

FROM THE BESTSELLING AUTHOR OF THIS BOOK KILLS

RAVENA GURON

MONDAYS

ARE

MURDER

*The worst day
of the week just got
DEADLY*



Seventeen-year-old Kay left her sleepy hometown after the devastating death of her friend, Ivy. But when Kay is forced to come back, she receives an anonymous letter that turns her life upside down.

The letter tells her that there will be a thrill on Tuesday, a wreckage on Wednesday, treachery on Thursday, a fire on Friday, sabotage on Saturday, a stabbing on Sunday – and her murder on Monday.

And if Kay can't figure out who is behind the threats, the worst day of the week is about to get deadly...

RAVENA GURON

**MONDAYS
ARE
MURDER**

USBORNE

*To the authors whose books made me a reader,
which made me a writer*

1

Aunt Sandra died on a Monday.
I've hated Mondays ever since.

MONDAY

2

I grip the faded blue material of the seat as the bus barrels around another corner, my stomach lurching. I'd forgotten that all the drivers in the Longrove area act like they've got a death wish. Or maybe I blocked it from my mind; there's a whole box of memories in my head called Longrove crap that I don't touch - the daredevil bus drivers are the tip of the iceberg.

None of the old people on the bus react as we jolt over a particularly bumpy bit of road - one has some knitting out, the needles clicking together in a rhythmic pattern as leaves start scraping at the windows. We're being driven into a hedge.

The journey from the train station into the town centre is supposed to take fifty minutes, because there are a thousand stops and the route goes through winding country roads - but it looks like we'll be doing it in thirty at the speed we're going. Racing towards Longrove, the town I grew up in. The town my parents moved us out of a year ago because Mum couldn't stand to stay.

And now I'm back, dumped on my Uncle Dara for a week while my parents go on a cruise around France to celebrate their twentieth wedding anniversary - without me. I wouldn't have got in their way; I even said I'd stay in my cabin and just hang out at the pool. Mum snorted at that.

So I'd said I could stay home alone, in our little place in London. I'm seventeen, I'm responsible. Mum actually *laughed* at that suggestion, and then told me she'd already sorted it with Uncle Dara.

"It's only a week, Kay, stop being so dramatic," she said. "I know it won't exactly be pleasant, but you'll be fine." She hesitated, then, like she knew how much it would actually suck for me. But she didn't say it aloud, because Mum doesn't talk about the emotional stuff. She brushes past it, and focuses on my grades, making sure I'm eating all my fruit and vegetables, drinking enough water. Instead, all she said was, "We'll pick you up on Monday." And that was the end of the conversation.

My phone buzzes, and the name Chloe Jiang flashes up. Chloe insisted on putting her full name in when I first saved her number, all formal, in case I got her mixed up with any of the other Chloes in our year group, none of whose numbers I had.

Chloe: Are you there yet?

Me: You sound like my mother.

Chloe: No, I don't. Has your mother asked you if you're there yet?

Me: Of course she hasn't.

Me: I'm still on the bus. Could die on it too. The driver keeps racing around corners like he's hoping something might be coming the other way.

Chloe: Hope you don't die. I don't want to sit alone in physics next year.

I smirk. Part of the reason Chloe and I hit it off when I showed up at school last year, alone and miserable, was the fact that we've both got the same dry humour.

Chloe: Your mum's just busy on her holiday.

Me: Well, that and I'm insufferable and she doesn't want to talk to me.

Chloe: Make sure you bring me some of that fudge you said your uncle's so good at making.

Me: You're supposed to tell me I'm not insufferable.

Chloe: Bring me some of that fudge and I will.

I snort. I know the reason Mum is yet to message me is not because I'm "insufferable". We've just never really... clicked. I know that sounds strange to say about your own mum, but it's true. She's always been into telling me what to do and where to go, and criticizing what I'm wearing, and disliking the fact I don't want to become an accountant, bored out of my mind but with a "nice, steady salary". She never liked that I wanted to figure my future out as I went, not have it all mapped out.

And now she dislikes me because I remind her too much of Aunt Sandra - and how she's not here any more.

It's been one year and six days.

And I'm back in the place Aunt Sandra died.

