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Opening extract from

Lottery Boy

Written by

Michael Byrne

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05 DAYS 05 HOURS 19 MINUTES

Bully squinted up at one of the faces of the big, big clock across the river. It was just past six and time for Jack's tea. He pulled the can and metal spoon out of his long coat pocket.

"Here you go… Here's your tea, mate," he said making a big fuss of spooning it out, because there was only jelly in the bottom. Jack sucked it down without chewing.

Jack was a bull terrier, a Staffy cross, but crossed with what Bully didn't know for sure, no one did. That other half was all mixed up bits of other dogs. Her short wiry fur was dark brown around the neck and streaked white and grey everywhere else, making her look like an old dog at the end of her days. She had a Monkey Dog tail, and a wide back with legs that were jacked up at the rear and bowed at the front so that when she sat up she looked like she *really* wanted to hug you. Her head though had little fangy teeth inside so that you didn't *really* want to hug her.

When Bully left the flat in the winter, Jack had come with him. It was the summer now and though she was getting on for two years old and filling out, she was still a funny-looking dog. Not a good dog for begging but to Bully she wasn't for

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begging. She was his friend and as good as family.

"Come on, mate … come on…" Bully pleaded because Jack was still looking at him and now there was nothing much left in the can. Still, he had another scrape round. Then without thinking he slid the spoon into his own mouth. It came on him like that when he was hungry – all of a sudden, catching him out, making him do strange things – like he couldn't control it, like *he* was the animal.

Bully spat it out. The jelly didn't taste so bad but it was the feel of it he didn't like, cold and slimy in the back of his mouth. He rinsed his cheeks out with water and then from habit, to calm himself down, he read the ingredients listed on the back of the tin because he liked things that just told you what they were and didn't try telling you anything else.

Water 65%

Protein 20%

Fat 12%...

He got down to the last ingredient, the only one that he didn't like seeing there: 3% *ash*. And he thought of all the zombies in the factories flicking their fags and topping up the cans. And the other kinds of ash they used maybe, if they ran out of smokes. But at least they were honest enough to put it on the back of the tin.

He went to lob the can into the river but changed his mind when he saw the picture of the dog. It was a Jack Russell. And he liked Jack Russell terriers – a bit too little maybe, a bit too yappy – but what he *really* loved, was seeing Jack's name printed out on the label. It made *his* dog sound important and

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official. Though Jack wasn't technically a dog. *She* was really a girl dog – what they called in the dog magazines a *bitch*. And when he'd found her all that long time ago, last summer, and brought her back to the flat, and Phil had pointed out she was a *girl* … he'd named her *Jacky* straight away before his mum got back from the hospital. Bully, though, hadn't called her that since he'd left the flat. He'd lost the Y, so she was just Jack now.

He put the empty can in his coat pocket and wandered back along the river towards the big white Eye that always looked broken to him – the way the wheel went round without moving, like the zombies stuck up there were waving for help. Jack followed along next to him, every so often nosing his ankles but never getting under his feet. Bully had trained her pretty well before they left the flat. He'd spent weeks just teaching her to *stay*, giving her Haribos and Skittles whenever she did it right. They called that *rewarding good behaviour* in the magazines.

Bully stopped when he got to the skateboard park, sucked in by the clatter of the boards and the laughter. He didn't think much of the place though. There weren't any big ramps or jumps just little concrete ones no bigger than some of the kerbs and speed bumps on his old estate. He didn't even think it was a *real* skateboard park, the way it was squeezed underneath the big fat grey building above. And it reminded Bully of the block of flats where he used to live, in the basement underneath where the rubbish chutes fed down to the bins.

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He still didn't know any of the boys who did tricks. He just came here to watch them laughing and talking and falling off, and then blaming their skateboards for everything. One day he'd rock up with a board that you couldn't blame anything on, with silver and gold trucks and the best decals … and it would be just the best one. He wasn't sure when that day would be but it would definitely be a day.

