs, too. Per'aps it is from standing on them all day. I work in the 'ospital once and many of the nurses' legs is also thus. The ankle disappear." Maria glanced approvingly at her own shapely leg.

"There's an appeal here," shouted the radio in a frenzy of excitement, "but the umpire disallows it. It's not like Endean to nibble at those fast ones on the outside."

"Is the poor man hungry, then!" exclaimed Maria.

"He's out!" roared the radio so loudly and suddenly that Maria spilt her tea in the saucer. "A glorious catch by Smith at silly mid-on."

"What is silly mid-on?" asked Maria.

"I'm not sure," I replied, "but I think it's somewhere so close to the batsman that only silly people can be persuaded to field there."

"Well, that was a really magnificent catch," exulted the radio. "Smith literally threw himself at the ball and almost took it off the end of Waite's bat. And now South Africa's in trouble. Three wickets are down..."

"But Waite is out because of this so magnificent catch," said Maria, "and now the man says the three wickets are down. Did Waite knock down the wickets because he was angry at being out?"

"Oh, no," I said, "I'm sure he wouldn't do that. When they say three wickets are down it just means that three men are out. You see? Three wickets down—three batsmen out."

"Ah, yes, of course, it is all quite simple. The wickets seem to be standing up but they are really lying down because three batsmen have been knocked out."

"It's amazing," I agreed. "I knew that cricket commentators used some pretty queer terms, but I hadn't realised before that they have invented an entirely new language. I wonder if they realise it themselves."

"Pretty queer, eh?" murmured Maria thoughtfully.

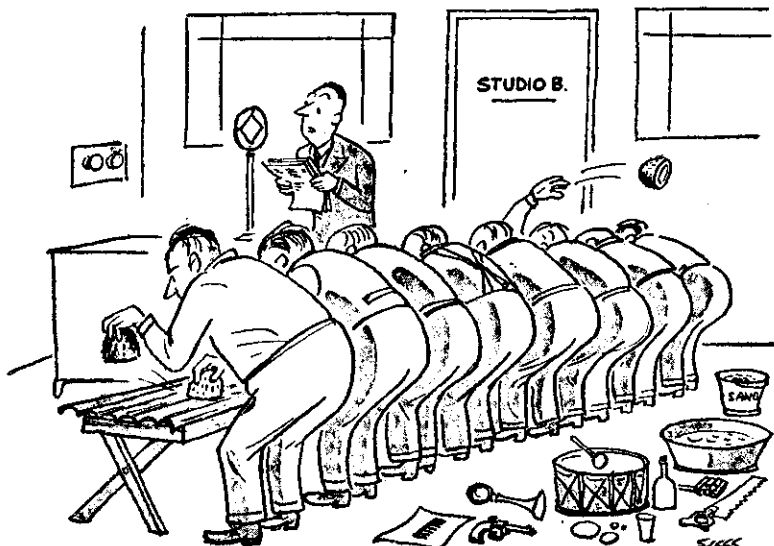
"Well, what I mean is—quite queer—you know."

Maria looked at her watch. "It is time I must go," she said. "I have arrange to meet Stanislaw and help him to buy some shirts. He speaks not so good English as I. He speaks pretty bad." She rolled the word lovingly around her tongue.

I helped her with her things and as I opened the door for her she said: "Thank you very much, it has been very nice, and I enjoy very much the creeket match."

"Goodbye, my dear," I said. "Come over any time you like. Just telephone first to make sure I'll be home."

"Thank you," said Maria. "I will be very 'appy. But," she added with a gleam in her eye, "I will not come over, I am not a bird. I will just come."



(C) Punch

"Then, as the coach thundered down the hill, one of the horses cast a shoe."