3

The bus rolls to a stop on the high street. I step out, dragging my suitcase with me. There are pubs, a butcher's, a bakery, an antiques shop – Longrove has it all, if you're a boring middle-aged person. On the opposite side of the road is Longrove's pride and joy – a giant statue of an old guy everyone assumes must have been important three hundred years ago, because he's been memorialized in stone. Only there's no plaque and no one has the fuzziest clue who he was.

There are four people standing in front of the Old Guy, taking photos. Twenty years ago, he was used in the backdrop of a film that bombed both financially and critically, and then got a weird cult following of people who insist there were a bunch of hidden deeper meanings in the script that everyone at the time was too dense to understand. The Old Guy is a real draw for tourism in the town – well, the only draw. Aside from the fact that there are some decent country walks, if you like that kind of thing, and it's a lot cheaper to stay in Longrove than the Cotswolds.

I walk along the pavement, making space for a woman with a dog that looks like a giant rat. The dog growls at me, and the woman frowns, like I've done something to personally offend them.

Uncle Dara's house is about twenty minutes away, and one of the wheels of my suitcase is close to popping off. I slow down as I turn off the high street into a residential area – I'm not sure I have the core strength needed to lift my suitcase if it comes to it, so I've got to be careful. The back roads are quieter – it's weird compared to London, like a ghost town. And even though this was *my* town a year ago, I feel like a stranger to it now.

I pass Rosemary Avenue. Our old road, with our old house. My parents let it out instead of selling it, because that was quicker – some other family lives there now. Some other girl might even have my bedroom, looking out onto the fields. We left the walls a hot pink and deep purple, a poor decision that my mother allowed me to make when I was six and then never let me undo. She won't trust me to stay home alone for a week while she swans off to France, but she absolutely maintains that six-year-old me knew exactly what she wanted – bedroom wall paint so bright it practically glows in the dark.

But it's when I turn down Honey Drive that I stumble – because there is number nine, the little house that used to be a large one, until it was split into two cottages years ago. The house I used to enter every day after school. There is Uncle Dara's bright yellow door, standing out against the ordinary white of the other houses.

There's Ivy's house next door. The companion cottage at number eleven.

A fist squeezes my heart – I've tried my absolute hardest not to think about Ivy since last year. Ivy is stored away in that box of memories in my head, in her own separate compartment that's kept double-locked.

I won't be letting her out.

Uncle Dara's yellow door swims in front of me. I don't like being back here – things I don't want to deal with are

bubbling to the surface, instead of being pushed right down where they belong.

My hand shakes as I put my old key in the lock. When I step inside tears prick at the corners of my eyes.

This is Aunt Sandra's hallway, a narrow space she insisted should always have flowers in the windowsill – there are some now, but they're wilted, nearly dead. I can't tell what they were supposed to be. Maybe roses.

I drag my suitcase into the kitchen at the back of the house. The windows and back door look out over the little garden and beyond that, fields. The table has been freshly scrubbed down. Aunt Sandra could have left this room a few moments before; I might just have missed her.

But, no, that's not true. Because the kitchen would never be this clean – she was always experimenting with cooking, coming up with weird and wonderful concoctions. The table would be groaning under papers, notes of hers that she insisted needed to be spread out to help her think. A radio would be playing soft music – she never could deal with silence. Even right at the end, when she lay in bed with scarves tied over her bald head, dying from the cancer, she had the TV on to keep her company.

No – that's a memory I don't want to visit.

The walls are closing in, and all I want to do is run out and leave and never come back. How the hell can Uncle Dara and Nikki still live in this house, with her ghost? Why did Mum make me come here, when she can't even bear the mention of Aunt Sandra's name? She hates me calling her Aunt Sandra – she was supposed to be Masi, since she was my mum's sister, and Mum always thought I wasn't showing proper respect. Aunt Sandra never cared, though.

I take a deep breath, all the memories washing over me—
The kitchen door slams open.

4

I turn in alarm as the door bangs on the wall behind it. Nikki is standing in the doorway, holding up an empty vase. She's dressed in a baggy black T-shirt and jeans, and somehow still manages to look stunning. She's even got her nose pierced – Mum wouldn't let me get one too, because she was worried the piercing would get infected and my nose would fall off. I told her that wasn't possible, but she just huffed and the discussion was over.

“Kay?” Nikki says. “What are you doing here?”