"Look at 'im," he said, pointing one of them out to Jack. "Shit, in 'e?" Secretly though he hoped that if he just stood there and stared long enough, one day one of them might let him have a go. So far all they'd done was to call him a *germ* and told him to eff off. He didn't know exactly what a germ was in skater speak but he knew it was something little and dirty and *bad*. Though to be fair, when he was here with Chris and Tiggs, Chris had called them a lot worse names and thrown that bottle so that it smashed right in the middle of where they did their crappy tricks.

That didn't happen usually. Usually they just lobbed their empties off the footbridge to watch them float back underneath. Chris and Tiggs were his mates. They said things, making him laugh, going on about girls who were *pigeon* and *breezy*, messing about along the river. Chris sometimes tied a red bit of rag round his head and Tiggs *always* had his big extra ears somewhere on his head, listening to his *sick tunes*. They were both older than him. And they had been all over the place, all over London even up to Brent Cross shopping mall.

He watched the skaters for a bit longer until a short little

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boy, shorter than him, did a *really* crappy trick and fell right off onto the concrete slabs, rolling over and skinning his elbow and rubbing it like that would make the skin come back. Bully started fake laughing. He knew they wouldn't do anything because he had Jack with him but he didn't want the Feds getting wind, so they left and carried on walking towards the Eye.

At the footbridge he stared at the beggar man on the bottom step. He wasn't doing it right. Usually, if you were begging you sat at the top where the zombies stopped to catch their breath. And the man didn't look too good either, shivering in the sun, wouldn't be making much with his head down, mumbling to himself like that but not saying a word. He didn't even have a sign. You had to have a sign if you weren't going to ask, otherwise how was anyone to know?

Bully went round the beggar man and climbed half way up the steps to the footbridge. He stopped and looked back along the river to see if there was anything worth fishing for. The sun was still warm on the backs of his legs and a long way from touching the water, not the best time of day for fishing. There were still too many zombies about, not looking right or left, but leaving town as fast as they could. And in the morning, coming back just as quick. He squinted a little more to sharpen up his eyesight. Everything wriggled in front of him if he didn't squint. He was supposed to wear glasses for seeing things a long way away but he'd left the flat without them, so he just squashed his eyes and squinted instead.

He made out a couple of maybes leaning over the railings,

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looking at the river: a tall girl in shorts and tights with an ice cream, her boyfriend smaller than her, joking about, pretending to rob it off her. Bully left them alone though. Girls didn't like dogs but old ladies did. And there was one! With a nice big handbag on her arm large enough to fit Jack in, staring at buildings across the river, like she'd never seen a window before. He went down the steps on tiptoe quick as he could, nearly tripping over the guy still shivering away on the bottom step and came up on her blind side just as she was starting to move away.

He matched his pace with hers.

"I'm trying to get back to me mum's, but I'm short 59 p…"

"Oh, right," she said but stepping back like it wasn't right.

"I want to go home but I'm short," he said, a little faster in case she got away.

Bully liked to make it sound as if he needed the money for something else, that he wasn't just begging, otherwise they started asking you all sort of questions about what you were doing and why weren't you at school. He'd learnt that.

"So can you do us a favour?"

She looked like she was ready to turn her head away, knock him back with a "no, thank you" but then she looked down and saw Jack there.

"Oh… Is that your dog?"

"Yeah."

"He's well behaved, isn't he?" she said.

"Yeah…" He nodded but only to himself and tried not to pull a face. Of course she was. Bully had taught her to do as

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she was told because that's what you did. You didn't treat a dog *like* a dog and shout and hit it. What you did was … you trained a dog up so that it *obeyed* you, and then you had a friend for life.

"Have you got 59 pence then or what? I wouldn't ask normally." He always said this, though he never really thought about what *was* normal any more. Once an old lady, even older than this one, with a hat and a stick and off her head, had taken him to a café and bought him a fry-up and they'd sat there in the warm for an hour, her telling him things about when she was a girl and lived in the countryside and had her own horse and a springer spaniel, but that wasn't *normal*. Sometimes he got a whole quid out of it, often just pennies and shrapnel. Once he got exactly what he asked for to the penny, a young guy counting it out in front of his mates for a laugh and that had really wound him up.

