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THE COLWYN BAY KILLINGS



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To Neil, Sam, Mia, Macy and Tracey x

'No man has a good enough memory to be a successful liar.'

Abraham Lincoln

'To be born in Wales, not with a silver spoon in your mouth, but with music in your blood and with poetry in your soul, is a privilege indeed.'

Brian Harris

'Football is a staggering, heartbreaking, gorgeous, tommy-gun of soul-deadening, evil and beauty and I'm never sleeping again ever ever.'

Ryan Reynolds

PROLOGUE

April 2021

It was a mild spring night as the young man tried to navigate his way through the log cabins of the Pen-y-Bryn Holiday Park. In his twenties, he was tanned, lithe and handsome, with a mop of curly black hair that framed his oval face. Finding it hard to concentrate or focus, he looked up to the clear sky where the moon sat between two bright stars. It felt like it was looking down at him. For a moment, there seemed to be a face on the moon's surface. One of the eyes winked at him. Shaking his head, the young man looked up again, but the face was gone. Was he seeing things?

Taking a step, he lost his footing for a moment but then regained his balance. He took a long, deep breath of fresh air in the hope that it would clear his head. Searching his memory, he knew that he'd been drinking for most of the evening but the dizziness just didn't feel like drunkenness.

Turning around, the young man surveyed the Pen-y-Bryn Holiday Park which was located on the North Wales coastline, just north of Colwyn Bay and a few miles south of Rhos-on-Sea. Colwyn Bay was a seaside resort that expanded in the Victorian era and overlooked the Irish Sea. Its famous pier was built in 1899 and included a 2500-seater pavilion.

The holiday park itself was relatively upmarket with a range of wooden cabins, as well as yurts and tee pees for those who wanted to go 'glamping'. It offered a variety of activities – archery, high ropes, pitch and putt, tennis – as well as bike hire.

I think it's this way, isn't it? Why can't I seem to remember?

Trying to get his bearings, the young man staggered along the footpath. In the distance, he heard the raucous laughter of a group of women sitting around a fire pit. He'd spent time with them earlier in the evening, but he wasn't going to go back. Not in his current state.

His head started spinning again. He really needed to lie down and sleep.

Then he got the eerie sense that someone was watching him from beyond the trees on the far side. Staring over, it was impossible to see if there was actually anyone standing there or if it was just his imagination creating the ghostly dark shadows as the branches moved in the silvery moonlight.

Looking down at the key fob in his hand, he saw that the key belonged to Cabin 5. Scanning his eyes left, he saw that he was now standing outside Cabin 7.

Nearly there, he thought, trying to focus his mind. He seemed to have no memory of the previous few hours. Had he really drunk that much? Or had someone spiked his drink? He was a man in his twenties so why would anyone spike his drink? *Was that even a thing?*

He took another step forwards. His legs felt like lead. It felt as if he needed to reach down and move the legs forwards with his hands. Then he laughed to himself at the strangeness of that thought.

Wow, I am seriously fucked. What's happening to me?

Dazzling lights shone from behind and he turned to see headlights. A car was speeding along and clearly not sticking to the 5 mph limit. Teetering off the road, the young man jumped out of the way as the car sped past, loud music and a thudding bass coming from its open windows.

Who the fuck was that?

Looking up, he saw the small wooden steps that led up to the door of Cabin 5. He held the thick handrail tightly as he took each step slowly, before trying to put the silver key into the lock. He could feel the rough grain of the wood beneath the palm of his hand.

It seemed to take an eternity for him to focus enough to slide the key into the lock but eventually the door opened.

I'm in. Thank God!

He slammed the door shut behind him, stumbled inside, shaking his head to see if he could clear it. Flicking on the light, he staggered into the living area that had a kitchen attached. The shape of the furniture and the kitchen cabinets seemed to blur around the edges. He had double vision.

Has someone given me Ket or something?

He took unsteady steps towards a long, inviting looking sofa and then let himself fall onto it. Nestling his face in a thick cushion, he sighed with relief.

Ah, that's so much better. I'll just stay here and sleep this off.

CHAPTER 1

What the hell is going on? Where am I?

Detective Inspector Ruth Hunter of the North Wales Police was struggling to work out where she was and why she couldn't open her eyes. Her eyelids felt like they had been glued shut.

Jesus! Why won't they open?

All she could hear were loud voices. She could sense people grabbing at her arms and chest and moving her.

What are they doing? This is horrible.

Then there was a crushing sensation on her chest. She couldn't breathe. It felt like an elephant was laying on her chest.

Bloody hell, this is agony! In fact, it's more painful than being shot.

Then she heard a man's voice. 'I'm going to need three milligrams of epinephrine please nurse. As quick as you can.' There was a sense of urgency in his voice.

A sharp pain in her forearm made her wince.

But then the panic started.

I can't get my breath! I'm suffocating.

She tried as hard as she could to drag the air into her lungs.

Nothing.

And then she started to get flashes of memory.

The events of the day began to play out in short bursts.

Earlier that afternoon, Ruth had been shot by DI Ben Stewart, a corrupt police officer from the Modern Slavery and Human Trafficking Unit, part of the National Crime Agency based in Manchester. It was the UK's primary law enforcement unit against organised crime and human, weapon and drug trafficking. Stewart had kidnapped DC Georgie Wild from Llancastell CID after she had discovered his criminal activities, but they had been stopped close to Menai Bridge. But not before Stewart had managed to shoot Ruth in the stomach.

Suddenly the severe pressure on her chest subsided. It wasn't that she could now breathe again. More that she just couldn't feel anything at all. A lovely floating sensation.

God, that feels so much better.

Then the male voice snapped, 'She's not responding.'

'Stats are dropping, she's gone into VF.'

'Charge the defib…'

'Stand clear… Deliver shock please. And resume CPR.'

The voices began to fade to a mumble before disappearing altogether.

In fact, that feels quite lovely, she thought.

In Ruth's mind's eye, she felt like she was floating up to the ceiling.

Down below she could see an emergency room in the Intensive Care Unit of a hospital. Doctors and nurses were desperately trying to resuscitate someone. As a nurse moved out of the way, she could see who was lying on the bed.

It was her.

The scene was in complete silence.

Jesus. I don't understand, she thought as she tried to make sense of what she could see below.

The heart monitor showed that there was no activity and that Ruth had flatlined. A doctor was performing rhythmic chest compressions as part of CPR.

A nurse rushed forwards with pads that were attached to a defibrillator and then placed them on her chest. Everyone moved back as an electronic shock tried to restart Ruth's heart.

Am I dead? Why do I feel so incredibly calm watching this? Ruth wondered.

On the other side of the emergency room, several figures watched on. A man in his sixties frowned and she realised it was her father who had died many years ago. Next to him, a woman in her thirties. It was Sian. Her partner who had been killed in a police operation three years earlier.

Then the whole tableau below her began to fizz with a white-gold light. The figures became blurred by its brilliance. Everything suddenly slowed as if in slow motion, and then it stopped.

Silence.

Ruth felt overwhelmed by a surge of great peace and serenity. Something was urging her towards the centre of the light, with the promise of such harmony and joy. For a moment she relaxed, as if allowing herself to be taken towards the light and all that if offered.

Wow. This is amazing. I want to stay feeling like this forever.

Then she caught herself as if she'd suddenly realised what she knew was about to happen.

No, no. I want to live. I'm not ready for this.

Everything went black.