I blink at her. “Er...I'm staying for the week, remember?” No, *Hello, cousin, how delighted I am to see you*. Nikki's never been one for small talk. “Why do you have a vase?”

“You're supposed to come on the fourteenth,” she says.

“It is the fourteenth,” I say. “Did you...think someone had broken in? What were you going to try and do? Display them like flowers?”

“Smash it over their head,” she says.

“Violent,” I say, half-impressed. She's not acted particularly rationally, though – this is Longrove. There aren't break-ins here. Most people don't even lock their front doors. “Great to know how much you were looking forward to seeing me. Where are the balloons? The red carpet? The party?”

Nikki lowers the vase. "You made me promise never to throw you a surprise party again after your thirteenth birthday."

"That wasn't a party. You made everyone dress up as a clown and jump scare me. Even your mum thought it was a bad idea," I say.

"A surprise party *is* a jump scare!" says Nikki. "And you *loved* clowns."

I had loved clowns until I came home one day and ten of them spilled out of the kitchen. After I finished screaming, I did manage to appreciate how much effort Nikki had put in – even convincing Ivy, the queen of cool, to dress up, and inviting a bunch of other people from school I liked. "How have you already lost track of time, anyway?" I say. "Didn't you just finish school last week?"

Nikki places the vase on the counter. "I've been working on an art project – it's a comic that I'm going to enter into a competition. Come see." She turns and heads out of the kitchen without waiting for me to respond. Nikki is my cousin, but she's also basically my sister – she's just a few months younger than me. When I lived in Longrove she'd occasionally come and hang out with me and my friends, but sometimes she would get spiky and then go off and chill by herself. She's never been the type of person to really *need* other people.

We were in the same class at Longrove High – teachers would constantly stick us together, acting like we were twins, since we both had the same sand-brown skin, brown eyes, unruly tangled messes of hair, and the same short build. Except Nikki is athletic, and I can't run to save my life. Someone caught a video of me dancing at a family wedding once and my awkward shuffling is still burned into my retinas.

It felt odd to move away from Nikki – especially so quickly after Aunt Sandra, her *mum*, died. I was used to seeing them

both every day, and I quickly found out Nikki's not the type of person to keep in touch. Or, when she does respond to the messages I send, her replies are clipped. If I didn't know her as well as I do, I'd have thought she didn't want to speak to me – but that's just how she is. She's always fine when she and Uncle Dara come visit, which has been pretty much every school holiday over the past year, and even some random weekends too. Though maybe she's a bit quieter than she used to be.

The living room is a small space with a red rug that takes up much of the floor, a TV in the corner, and a fireplace which obviously isn't lit, considering it's a fresh twenty-three degrees outside, a high for Longrove in the summer. Nikki holds up her drawing pad for me to see. Her designs are erratic, from what I remember, and it looks like she hasn't changed. She's sketching some sort of...sheep...with a shark's head.

"It's great," I say, and I mean it. It's really weird, but it looks cool and my drawing skills are limited to blobs in comparison. "Is the guest room made up?" There's a chance it won't be, considering Nikki wasn't expecting me – but surely Uncle Dara knew I was arriving. He'll be at the cafe, dealing with the lunchtime rush, which is why I assume he's not here to greet me.

"I don't know," says Nikki with a frown. "Dad probably sorted it – I wonder why he didn't remind me you were coming today. Or maybe he did... I was looking up some new paints online when he came into the kitchen this morning, so I wasn't really listening..."

My grand return to Longrove is pretty much a non-event to her – she and Uncle Dara last came to London a few weeks ago, so it's not like she's had a chance to particularly miss me. Coming back is only a big deal to me.

"I'll just go put my stuff upstairs," I say. "And then I'll probably go for a walk... Go to the cafe, see the sights. Come

with?"

Nikki snorts. "Next you're going to tell me you want to stare at the Old Guy."

"I want to see how everything's changed," I say. She's right, though – there aren't exactly many sights to see, and she knows the only other draw to Longrove – the hikes – aren't my thing. "Plus, you'd get to spend time with me. You know how much you'd like that. Like old times, you following me everywhere..."

Nikki snorts again, but this time she's trying not to smile. She won't admit it, but I'm probably in her top ten favourite people, below all her weird artist heroes who died about two centuries ago. She's happy I'm here, she just hides it under her don't-care persona. "I didn't *follow* you everywhere, you *dragged* me. Like with the Puzzle Box. I still haven't forgiven you for that."

