

One of the Cullens

He was already ten minutes late for meeting Mim, so Glenn bunny-hopped onto the pavement and sped towards the side street. He got to the corner and almost bowled into some guy coming the other way, and Glenn had to swerve back on the road so they didn't crash.

It was no surprise he almost hit into him. The guy was solid. They were maybe the same height but the guy's neck looked as thick as one of Glenn's legs.

'GET ON THE FUCKIN ROAD,' the guy shouted, as Glenn turned up the side street the guy had just walked down. Glenn looked back from his bike and said, 'Oh, do fuck off.'

The man turned and Glenn had never seen someone look so offended before. It was as if everything bad that had ever happened was all because of Glenn.

The man said, 'GET OFF YA FUCKIN BIKE AND SAY THAT.'

But Glenn kept cycling slowly while looking backwards and giving the man some Vs.

The man started to walk and he broke out into a jog and Glenn said, 'Come on, no neck, you could do with a jog,' and the man stopped.

Glenn turned round and went to keep on cycling but he heard the man shout, 'YOU FUCKIN WANKER, GET OFF THE FUCKIN BIKE, IF I EVER SEES YOU AGAIN I'M GONNA SMASH YOU. I'LL FUCKIN SMASH YOU.'

And Glenn just cycled down the side street towards the alley at the other end and onwards to Mim's house. It was no biggie, upsetting a rando, even if he did feel a bit guilty.

* * *

Mim still didn't have the money but he swore down he'd get it sorted. They left the bike at Mim's and walked through town to the Jobcentre, and Glenn got to hear the opening lines his chugger work colleagues used when they didn't recognise him without his Save the Turtles coat. They walked into the Jobcentre, and Glenn nodded at the security guard as Mim took a ticket.

Glenn said, 'I don't miss this place.'

Mim said, 'Can't blame you.'

Mim's ticket said 255 and they'd just called out 241. They got their phones out and started scrolling.

After showing Mim how many hits his latest video had got they heard some shouting coming from one of the booths. They heard a man shout, 'A CHEQUE WON'T FUCKIN DO, I NEEDS MY FUCKIN BRASS TODAY.'

They looked over. The man was standing. He had a shaved head and a neck like a concrete bollard. It was the guy Glenn had almost run into.

'He's never gonna get anywhere,' Mim said. 'When they fuck up you never make demands, you have to tell them you got no money in the world and you're gonna die. Anything but shout at them.'

Glenn put his hood up.

The security guard went up to the man. He mumbled something and the man turned around and pointed and said, 'YOU BEST BACK THE FUCK AWAY OR IMMA FUCKIN SMASH YOU.' The security guard held his hands up and walked back. Mim said, 'Oh shit, it's one of the Cullens.'

The man turned to the desk and snatched the cheque and walked towards them.

Glenn sank down into his seat, but the Cullen walked past without looking at them and went out the door, and everyone started talking again.

Mim said, 'You look like my mum last Christmas when she had gastroenteritis. Go the Spoons round the corner, the toilets here are grim.'

Glenn pulled his hood down and said, 'That's that guy I told to fuck off.'

Mim laughed then choked and started to cough. Glenn got up and filled a cup with water from the cooler. He walked back and held it out as Mim whispered, 'I can't believe you flipped off one of the Cullens.'

'Which Cullen is that one?'

Mim took a sip of water. 'I'm not sure,' he said. 'He's either the one who went down for breaking into a salvage yard and smashing the guard dog with a hammer or he's the one who drove around for four days with that nonce in his boot. They all kinda look the same with that big neck.'

They called 255, and Glenn was left on his own feeling very, very cold.

* * *

Two days later and Glenn was just about hitting target. He needed one sign-up an hour to make bonus, but having Save the Turtles on the back of your coat didn't have quite the same effect on the public as Save the Children did.

He hadn't been able to stop anyone for twenty-five minutes, and he was starting to feel depressed. He was trying to get eye contact with anyone he could, and not just those people he felt like he was an expert at getting to sign, which was basically just blokes exactly like him of about the same age.

He looked up the street past the mums and kids. And then he saw him.

The Cullen was walking towards him, walking like he had stones in both boots, romping and stomping as if he was trying to cover as much ground as possible in a single step.

Glenn turned round. If he could just talk to someone then maybe he could pretend that the Cullen wasn't there. Maybe the Cullen wouldn't notice him or the Cullen wouldn't want to start beef if he had an ally.

He saw a woman with straight black hair and big hoops, and he said, 'I love those earrings, you have to tell me where you got them so I can get them for my sister's birthday.'

'That's what you said to me last week,' she said, and while he thought of something, anything to say, she laughed and said, 'I was in Tenerife last week, I just wanted to see what face you'd make.'