"How old are you?"

"Sixteen."

"You sure?"

"I'm small for me age, innit," he said.

She made those tiny eyes that grown-ups did when they were having a good look at you from inside their head. He reckoned he could just about pass for sixteen with his hat on. It was a sauce-brown beanie hat with black spots. And it was his. He'd remembered to take it from the flat when he left in the winter. He didn't need to wear it to keep warm any more but it hid his face from the cameras in the station and made him taller. He fiddled with it, pulled it up to a point so that

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in the summer sun he looked like one of Santa's little helpers who was way too big for next Christmas.

He was twelve but getting closer to thirteen now so that he could count out the months in between just using one hand. When he was at little school, he'd been the tallest boy in the year, taller even than the tallest *girl.* And already he was 167 centimetres and a bit. He had a tape measure in one of his pockets he'd nicked out the back of a builder's van and in old-fashioned height that was nearly exactly five feet six. And that was bigger than some grown-up men, and as big as some *Feds*. His mum had been tall but, thinking about it, that was because a lot of the time he'd been small. And she'd worn heels. Platform one and platform two she used to call them. Maybe his dad was tall. Maybe his dad could reach up and touch the concrete ceiling at the skateboard park. Anyway, whatever his dad was, he was definitely going to get taller. That was his breed. He'd decided this, because as soon as he was tall enough, he was going to rob a bank or get a job or something and save up and get a proper place with a toilet and a bed and a TV.

He tuned back in. She was still sizing him up.

"Sixteen … are you *really*?"

"Yeah, I had cancer when I was little and that shrunk me up a lot," he said all matter of fact because cancer did that to you. His mum, after all the hospitals, had never worn heels again.

"Oh, love. You poor love. You go and get home… Look, get yourself a good meal with this and don't go spending

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it on anything else will you?" she said, looking at him now with bigger eyes. Bully didn't like being talked to like that. He could spend it on what he liked if she gave it to him but his face lit up when he heard the crackle of a note coming out of her purse.

When he saw the colour he couldn't believe it. A bluey! Jack could have tins for a couple of weeks off this, the kind she liked with her name on and only 3% *ash*. And he fancied an ice cream and chips for himself and a proper *cold* can of coke from a shop. He hadn't had a proper can in weeks. Bare expensive in London, a can of coke was. A total rip-off. That was the first thing that had really shocked him when he got here on the train: the price of a can of coke.

"There," she said. "You get home soon." She smiled to herself as if she was the one getting the money and walked off towards one of the eating places on the river.

"Cheers, yeah. God bless ya," he said after her. He thought that sounded good. It was what the Daveys said: the old shufflers on the streets with spiders up their noses and kicked-about carpet faces. He called them that after one of them had told him his name was Dave. He'd asked for a lend of Bully's mobile and Bully had run away and steered clear of all of them after that.

Jack growled, her quiet warning one, under the radar just for Bully. He looked up, the queen still smiling at him from off the twenty-pound note. But he lost his smile when he saw who it was, and the dog he had with him. Bully told himself he mustn't run – worse for him later if he did because there

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was Janks with his eyes shaded out and his lizard grin that said: I know *you*.

Janks robbed beggars all over London town. *Taxing* he called it. He didn't even need the money, just got a kick out of it, that's what they said. They said he'd come down from *up north* and made his money dog-fighting and breeding all sorts of illegals, and *the rest* they said. You never saw him out and about with one of his illegals. Too many Feds. But doing his rounds in the day he always had one of his pure-bred pit bulls with him.

Nasty animals. There were a few breeds Bully wasn't keen on but the only dogs he despised were pit bulls. He didn't like anything about them: the way they strutted about, looking for trouble with their long, shiny, burnt-smooth faces and tiny, beady black eyes. And they had this thing, so they said – everybody said – this click in their jaws like a key in a lock that meant once they bit down and got a hold of you, they never let go. Once on the estate he'd seen an American pit bull turn on the boy walking it and even when his mates had battered it, Old Mac from the newsagents still had to come out with a crow bar and pry it off.