The Puzzle Box was a birthday present Aunt Sandra came up with for me. It involved traipsing around town trying to solve riddles she had invented herself. I forced Nikki to come along mostly because I wanted some company – I knew she wouldn't bother trying to work out any of the clues. It took a bribe of my birthday present from Mum (a dark chocolate duck) to persuade her to join the adventure, though I was happy to give the duck away – I hate dark chocolate and Nikki loves it.

"I miss you being my assistant," I say, because I know that will wind her up.

"I will kick you," says Nikki. Charming.

"That's not very nice. Remember to respect your elders," I say in a sing-song voice as I lug my suitcase up the narrow staircase, huffing as I get to the top. Uncle Dara's room is opposite me, and Nikki's is in the corner – she used to have hanging beads you would push back, but she's got rid of those now and just has a normal door.

A year ago, the guest bedroom was next to the main bathroom, though no one ever stayed over. My old house was right around the corner, otherwise I would have done, constantly.

I peer inside – it's an office now for Uncle Dara, though there's a dartboard on the wall next to a large flatscreen TV and a very worn, very comfy-looking couch with a stack of books next to it that suggests he doesn't do a lot of work in here. He probably would have warned me if I was going to be sleeping on the floor for a week, though maybe I should mentally prepare for the possibility. According to Mum, sleeping on hard surfaces is meant to be good for your back. That's why she hasn't bought me a softer mattress. That, or it's too expensive.

There's only one more room in the house. Last time I was here, the attic room was being used for storage, but I assume they've done it up and that's where I'll be sleeping. The next set of stairs is behind a white door next to the linen cupboard where Uncle Dara keeps towels and years-old wrapping paper.

When I get to the top, I sigh with relief. When we were little, Nikki and I used to play amongst the dust, cobwebs and stacks of cardboard boxes. Now the attic is a large space with beech floorboards. I spot a single bed in the far corner with towels placed neatly at the bottom, like I'm staying in a hotel.

There's a wardrobe and a desk and an armchair too, and a door that leads to a tiny en suite with a shower anyone taller than me would have to crouch to use. There are two windows set into the slanted roof. It's nice. Much better than the floor.

I head back down to grab my suitcase, then shove it in a corner of the room – there's no point unpacking, I'm only here for a week.

As I survey the room again, I catch sight of a piece of paper in the middle of the bed, almost invisible against the white sheets. I frown – has Uncle Dara left me a welcome note? There's what looks to be some sort of...poem printed on it. Uncle Dara *definitely* didn't leave me this – I can't imagine him reading poetry.

Hello, Kay,

Get ready for the next week, because we're going to play a game. Can you beat me and figure out my identity before the week is up? The stakes will keep getting higher – there's going to be...

a thrill on Tuesday,

a wreckage on Wednesday,

treachery on Thursday,

a fire on Friday,

sabotage on Saturday,

a stabbing on Sunday –

and your murder on

Monday

5

I blink at the note a few times. The words don't change. One word in particular.

Murder.

Your murder.

My murder? As in...my death? This is a note addressed to me, and it's pretty...violent. A thrill on Tuesday sounds okay – and a wreckage could mean...like a shipwreck? How would that work, we're not near the sea, there's only a river running through Longgrove—

Ivy.

A golden-haired girl flashes in my mind, smiling to reveal two perfect rows of teeth.

No.

I focus back on the note. *Stabbing. Murder.*

Hello, Kay. A shiver goes through me. This note is... threatening to kill me. After a week's worth of mostly horrific-sounding threats.

I scan the words again. *Treachery. Fire. Stabbing. Murder.* It's like fifteen years' worth of plot points in a dramatic soap.

There's no way this is serious, surely – maybe it's from Nikki. She's got a dark sense of humour too. Maybe she was pretending to have forgotten I was staying this week, to give

this note more impact. I have to hand it to her, her performance with the vase was Oscar-worthy. I truly thought she was going to lob it at me.

Nikki knows how much I love puzzles, like Aunt Sandra – in her heyday she was a detective, travelling around solving weird murders the police couldn't figure out. Sometimes, she let me pore over some of her solved cases. Mum thought it was morbid that I wanted to hear all about how Aunt Sandra would gather the clues and the motives, how she'd deduce what were red herrings designed to throw her off – how she figured things out and brought the murderers to justice. I never got any of the solutions right – I got too caught up in red herrings, but I loved discussing them with her.