He asked her about her holiday, and about the earrings and she told him she got them from Claire's Accessories and he thanked her, and the Cullen still hadn't walked past so he slid into his turtle spiel as if it was the most natural thing in the world. She kept looking over her shoulder as if she had somewhere to be, but she listened to every word he said and he was going wildly off script and talking about his videos even. And he realised that they had something of a

rapport, and he couldn't remember if the Cullen had even walked past or not cos he was too busy getting lost somewhere in her eyes.

He remembered about his target and went back to script. He said, 'Does supporting our work saving the turtles sound like something that would interest you?'

'I'm gonna have to say no,' she said.

He looked behind him. The Cullen was gone. The rest of his team were all in conversations and Bryce the new team leader was nowhere.

He said, 'Does going for a drink sound like something that would interest you instead?'

She smiled and picked up his lanyard with his name on it and said, 'I'll find you on Facebook.'

He watched her walk away into the crowd. Three minutes later, he got a friend request through from Hannah Tremayne.

That afternoon, he had the most sign-ups on the team.

* * *

They met late on the Saturday afternoon for a coffee, but they soon shared a bottle of red over some tapas, and they didn't stop talking once. Hannah lived by herself and she wasn't scared to tell him that she had not long come out of a long relationship (and after the second glass that Glenn shouldn't worry, she split up with him) and Glenn thought that the way this was going, he would be seeing this flat she lived in pretty damn soon.

They left the tapas place and they were feeling merry but they were still too full for dancing. Glenn took her to the Spoons next door because it was the closest place, and they could get a booth to themselves. The bar was three deep. Glenn was just looking at the gin on the shelf when Hannah said, 'I'll go save us a booth,' and she walked away without waiting to hear his answer.

Funny how she walked away like that, he thought. But fair enough.

He got near the front and somehow elbowed his way to the bar. He ordered two Singapore Slings and as the bartender turned to make them he heard someone down the line say, 'NO, I GAVE YOU A FUCKIN TWENTY.'

He looked over. There, speaking to one of the managers in a black shirt, was the Cullen.

He turned his face to the right and looked down. He told the bartender to keep the change.

He went back to the booth the long way round so he wouldn't have to walk past the Cullen. He was still arguing with the manager when he left.

They were practically necking their drinks as they talked, and he felt her knee touch his and she didn't move it away. Glenn forgot all about the Cullen. But then they heard a solid slap and a few people at the bar started shouting and Glenn looked over.

The manager was being dragged over the bar while a bouncer was trying to get two Cullens off him. The other one was definitely a Cullen because he had the neck like a demijohn. The Cullen Glenn knew turned to look at the bouncer and elbowed him once and the bouncer dropped to the floor. He turned back and grabbed the manager with both hands and the two Cullens dropped him on their side of the bar.

Glenn heard him say, 'I TOLD YOU IT WAS A FUCKIN TWENTY BUT YOU HAD TO GET ALL FUCKIN SMART.'

Glenn wanted to leave, but he didn't know if he had any power in his legs.

'I can't be arsed with this,' Hannah said. 'I've had enough of town. Come back to mine and have a coffee.'

Glenn felt his back straighten. They grabbed their coats and walked towards the door. The other two bouncers had joined in. The Cullen Glenn didn't know was wrestling on the floor with another guy in a dark blue shirt and the Cullen he did know was punching two of the bouncers. Hannah walked slow and kept turning back to see.

'You know who that is, don't you?' Glenn said.

Hannah stopped walking. She turned to look one last time, then looked at Glenn like she was trying to see what was behind his face.

'He's one of the Cullens,' she said.

* * *

Their taxi pulled up on a Victorian terrace full of brightly coloured doors overlooking some school playing fields. Glenn got his tenner in the driver's hand first. Hannah let him in then closed the front door quietly, and whispered that she didn't want to wake the old grump on the first floor, and they walked through to the kitchen at the back.

She put a slug of whisky and a teaspoon each of sugar and instant coffee in a mug as the kettle boiled. They sat down at the kitchen table.

'So you can't just want to be a chugger,' she said. 'Tell me what you would do if you owned your own house and all your bills were paid for.'

He started to tell her about his videos, and how if he had the money and the studio he would create Gilliamesque stopmotion animations that took ten hours to create one minute of film but he wouldn't care, it would be all he would do, and she didn't take her eyes off him and he realised that she had somehow moved closer and there was something of a knowing smile on her face, and she sipped her coffee and she was closer still, and he was still going on about his hopes and dreams and he could practically feel her breath on his cheeks she was so close, and he realised that he could probably be saying anything right now and neither of them would remember or care, because the important thing was that he was saying it to her.

And he had just run out of steam and they were so close and he leaned in but he heard a bang and a bang and she turned her head, and they heard a bang and a bang again, and she got out of her chair and walked out the kitchen.

And it was all going so well.

He walked into the front room. She hadn't turned the light on. He heard three quick bangs. She was at the curtains, moving one just enough to the side to see what was going on. She flicked it back into place and took a step back.

He could see how heavy she was breathing. She looked up and saw him, and the way she looked at him wide and bright made him realise that, for a second, she thought he was someone else.

