

LOWTHER'S LAST LAUGH



By

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(of the Fourth Form)

Ragging a practical joker is a highly risky proceeding—a fact which is brought home to Tom Merry & Co. when they "take it out of" Monty Lowther, the St. Jim's joker

If ever a chap deserved being boiled in oil, then that chap's Monty Lowther of the Shell!

He calls himself a practical joker. Personally, I prefer to regard him as a practical idiot!

Only a couple of days ago he sent a dozen of us racing off to Wayland on our bikes in the expectation of seeing a spectacular fire. When we got back, after a fruitless journey, he calmly informed us that the fire he had been talking about was in the grate of the tea-room at the bun-shop!

What can you do with a fellow like that?

We gave the matter serious consideration—"we" being Tom Merry and Manners and Kangaroo and Gussy and other big shots in the Fourth and Shell.

Ultimately we decided that it was time Lowther was brought to his senses. We unanimously chose a dorm. ragging as the best means of achieving our object.

That night a crowd of us from the Fourth went along to the Shell dorm. Monty Lowther was yanked out of bed, biffed with pillows, bumped till the House almost rocked on its foundations, and finally made to run the gauntlet.

"Perhaps that'll keep him quiet for a time!" I remarked, as we trooped back to our quarters.

And the next morning Monty certainly looked more subdued. His expression was awfully meek as he joined a crowd of us on the steps.

"I say, I'm awfully sorry if I offended you about that fire bizney," he said. "Wouldn't have had that happen for worlds, naturally."

"Hum!"

"After that ragging you gave me last night, I realise that you looked on it more seriously than I'd thought," said Lowther meekly. "I feel I want to make amends now."

Gussy, as the representative of Vere de Vere manners, assured Lowther on our behalf that it was quite all right, and that undah the circs. we fweely forgave him.

"Yes, I know you're all awfully good and kind," Lowther said. "But I want to do something to make up for the way I've treated you, and I think I've found a way of doing it. You see, I've got an uncle who's managing-director of the new ice-rink at Wayland, and I can get you free passes to a private session this afternoon. How's that?"

"Fine!" we said promptly.

"There'll be nobody else there bar a couple of engineers, for the rink has closed down for the summer season," went on Lowther.

"You can all have the time of your lives."

We thanked Lowther and said we hoped we hadn't hurt him too much the previous night.

We all turned up at the ice-rink that afternoon. Ice-skating doesn't come our way every day, and we were as keen as mustard.

Lowther led the way in.

"You're not skating, then?" I asked, noticing that he was the only one without skates.

"Oh, it's nothing much to me!" Lowther said nonchalantly. "I can look in any time, you see, as my uncle's boss of the place."

"Ice looks a little off-colour!" Manners remarked, as we sat down and put on our skates. "Not quite so white as you'd expect it to be."

"That's because it hasn't been used for a day, I expect," Lowther said. "You fellows get going. I'll dodge down below and have a word with the engineers."

Lowther disappeared.

We fixed on our skates and duly got going.



We yanked Monty Lowther out of his bed and biffed him right and left with pillows as a warning to him that his practical joking must stop!

We hadn't been going many seconds before we discovered that there was something very peculiar about the ice. It seemed to be off-colour in more senses than one. Our skates seemed to stick, somehow, and we found quite a lot of difficulty in getting along at all.

All at once we tumbled to it.

"It's thawing!" yelled Tom Merry.

It was! And some parts had thawed more than others, for even as Tommy spoke we found ourselves gliding into a foot of icy water!

A dozen yells rang out, then. They were followed by a dozen splashes as, one by one, we collapsed into the swirling waters of the thawing rink.

And then there was a fresh yell—of laughter!

It came from Monty Lowther!

Lowther was standing on terra firma, fairly howling.

"I've seen the engineers!" he managed to call out. "They're awfully sorry to inconvenience you, but they won't be putting on the ice again till next autumn. At present they're draining it away for the season. Ha, ha, ha!"

The truth came to us in a sort of blinding flash. It was all a jape! Lowther, aware that the ice was being thawed and drained off that afternoon, had deliberately invited us there to give us a ducking, and we'd swallowed his meekly phrased invitation like lambs!

We were simply furious with the fatheaded practical joker, and threatened him with dire punishment when when we get our hands on him.

We staggered through the water to the side to change into our ordinary footwear and make an ignominious exit.

By which time, needless to say, Monty Lowther was far, far away!

Wait till we get him!