I could see from Aunt Sandra's notes that the cases immediately became less gruesome when she got pregnant with Nikki, and they settled in Longrove. Uncle Dara took a job as a teacher at Longrove High, and they both told Mum and Dad how nice it was here, so my parents followed. Aunt Sandra kept up her investigations as a hobby, the murders turning into: *Is my husband having an affair*, and, *Where did I put my glasses? I simply can't remember*.

So, Nikki having written the note would be a good theory, apart from the fact that this note is threatening to kill me, and as far as I know she actually quite likes me.

Get ready for your murder on Monday.

I know what this is – I breathe out as I come to the obvious solution; Uncle Dara wants me to participate in one of those murder-mystery games Aunt Sandra used to love. We'd all get characters and then have to figure out which one of us was the killer – Aunt Sandra always used to get it right, but that was part of the fun too. Uncle Dara hasn't mentioned anything about playing this, but Aunt Sandra died a year and six days ago. It would be a great way to honour her memory.

I put it on the desk. The week is already looking up – I hope Uncle Dara’s got a really challenging game in mind. I want to be *baffled*. I’ve done half the escape rooms in London, though I’ve had to take a break due to a distinct shortage of interest from Chloe. I *mostly* manage to get out – but the time pressure works against me, because I get bogged down in the weird details. This will be a new test.

In the meantime, though, I’m feeling gross from the train and bus journey, so I have a shower and change into fresh clothes.

Time to visit Uncle Dara’s cafe.

6

The Orange Flamingo stands out compared to the rest of the buildings on Blossom Avenue, which is just off the high street – they're all boring sand-coloured brick. Since I was last here, Uncle Dara has increased the number of plastic flamingos standing guard at the window – there's now an army of eight lined up in a row. He's also introduced tacky bright-green plastic tables on the street in front, with enormous parasols giving shade from the sun.

It was always Uncle Dara's dream to open the cafe. He used to teach history at Longrove High, and when he came home, all he would do was watch baking shows, talk about baking, or actually bake – cakes, bread, biscuits, he could do it all. He and Aunt Sandra finally took the plunge in January of last year – but they only had a few months before Aunt Sandra got sick, and even that short time wasn't sweet.

The Committee (capital C because they're dicks and think they're more important than they actually are) saw to that.

The Committee have been around Longrove for over a hundred years. They are the self-appointed rulers of the town, organizing riveting community events like the Longrove Flower Show, Longrove's Prettiest Garden, Longrove's Best Painted Fence. The Committee takes a cut of the money made, then I guess uses it to run more events,

though unsurprisingly I've never been too interested in the details.

Aunt Sandra wanted to join when she and Uncle Dara first moved to Longrove, eighteen years ago, but they wouldn't let her - she hadn't been born in Longrove, which was apparently an iron-clad requirement for becoming part of the Committee... Like how the American president needs to have been born in America. It's that level of "importance".

The Committee didn't like Uncle Dara opening the cafe, with its bright orange paint that stood out on the road. They didn't like the flamingos, or the fact that the Orange Flamingo is next door to, and competing with, the Blossom, a cafe owned by Jason Halford, a long-standing member of the Committee.

In fact, Jason Halford, a grumpy-looking man in his sixties, is hanging out of his cafe and glaring at me right now.

I hurry inside the Orange Flamingo. It's mostly packed with tourists, with muddy walking boots and bright expressions as they scroll through hundreds of photos of the Old Guy statue on their phone (I assume that's why they look so happy). There're also a few teens sharing slices of cake - I recognize some who were in the year below me at Longrove High. It's a much more welcoming place than the Blossom, because Uncle Dara doesn't care if people linger.

I do a quick scan, and feel a moment of disappointment - no Sophie or Mikey. We lost touch when I left Longrove, after what happened with Aunt Sandra... And Ivy. I didn't know what to say to them.

But some part of me still thinks it'd be nice to see them. Mikey was always cheerful and perky and we had the world's easiest friendship, and Sophie...well, she was the shadow of whoever she considered to be the leader. For a while that was me - and then Ivy. I wonder who she's chosen to fill Ivy's shoes - although maybe she's finally her own strong, independent person.