Janks's pit bull was straining on a long leash, choking itself to get at them. And Jack's growl went up a notch and she started taking little snappy chunks out of the air.

"Stay, mate, stay, stay, stay… Mate!"

Bully's top half swayed and twitched like he was a rat with its paws stuck in a glue trap, the rest of him still trying to get away. He'd seen them do that – real rats gnaw their own legs

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off near the bins round the back of the eating places.

He managed to stagger forward just a few steps and kick Jack round behind him because Jack wasn't good at backing down. It was one bit of her training she struggled with. She was fine round people – most people anyway – just some dogs rubbed her up the wrong way.

"You's done well…" Janks said, getting in close so that Bully felt the words on his face. He spoke in a funny way, the words seesawing up and down, the way they did up north. His dog snapped at Jack's face and Jack snapped back and Bully gave her another punt with his toe.

"I taxed you before, didn't I?" said Janks. He pulled Bully's hat off and let it fall. The pit bull instantly went for it – like a nasty game of fetch – and started tearing it apart.

"Grown, 'aven't ya?" he said, ignoring what was going on at his feet.

Bully was close to Janks's height now. When he first got to the river in the winter time, a long time ago, this man with the same stickleback bit of hair, the same "nice to know you" smile, had asked for a loan. And when Bully had said no, he'd taken his money anyway and given him a kicking, as if that was paying him back.

Bully had managed to keep out of Janks's way since then.

"You want to mind *that*," he said, nodding down at Jack. "My dog'll rip that thing of yours apart. You don't want to start facing up to me with a dog, boy."

Bully just stood there, too frightened to work out whether to shake his head or nod.

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"Calling me out, are you, big man? You giving me the *eyes*?" And Janks jerked Bully's head down in the crook of his arm, pushing his face into his jacket so that Bully could *smell* him – a sort of sharp, sniffy smell like that stuff his mum used to spray round with – and he did his best to breathe through his mouth.

"Stay! Stay, Jack!" Bully's muffled voice just about made it out of the headlock.

"Yeah, that's right. Good *boy*," said Janks, squeezing his neck harder still.

Bully twisted his head to breathe, looked down and saw daylight at Janks's feet. Everyone knew he had a cut-down skewer inside his boot. He'd used it once on a guy, a big fat flubber who wasn't showing him any respect, that's what Chris and Tiggs had told him. And he imagined it happening the way his mum used to do their spuds in the microwave, stabbing them with a fork, quick, before putting them in: *stab, stab, stab*.

"What she give you?"

"Twenty…" he said to the feet. He heard a dog yelp.

"Well, lucky for you that's what you owe me."

"Mate…" he pleaded.

"Who *you* talkin' to? I'm not your *mate*."

Bully felt the crook of Janks's arm cut into his wind pipe and he started making alphabet sounds like he was a little kid. *K … k … k … a … a … r … r.* His head was thumping because the blood was getting stuck in it but he couldn't say anything, not even sorry, and he felt faint and his legs began

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to go, making it worse for him.

And then suddenly he could breathe.

"Re-lax … *re-lax*, man…" Janks was patting Bully hard on his back, like he was helping him to cough something up. Bully pulled away, dazed like he'd been trapped underground for a week. He wobbled a bit and saw what Janks was seeing: a couple of fake Feds in high-vis: Community Support Officers standing away by the footbridge with their backs to them, talking to the beggar man.

Bully looked back at Janks who was staring right through him. Then he looked down, saw Jack at his feet, blood dripping off her ear, and his anger roared up quick like a paper fire. And while he waited for it to burn out he thought about what he'd do to Janks one day when he was robbing banks or had a job and was a whole lot bigger than him.

