

Vince and Tony

"Hiya Vincey-boy, how's it hanging?" Carl asked as the door swung open.

"Getting better – had a bad gut last night." Vince replied.

It was 9 o'clock the next day, and his slightly unsettling friend Carl had made a surprise visit.

"Couldn't have been the curry – remember, we had the same meal. Of course, if you can't handle Chicken Vindaloo ..."

"Nah, course I can. I thought at first that it was the chocolate I ate." Vince said, strangely feeling uncomfortable in discussing stolen goods.

"What, chocolate poisoning? Only someone like Neil would get that!" Carl replied.

"You're right. Besides, the chocolate tasted OK. What you up to today?"

"I'm off to Grange Park to hang around with Joe and the others. Nothing special – wanna come along?"

They trundled off and became part of an assembly of young people called a gang. And it is a fact about gangs that they seem to have a compunction to assert themselves. To carry out acts of great daring in order to

legitimise their status. So they decided, in their not so great wisdom, to steal a bicycle.

Now the bicycle they had their eye on was owned by Julian, a gangly youth, who was entirely incapable of defending himself against such a theft.

Minutes later, swiftly removed from ownership of his bright red bicycle, Julian could only watch as Tony, the bullish group member who carried out the broad daylight theft, cycled off with an evil roar in his throat, around the edge of the tennis courts, and stupidly straight into one of the rarest sights you can behold in modern Britain – a policeman on his beat.

The poor constable suffered a bruised shin, but Tony landed so awkwardly that he dislocated his shoulder. And his ego.

Like a puff of smoke, the group disbanded, all but Tony disappearing into the distance. The speed of their retreat benefited from the absence of even the slightest sense of loyalty to the now stranded Tony.

Poor Tony, who was now actually being helped to his feet by the Policeman.

The two of them stood there, vocally exclaiming to all around that they ached. As they groaned and grimaced, Julian gained the confidence to recover his bicycle.

"He nicked my bike!" Julian exclaimed to the policeman.

To which, the policeman asked Tony if this were indeed true.

"It was only a joke - I was just having a little ride and was going to give it right back. Honest I was." he said in his defence.

"Liar - you sneered when you took it." Julian riposted.

Fortunately for Julian, the policeman had indeed witnessed enough of the event to see what had actually happened, so proceeded to accompany Julian home, along with an obviously reluctant Tony. You see, this policeman was less bothered by the formalities of his job, that should have seen him now filling in copious numbers of forms. Instead, he felt the best way to treat the villainous boy was for him to meet the parents of his victim.

This was painful indeed for Tony, for he now had to bear the wrath of Julian's somewhat intimidating father Brian, who proceeded to accompany Tony home. When he arrived, Tony's father, George, was asked on the spot to pay a reasonable sum for damages. He was numbed into doing so by the presence of the policeman.

After George and the policeman had departed, George was left alone with the sullen looking Tony. As if to literally add insult to injury, George dealt out his own punishment.

So Tony felt doubly aggrieved of course. And puzzled also, for he had no idea why he had earlier been unable to avoid cycling straight at the policeman. It was as if he was being pushed inexorably towards his fate.

By contrast, Julian decided that life was not so tough after all, his finances now unexpectedly supplemented by the damages payment.