I doubt it, though. She won't have changed that much in a year.

As I head through the cafe to the counter, someone calls my name.

"Kay." A boy slides out of one of the booths - he's got bright red, straggly hair and pale, freckly skin, and is wearing a cartoon T-shirt over baggy jeans. He frowns as he looks at me.

The memory comes back strong.

A boy trailing after me, Sophie, Mikey and Nikki, as we trailed after Ivy. Liam Maldin. He's grown out his hair and dyed it - when I last saw him, he had a brown buzz-cut and wore plain oversized T-shirts with various joggers.

Liam Maldin, the stalker.

Well, Ivy's stalker.

Ivy said that Liam was following her home and taking photos outside her house. He started at Longrove High as a new kid in year nine - moving from a private school in the next town over - and tried to befriend us. Which I think set Ivy off against him. She had to be the one who decided who was in our friendship group, not the other way around. I wanted to stay out of it, so I just avoided speaking to Liam. I didn't like turning my back on him when he tried to join us at lunchtimes, but I knew the alternative was Ivy icing me out - and it was better to be in the group with Ivy than sitting outside it alone.

Plus, well...Liam developed a reputation for being a liar pretty quickly. They were all stupid lies too, stuff that could easily be debunked - *my mum was a musician and she went on a world tour with Madonna. I was going to be an Olympic swimmer, but I'm allergic to chlorine.* And he genuinely seemed to *believe* his lies, even in the face of evidence to the contrary. It was hard to like him.

Obviously, I definitely *disliked* him when the whole stalking thing came out. Even though I could sort of understand it – not that I ever would do that myself.

Because Ivy was the type of person people might start to feel obsessive over.

Liam's face is tense. "Why are you back?" he asks, his voice clipped. He's very much *not* happy to see me.

"I'm visiting my uncle and Nikki," I say. "I'm not...*moving* back or anything."

"Good," says Liam, folding his arms. "Because you shouldn't be here."

I look around, wondering if this is some sort of joke. "You know this is my uncle's cafe, right? I'm fairly sure I should."

"No," says Liam through gritted teeth. "You shouldn't have come back to Longrove. You should have stayed in London, or wherever it is you moved to. You should have stayed gone."

7

For a moment I stare at Liam, not sure what to say. As well as the big changes he's made to his look, there are more subtle differences too. His long hair falls down into his eyes, hiding the fact that they're *angrier*. He's got the beginnings of a scraggly beard.

There's a horrible feeling in my stomach, like I've been punched. He knows why I left Longrove – the town is small, everyone heard about Aunt Sandra dying. He knows it's only just over a year since she passed away. Why is he being so nasty?

I stand straighter. I won't let him see that he's got under my skin – I could wield the *my uncle is the owner of this cafe and will kick you out* card – but that wouldn't be the most sensible thing to do. I've got another six days here but Uncle Dara will have to live with the consequences of whatever I choose to do – and Liam's still a customer... A good one, judging by the three empty plates on the table and two finished mugs.

No – I will do what doesn't come naturally. I will take the high road. "I'll see you around," I say, as I step past him and continue on my way. I know what his problem is – he's jealous I got to leave Longrove. No longer am I bored out of my mind in this small town. No longer am I under Mr Reed's

beady eye at school. I am free from everything that happened.

Grace Deborah is behind the counter, and I smile when I see her – Grace used to be my hairdresser, and was the only person who ever cut my curls right. Her dark brown skin is more wrinkled than I remember. Her eyes, a warm, deep brown that always seem to sparkle, crinkle in delight when they land on me.

This is more like it.

“My darling,” she says, coming around the counter and wrapping me in a hug. “Dara said you’d be coming today – I’ve been looking forward to it.”

“I didn’t know you were working here,” I say, pulling away and smiling at her. She pushes my hair out of my eyes – the hairdresser in her is probably itching to get her hands on it.

“I got bored in retirement,” she says with a chuckle. “I work here part-time, and I run free piano lessons at the children’s centre. Your uncle is in the office.”

I grin at her as I slip behind the counter – the cafe layout is an odd one. There are two doors leading off from the kitchen, where a cook I haven’t seen before is flipping an omelette. One of the doors leads to a tiny office, and the other leads down into the cellar, which is used for storage.

