

Just Education

Alf approached the table hesitantly. Two or three men sat on benches at each side, holding a serious discussion, rather like a board meeting. Alf indicated an empty place and asked tentatively, 'Can I sit here?'

A rather distinguished-looking man, a sort of chairman of the group, replied, 'Come and join us. You've just arrived, haven't you?'

'Yes,' said Alf, taking his seat.

'One of the Maths and English O-level lot?' asked the chairman.

'No, it's the full five O-levels, including Maths and English.'

The chairman was impressed, 'So what did you do to earn that?'

'Well, I was doing a jewellers shop and got interrupted. I hit the guy rather hard and put him in hospital.'

The chairman smiled, 'Be careful who you hit in here. You might end up in hospital yourself.' He added, 'Well. Let me introduce myself. I'm James Edmunds. I'm here to do a Ph.D on computer control of machinery.'

'Blimey,' was all Alf could say.

One of the other men asked, 'What's *your* name?'

'Oh, Alf Turner.' He looked with respect at James Edmunds, 'Didn't know they put clever blokes like you in here. You must know a lot about computing.'

'Studied it at University; then went in for computer fraud. But they tracked me down in the end. After the doctorate, I'll get a very well-paid job in industry.'

'Going straight?' asked Alf.

James Edmunds smiled again, 'I hate to say it, but that's what the good guys want us to do. When you have your five O-levels, they'll help you get a decent job.'

The other man spoke again, 'I've just passed a couple of A-levels, and they're arranging some interviews for me. They want me out now – as quick as possible.' He corrected himself, 'As *quickly* as possible.'