She walked over and put her mouth to his ear.

'It's my ex,' she said. 'He hasn't been taking the split very well.'

A bang came from the window and she shuddered. It sounded like the pane was about to fall through. Glenn heard a voice say, 'I KNOWS YOU'RE IN THERE, HAN. I JUST WANTS TO TALK.'

He knew that voice.

It couldn't be.

He went to the curtain as she did. He moved it enough to see outside with one eye.

It was the Cullen. Glenn saw him bang the front door. He was holding one of his arms across his chest.

Glenn felt himself being pulled back from the window.

Hannah said, 'Careful, he's one of the Cullens.'

They crept into the kitchen. Glenn prayed he wouldn't stab a toe in the dark and make some noise.

Still whispering, Hannah said, 'You need to go.'

Glenn said, 'You need to come with me.'

'I need to calm him down before he wakes the whole street.'

They heard the banging again, and the floorboards above them started shifting.

Glenn thought of what he could do. They could hide, as he had at the Jobcentre or in the street when he had met Hannah. Or he could call the police, of course, or get Hannah to do it, but he saw what happened in Spoons and it would defo happen again. He could run away, as he did on his bike, and leave her to her crazy Cullen ex, but he couldn't just leave her here.

Or he could stop running and hiding for once and do the right thing.

He said, 'You got a back garden, yeah?'

She showed him to the back door. He told her to lock it behind her, and he went to the back wall and climbed over into the alley. Then he walked down the longer end and around to the front of Hannah's street.

He could hear the knocking from eight houses away. He wasn't sure what was more of a concern, the thumping on the door or the thumping from his chest.

The Cullen had a fist on the door and he was leaning his head against it. Glenn felt like his heart was about to start mainlining. He stuck to the pavement and said, 'You OK there, buddy? Lost your key, is it?'

The Cullen stayed still. Glenn started to wonder if this was not actually that good an idea.

Glenn took slow steps closer, and then he said, 'Hey, don't I know you?'

The Cullen turned round.

Glenn felt sure that he was about to be ripped apart at the ribcage. But then he noticed the Cullen's arm. The one that was held across his chest. It was dripping blood.

Glenn said, 'Mate, please, let me have a look at your arm. That looks serious.'

He got closer. The cut ran the length of the Cullen's forearm. Glenn wondered if he'd been glassed after they left the Spoons.

The Cullen said, in a voice that almost sounded too small for him, 'I just wants to see my ex.'

Glenn looked at his arm. He understood what it was now. His cut was a cry for attention in physical form. Cullen wanted to show her and say, look, this is what I feel.

He didn't have long. Glenn took off his jumper and took off his T-shirt and put the jumper back on. Then he folded the tee and held it against Cullen's arm and said, 'You need to keep up the pressure.'

Cullen looked at him and said, 'I remembers you now. Sorry about the other day, I was havin a bad mornin. I just had a barney with my ex again, the one who lives here.'

And Glenn swallowed and said, 'No problem.'

It was starting to make sense. Cullen wasn't waiting for him as he chugged. He was waiting to speak to Hannah. Glenn thought of how Mim talked about this Cullen and wondered what Mim would think if he could see him now, broken and drunk and pining for someone who cared for him but didn't love him anymore.

Glenn was just about to suggest that the Cullen got his cut seen to when the Cullen looked up and said, 'You smell tha?'

Glenn said, 'No.'

The Cullen looked at Glenn and lowered his chin and said, 'You smells like her.'

Glenn breathed in. He had to think of something, anything, before the Cullen put two and two together.

He said, 'Mate, no offense now, but I think you got her on the brain. I been workin in KFC all night. All I smell of is fried chicken and sweat.'

The Cullen looked at the floor. Glenn prayed he didn't notice that he wasn't in work clothes. But the guy was a mess.

Glenn thought about all his interactions he'd seen this Cullen have. At the Jobcentre, not being believed in the Spoons, being ignored by his ex in the street, and his own interaction with him on the bike. Every single time, he wasn't in the wrong, and people never took him at his word. All he needed was a bit of understanding.

'You really need to get some stitches in that,' Glenn said quickly. 'Please, go to the main road and flag down a taxi. I don't wanna get involved but if your ex means that much to you then you should see her at your best, not in the middle of the night all covered in blood. You owe it to yourself to be your best around her.'

The Cullen stared at him.

Glenn stared back. If he could keep it up for a second or two without his knees giving in he might not even get smacked.

Finally, the Cullen said, 'Fuck it. You knows what, you're OK, you are, bro.'

Glenn walked with him to the street, and told the Cullen to take care as he walked in the opposite direction. Then Glenn walked back down the alley behind Hannah's street and jumped over her garden wall and knocked gently on the glass till she let him in the kitchen.

He wouldn't stay long. He would just tell her that everything would be OK, and make sure that she didn't feel as lonely as the Cullen.