Bully handed the note over and Janks took it without a word. Then he heard a terrible sound: Janks screwing up his twenty quid into a ball because there was only one thing you did with a ball… And Bully watched Janks walk over to the railings and flick his money into the river.

"Don't keep me waiting next time. *Mate*," he said, smoothing his bit of hair down, a gust of wind blowing it straight back up again. Bully nodded down at the ground, paid his respects and looked away.

When Jack stopped growling, Bully picked his hat up, ripped apart and slick with dog spit, and shoved it in one of his pockets. He checked Jack's ear. It looked worse than it was. Janks's dog had only managed to take a nick out of it.

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He used the rest of his water to wash the blood off, then gave Jack a squirt of it.

"You got to learn when to back down, mate," he said. Jack didn't seem to be listening, too busy licking Bully's face. "Get off," he said but didn't push her away. He rounded up some of the spit off his cheek and swabbed the wound on her ear because dog spit was good for cuts, as good as medicine (though he had never seen this printed in the magazines).

Eventually he stood up, went and took a long look in the river. He thought maybe he could still see it, a spec of blue, his twenty quid, sailing away under the bridge and out into the sea. The tide was going that way. He caught himself thinking about jumping in after it though he couldn't swim, not even doggy paddle. He'd bunked off the school swimming lessons at the leisure centre because he didn't like the noise there in the pool, all the screaming and shouting. He bunked off school too, for the same reason: having to sit still at a desk, questions and answers from thirty other kids all day, right next to his ears. He could just about put up with it when he had his mum to come home to at the end of it all, but after she'd died it was all just empty noise.

He looked back towards the footbridge and one of the fake Feds was looking at him. Bully started walking off, whistled Jack to follow him, getting in step with the zombies until he could cut through between the eating places and make for the station. He thought about taking one of the tunnels to be on the safe side but he didn't like tunnels even in summer. He didn't like going under the ground if he could

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help it. Besides, he'd got used to his route: past the fountain that wet the pavement on windy days, across the traffic lights, through the arch, up the steps where the dead train drivers' names were scratched into the walls, and into Waterloo.

Waiting at the traffic lights, he leaned against the railings. He watched a few zombies get ahead of the game, beat the lights, hop and skip between the cars like kids out for the day. He fiddled with one of the red rubber bands he wore on his wrists. He collected them, picked them up off the pavement and at busy times, fired them at the zombies as they raced away. It was a game he played. He'd invented different ways to do it too – and so far, he'd come up with seven. His favourite though was to just ping it off his thumb. And that was what he did … *ping*. A zombie just stepping off the kerb slapped the back of his neck and looked round. Bully gave him the innocent face.

"Big Issue… Help the homeless… Big Issue…" A woman with soft brown eyes was standing a few feet away. She was here most days in the summer now. And he had got used to her.

The green man came and went but Bully wasn't in a rush. He had all day, what was left of it anyway. He did a quick check for Feds, then started patting himself down. He did this ten, twenty times a day depending on the weather. It had become a routine, going through his pockets, making sure he had all his stuff, that he was all there. And it passed the time when he was bored because his coat had a lot of pockets. He'd robbed it from a bag outside a charity shop, leaving his old one there in its place. It was the best coat he'd ever had.

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Barbour it said on the label. It was warm and padded like a blanket inside but with a green and greasy skin to it that stopped the wind and rain like a brick wall. It had been way too big for him in the winter but he was growing into it now and the edge of it left a greasy mark on his jeans just above his knees. The best bit about it was the pockets. He'd never seen a coat like it. It had eleven altogether. The biggest one was like a rubber ring with holes cut in it that ran all the way round the bottom inside. And he'd cut holes in the two for his hands so that he could stash stuff in his jeans without anybody in the shops seeing.

"Big Issue… Help the *hopeless* … homeless, I mean," she said, correcting herself but no one heard her except Bully. He laughed – not nasty like he had done at the skateboard park because the lady had her long brown hair in a ponytail, like his mum used to wear it when she was working.

