



BRIGHT LIGHTS
AND DARK CORNERS

THE
**JOHNNY
GREAVES**

STORY

with Adam Darke

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Chapter One
On the Edge

February 2020

I WAS stood on a small grass verge with tears running down my face. My hands were gripping the railings in front of me so tightly that my knuckles had turned white, the scars from more fights than I could remember just about visible in the fading light.

‘Go on then, fucking do it you coward.’

I was speaking out loud but nobody was there to hear me.

The wind was blowing hard in my face, making my eyes water, and my arms were shaking violently. I knew I must be cold, but inside I felt nothing.

Out in front of me the winter sun was starting to drop below what looked almost like the ocean’s end on the horizon. The coast path stretched out in either direction but not a soul was in sight; just me and a sheer drop into what looked like an angry sea below.

I imagined my body floating, feeling peaceful for a while. Knowing what was coming but not being afraid.

Pain was ok. I had lived with pain all my life. Besides, it would be quick. Just a moment in time and then it would be done.

Vicki and the kids were back at the hotel waiting for me. I looked at my phone and there were seven missed calls and a load of messages. Every text sounded more worried than the last.

‘Johnny are u ok?’

‘Can you call me please?’

‘Johnny this is not ok’

‘The kids are worried now John, where are you?’

‘Johnny answer your phone!!!!’

‘I’m sat here crying John, please’

Over the last couple of days I’d been feeling more and more paranoid. We had come away to Norfolk with a load of Vicki’s family, to a resort on the seafront called Potters, just down the coast from Great Yarmouth.

The kids were 15 and 12 at the time, and both had been really excited about the idea of a change of scene. East London was our home but it always seemed to be so grey and miserable. You couldn’t breathe in amongst the shitty housing estates and high-rises. Everyone needed a break and here there was fresh air, the sea, a bit of open space as well as swimming pools, entertainment, and live music every night. Not that any of those things appealed to me.

I remember I had felt nervous before we set off. I just didn’t feel myself. There was a tightness in my chest and a sense of anxiety in my stomach but at the same time I felt flat. Numb.

Vicki kept asking what was wrong and I'd tell her I was knackered from work. I was doing long hours painting and decorating around London so that seemed a valid excuse. Once we had arrived, I did my usual trick of drinking until I couldn't think or feel anymore.

After a couple of days, the booze wasn't having its usual impact. I was waking up feeling tired and hungover, which then led to even more anxiety and paranoia. I couldn't cope with the people around me or the thoughts inside my own head.

I was getting more and more agitated as the days passed. I'd never thought Vicki's family liked me very much but now I was becoming really insecure. Every little comment, every look I felt they were giving me, made me feel more and more uncomfortable. Vicki and me had been together for nearly 25 years and I knew them as well as my own family, but suddenly it all felt unsteady and I wasn't sure who to trust.

We had spoken about my worries and she kept reassuring me that her family liked me, but it wasn't making any difference. In my mind, I was the outsider, the bad egg, the bloke who wasn't good enough for their daughter. Repetitive thoughts kept playing on a loop, like a scratched record:

'They think you're fucking scum.'

'They think you aren't good enough for their daughter.'

'They think you're a shit dad.'

I wanted the voices to stop but they kept on and on, over and over in my mind. Then it would escalate and I'd feel

like my whole life was a failure. The idea that nobody liked me. That everyone was better off without me.

I'd made my excuses that afternoon and said I needed a walk to clear my head before dinner. That wasn't unusual for me, so Vicki had just shrugged and told me not to be too long. I wandered for maybe 20 minutes until there was nobody around and it was quiet. Maybe a bit of time away from people would help.

But the voices in my head didn't stop. They never stopped.

So I kept walking, without any idea what I was searching for. Usually it was booze or drugs but now even they didn't work. I headed along the beach and then followed the coastal path to the top of a hill that overlooked the North Sea. It was wet and muddy from the winter rain and I fell a couple of times, swearing and scrambling back to my feet, pulling myself up using the branches around me, determined to reach the summit.

As I got to the cliff edge, breathing heavily from the climb and soaked through, I noticed how cold and dark the sea looked, the last of the afternoon sun disappearing quickly. Nobody would notice if I slipped away now, would they? Maybe they wouldn't even find my body.

I wasn't scared of dying. I was more scared of living, of letting everyone down. I'd always let people down.

I looked at the phone again. Another missed call from Vicki. I put it in my pocket and stepped a little nearer the edge; the wind pushing me back as if it was trying to

convince me to reconsider. I could hear my teeth chattering, through cold or adrenaline I wasn't sure.

I closed my eyes for a moment and thought about Ted and Ruby. Fuck. I collapsed to my knees, sobbing now. I just didn't want to go on. I wanted to end this here, for them. They didn't need a fuck-up of a father in their lives. Vicki could find a better man who could look after her financially. She would meet a bloke with a proper job and a few quid. My parents would be relieved too. They wouldn't have to worry about me all the time. I was a constant burden to everyone. I was pathetic. Just a pathetic excuse for a human.

I went to climb over the railings and something stopped me. I heard the sound of music from across the water and saw the disco lights from the resort. I pictured Ted and Ruby dancing and smiling, having a good time. Then I imagined someone telling them Daddy had gone. I imagined them finding my bloated, bloodied body, washed up on the beach. In my mind I pictured them screaming and falling on the sand ... and a switch suddenly went in my head.

The last bit of sun had fallen below the level of the ocean and I stood and listened for the sound of their voices. For a second I thought I could hear their laughter, or maybe Vicki calling my name. I sat down on a bench and got out my phone. Another three missed calls from Vicki. I messaged her:

'Heading back now, sorry.'