

Lancashire Magazine Comedy Short Story 2015 (August 2015)

The theme for the competition was comedy and authors could write up to 1,200 words. The story had to be fictional and had to be set in North West England, preferably with geographical, historical and cultural references to the region. The entrants had to demonstrate a knowledge of the North West as well as a lively writing style.

The contest was judged by Ribble Valley writing tutor, Mairead Mahon who choose my work as one of the three winners - selected from hundreds of entries. She commented, ***"A Day at the Races" had well drawn characters, a surprise ending which leaves the reader smiling and contains jokes which are an integral part of the story.***

A Day At The Races.

Two of the three friends cheered as the horses passed the winning post. Bob was the exception - he moaned as he tore up his betting slip. "Looks like you've already paid for your day out and that was only the third race!" he complained. "I haven't had even a sniff! We should have stayed in Yorkshire."

Tom and Fred laughed loudly. "You were the one who wanted to come here - we were happy to stay closer to home."

The three friends were part of a larger group from their village just outside Leeds who had a day out each July to a different race meeting. This year their coach had headed over the Pennines towards the Lancashire Oaks meeting at Haydock Park. Even Bob had to admit that apart from backing three consecutive losers - he was really enjoying himself. The sun shone, the course looked wonderful - and the beer was flowing.

"Right," Tom said, "time for another pint. You'd better get them in Bob - while we collect our winnings!"

Bob grudgingly agreed. "OK," he said, "but I'm trying a different bar this time."

"No!" both his friends shouted at the same time.

Bob jumped back in surprise. "What the hell's wrong?" he gasped.

"We can't go changing the routine now." Fred insisted, "We've picked three winners when we have had a drink in the bar under the stand - we need to go back in there."

"I haven't had a winner though," Bob protested, "what about my luck?"

They both smiled and ignored his protests. A quick pint later and they headed back outside to watch the main race of the day. Bob had gone from the bar to the bookies, then he hurried back to join his friends. As he approached them - he discovered that they were arguing fiercely.

"Bob will settle this," said Fred.

"What's wrong now?" Bob asked wearily.

"Well," said Tom, "we were arguing about what county Haydock is in - I say it's in Greater Manchester but Fred says it's in Merseyside."

"In a way you're both wrong." Bob said. "Remember back in the seventies when the Tories messed about with all the boundaries?"

His friends nodded.

"Well on April Fool's Day April 1974 they created various Metropolitan regions but they obviously didn't abolish Lancashire - or Yorkshire!" he explained. "Anyone who lives in the original county can still legally put "Lancashire" as part of their address. Haydock is in the county of Lancashire and what's more - although people in St. Helens now try to lay claim to Haydock, if you ring the racecourse office, you dial 01942 - which is a Wigan number!"

"How do you know all this?" Fred was amazed.

"My sister married a bloke from Wigan, actually they don't live too far from here." Bob admitted, "It was over twenty years ago but we've just about forgiven her now." he grinned. "I've been to Wigan many times to visit the family but never been to Haydock before."

Fred grunted. "Maybe we should have just read the race card." he said. "It says here that the Lancashire Oaks was first run in Liverpool in the nineteenth century, then moved to Manchester until that track closed in 1963. It's been run at Haydock ever since. The current racecourse was opened here in 1899."

The argument was quickly forgotten as the big race started. A few minutes later Bob was in despair once more. "Another loser." he groaned. To make matters worse, Tom had backed the winner and Fred had backed the second horse each-way. As the two men happily scampered away to pick up their winnings, Bob headed to the toilets. As he moved through one of the bars that the others had refused to enter, he spotted a familiar face and stopped to have a quick chat. He left the bar with a sly grin on his face.

The last two races quickly passed and soon Bob had gone through the card without even having a glimpse of success. "That's enough!" he announced. "We've got an hour before the coach goes and I refuse to have another drink in that bar. We're are going somewhere else!"

He stomped off and his mates followed behind - taking great delight in his misery! Bob led them into a large bar that was quickly emptying as the punters headed for home. "Right," he announced. "one of you two can dip into your winnings and get the last round in!"

Fred stepped up, ordered the drinks and then turned around. "What's the best way to stop a runaway horse?" he asked innocently.

Bob and Tom shrugged.

"Get Bob to put a bet on it!" Fred crowed.

Tom and Fred fell about laughing. "That was awful." Bob sniffed. "You never could tell a decent joke!"

Another argument began - this time about who could tell the best joke. They decided to settle the argument with a contest. "But we need an impartial judge." Fred pointed out.

"I'll do it." said a voice from behind the bar. "I couldn't help overhearing, we aren't busy now so I can spare you a few minutes if you like."

The friends turned to see a young barmaid - her name tag identified her as Lucy. "Belting!" Bob announced. "But let's make it interesting. Twenty pounds each - Lucy to hold the money - her decision is final."

The friends agreed - they drew straws to see who went first and they also agreed that the subject had to be horses - or horse racing. Tom went first.

"Why should you never be rude to a jump jockey?"

Lucy shook her head. "I don't know." she admitted.

"In case he takes offence!" Tom chuckled.

No-one else laughed. Fred was next.

"Bob backed one horse today that was so slow, the jockey kept a diary of the trip!"

This time there were just a few groans. Lucy didn't seem impressed.

Finally it was Bob's turn. "How do you spell "Hungry Horse" in four letters?"

Lucy shook her head.

"M T G G!" he said.

Inexplicably - Lucy began to laugh so much that she had tears in her eyes! "That's the winner!" she spluttered as she passed £60 across the bar to Bob. She walked away wiping her eyes as the two unlucky losers stood open mouthed in amazement. "That joke was terrible!" Fred claimed.

Bob shrugged - with a big smile on his face. "It must be the way I tell them! Anyway, we need to get to the coach."

His friends needed to go to the toilet so Bob waited at the bar. Lucy reappeared and Bob smiled as he handed her a twenty pound note. "That's for you." he grinned. "and tell your mum I'll give her a call next week."

"Thanks Uncle Bob," Lucy smiled, "Always a pleasure to help family - lucky you spotted me earlier!"

"The only bit of luck I've had all day love! I'd forgotten you had a part time job here." he chuckled. "And make sure you tell your dad how we pulled the wool over the eyes of two daft Yorkshiremen!"