He started pulling out his usual bits and pieces he had on him all the time: sugar packets, salt packets, paper serviettes, tape measure, Jack's metal spoon, plastic spoons, two cigarette lighters, penknife, extra elastic bands, sauce packets, towel scrap, Jack's hold-all (bigger and tougher than a plastic bag), plastic bags, biros, crisp packets (empty), Jack's lead (and a *proper* one too, not a tatty bit of string), chewing gum (chewed and unchewed), a pack of dog Top Trumps (best of breed) and his receipts. They weren't *his* receipts. He just collected them, went looking for them on the ground, sometimes fished them out of bins. He read them out of curiosity to see what it was that people bought in shops

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but the reason he kept them was in case he was ever caught *outside* a shop with something he hadn't paid for. And then if the guard marched him back inside he could say "But I've got a receipt, mate". And see how long they took looking through that lot before they let him off. That was the idea, anyway.

He examined his plastic spoons and threw away a couple with splits in, flicking them all into the road and one of the biros too. One of the zombies gave him a backward glance, twisted her mouth a bit and then looked away. He got out his Oyster card from the little pocket near the collar of his coat. He'd found it by one of the machines when the cold had driven him down into the tunnels to ride the Circle line. It was a while since he'd used up the credit and he looked at it as if it was no longer his. He put it back and got his red penknife out. It was his prize possession and he held it in his palm to admire it. Inside were two blades: one big, one small. On the outside was a compass that told you where you were going. And it didn't matter how fast you turned round trying to trick it, it always went back to pointing north and never let you down. He'd robbed it from a climbing shop. The small blade he used for little odd jobs like cutting up plastic containers for Jack to drink from. The big blade he saved to keep it sharp. He'd never done anything with it except to wave it at an older boy as he was running away.

He put his penknife back in his jeans and carried on looking, hoping to find a coin, a note, anything with a face on it and he was almost finished now, pulling things out and putting them away. Finally then, to wrap things up, he got

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out his card. All the corners were bashed in so that it didn't look like a card any more but he could still see what it said on the front. There was a picture of a face, a lady's face he'd decided, though it had just a squiggle of hair, whispering to someone inside the card. It made you want to open it. But he didn't, not yet. He read the words on the front first, like you were supposed to. He always read the words.

I've got something to tell you…

He moved away from the railings, further back from the road, and opened it up. The face on the front was the same face inside but much bigger with a real-looking mouth cut into the card and a red paper tongue. And he concentrated on the words that were going to come out of this mouth.

… I love you … I love you so much … I love you more than … more than anyone … more than anything else in the world… Happy Birthday Bradley! Happy birthday love… Lots and lots and lots of love from your mummy…

And then the best bit, the bit he always waited for at the end: the kisses.

Mmpur, mmpurrr, mmpurr… Mmmmmrrr…

Her voice was starting to sound a bit Dalek-y, like the batteries were starting to go and he wondered if he should stop doing this every time he went through his pockets.

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Bully looked around and one of the zombies waiting at the lights was smiling at him with pity eyes. He gave her a murderous look and clapped the card shut. As he did he heard a little *plinky* noise above the traffic. He opened the card back up and it said nothing. He frantically flapped it open and closed a couple of times before he could accept it was broken. Something had fallen *out*. He swore a lot and bent down scanning the pavement, waving a fresh pile of zombies away like it was a crime scene.

He saw the little roundness of the battery sitting on the pavement and he picked it up very carefully with the tips of his fingers. The slot where it went must be somewhere inside the card. He put his fingers in the mouth and felt something crinkly behind the paper tongue. It wasn't money: too papery, too thin. It *looked* like a receipt when he pulled it out but when he unfolded it he saw it was just a lottery ticket.

It must have got stuck there somehow. He didn't remember finding it. Still, worth checking it out, and it would take his mind off thinking about the money he'd lost to the river.

05 DAYS **04** HOURS **35** MINUTES

The girl at the till inside the station scanned his ticket without interest.

She was new. He knew all the staff by sight. She stopped what she was doing and pulled a face like it had broken something in the machine.

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"Gra-ham…" she said and Bully palmed a packet of chewing gum for the fraction of a second she turned her head. An older man came to the till. Bully got ready to run.

"Graham, what does this mean? *Contact Camelot Watford?*" She pointed to the screen.

"Oh, right," he said and gave her a little nod to say he was taking over. Bully craned his neck to see and when he caught the girl's eyes again she was looking at him differently as if he was someone she thought she should recognize.

"What? Does it say I won a tenner?"

"No… It's not that…" said the manager man and Bully swore and began to walk away.

"Heh, no! Hold on a sec—"

Bully turned round and the man surprised him, holding the ticket out, and looking concerned.

"You've won a lot more than *that*."

"Can't you pay me out the till then?" The girl smirked and he gave her a look.

"No, it's not an instant cash prize. It's not something we can pay out of the till. It's too much," he added when he saw the boy's face. "That's all I can tell you really. We just have to go by what's on the screen."

Bully thought about that. How much was too much for the till? He'd seen wads of fifties and twenties when they opened it up to give change … must be at least three or four hundred quid in there … maybe a thousand or *more*.

"This is your ticket is it then?" The man had pulled a look over his face, tried to make it sound like he was just asking,

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like he didn't really care.

"Yeah … someone else bought it though," he said in case he didn't believe a boy like him could afford to be buying tickets, and then he remembered. It must be *that* ticket. And the memory of it, suddenly sharp in his head after all these months started to hurt again and work him up. He looked round the busy shop to make sure of his exit.

"Well, someone needs to phone the number on the ticket..." The man slowly handed it back to him. "Or we can phone from here if you like? If you've got I.D.?"

"Nah, it's OK," Bully said. He didn't want anyone turning up and asking questions, all sorts of questions.

"You'd better get moving—"

Bully cut him off. "I'm going, all right!" he said, misunderstanding the man's tone.

"No, the ticket, I mean. There's a claim limit on it."

"What? You only just looked at it!" Trying to rip him off.

"No, it starts from the date of the draw … 180 days … there, see?" He leaned over the counter and pointed out the faint date on the ticket. "That's February 16th," he said as if Bully was stupid. Bully knew what day that was, didn't need to look at the numbers to know that day.

"Are you sure you don't want me to phone Camelot for you?"

Bully shook his head like he was Jack with a rat in her mouth and then when he was sure he'd said no, out came a question.

"What happens to it then – to the winnings – if no one

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phones up in time?"

"Well…" the manager man said, considering it. "I'm not sure but I think it just goes back into the prize fund or to charity or something…"

To *charity*? Why would they want to go and do that? Waste all his money on little kids and wheelchairs.

The man carried on talking but Bully wasn't listening now. He was looking at his ticket. What day was it, today? He looked at the green numbers on the till screen. 6.45 p.m. it said one side, 09/08/13 on the other. What day was *that* though? All of a sudden he couldn't understand what the numbers meant. He *was* stupid.

He turned round and looked at one of the papers to give him a proper day with a name to it. Today was Friday. And it was the 9th of August. He counted the months out on his fingers from February to August. It was nearly six months. So how many days was that? There were some months with more days than others in them and he tried to get a rusted-up rhyme going in his head. February had 28 days except in a leap year. He knew that because his birthday was February 29th. And really he was only three. It was a bit like dog years: one of his years equalled four of everyone else's.

He looked at today's date again. It was too complicated to work out so he just did six thirties to average it out. But he couldn't do that either. So he tried six threes instead which were eighteen and then added a zero. That was 180 already! He was frightened then that he'd already run out of time.

But the man was smiling at him. "It's five days you've got –

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well, six if you include what's left of today – that's how long you've got left on the ticket," he said. He leaned over the till and the look on his face changed: like he wanted to tell him something that he didn't have to, that wasn't part of his job.

"And I'd keep it quiet if I was you ... until someone puts your claim in at Camelot…"

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