I peek inside the office, and there’s Uncle Dara, mulling over some papers. He looks up and smiles when he sees me.

“You’re here!” he says as he gets to his feet. Every time I’ve seen him since Aunt Sandra’s death I’m shocked by how much older he looks – the little of his hair that has stuck around is now grey, as is his beard. If possible, he’s become even frailer in the last few weeks since he visited London – he’s lost a lot of weight, and his eyes look sunken in his face.

Maybe he sees my concern because he says, “It’s been a little stressful lately – I got permission a few weeks ago from the council to put tables out front and the Committee didn’t

like that. They've been dropping flyers in people's letter boxes asking them to sign a petition to get the cafe shut down."

Anger flares in me. "They're still trying that rubbish?"

He rolls his eyes, like it's something of a joke – but I can tell from the hard set of his mouth that this has really been weighing on him. "They're never going to stop. You know how some people in this town are. Resistant to change."

"You're hardly change," I say. "It's a cafe – it's not like you tried to open a...a gambling shop or something." I struggle to come up with anything that would make the Committee's eagerness to shut Uncle Dara's cafe down make sense.

"Nikki suggested maybe I should paint the outside so it's in line with the other shops, and change the name to something like the Daffodil – something really inoffensive," says Uncle Dara. "But I just can't do that. This is *my* cafe. It was Sandra's too – she loved it here. I'd rather shut it down altogether."

I swallow, panicking slightly. Aunt Sandra *did* love this place – and she didn't get to enjoy it for long enough. "You can't shut this place down. The Committee can't have done that much damage?"

"No," says Uncle Dara. "Thankfully there're enough teenagers and tourists who either don't care what the Committee says, or haven't heard their nonsense. But all the same, it's tough, having to get up and fight every day. Never knowing just how far they'll take it..."

"But they wouldn't take it *that* far?" I say. The Committee are a bunch of weirdos who are focused on making sure everyone's grass is cut to the same length – they're not mobsters or anything.

"Of course they wouldn't," says Uncle Dara with a shake of his head. He needs to work on his lying, because he's terrible at it. If we were blood-related, I'd say I got my lack

of lying talent from him. His eyes flicker towards the door, like he's expecting a Committee member to come in and announce they've got a bulldozer ready to swing into action outside. "It's nothing for you to worry about anyway. I hope your journey wasn't too bad? We'll be having spaghetti later, if that's okay?" He looks slightly anxious as he says it.

"Sounds good," I say. I know he's a great cook, but that he's also on his feet all day in the cafe – I don't want him to go to any extra trouble. And he looks so *tired*. He needs to go away and recharge somewhere, not be worried about the Committee egging his windows.

Uncle Dara smiles sadly at me. "You look so much like Sandra, you know. You and Nikki both – she had very strong genes, didn't she?"

"And a strong personality to match," I add.

That makes him smile properly. "Will you be meeting up with all your old friends? Sophie and Mikey? I know Nikki doesn't really speak to them any more – I think she sits with some girls from her art class at lunchtime..." He nibbles his bottom lip. "Your visit might be good for her. To hang out with someone her own age here. She spends so much time alone."

I nod. "I lost contact with all the old gang," I say. "After..." My throat closes up, and Uncle Dara looks away. When I first moved, Sophie occasionally messaged, but that stopped following a few months of stilted conversation. Mikey never bothered. He was supposed to be the cheerful, nice one as well. I never thought he'd completely ghost me. But then again, I became a dark cloud to his sunshine.

Uncle Dara's eyes flick to the door – he probably needs to get back to work.

"I'm going for a walk around town – see what's changed," I say.

"Eat some lunch before you go," he says.

I nod – and I’m almost at the door when I remember the note, left on my bed. “I almost forgot – the murder mystery thing sounds really fun.”

Uncle Dara frowns. “What murder mystery?”

“You know,” I say. “The note you left on my bed. *Figure out my identity before the week is up. There’s going to be a thrill on Tuesday...*” I trail off, because he’s looking really confused now.

“I didn’t leave a note on your bed, Kay,” he says.

“Oh,” I say. It must have been Nikki, then. “Never mind.” I’ll ask her about it later – if I message her, she won’t reply.

I move to the door, but as I glance back at Uncle Dara he looks concerned.

Maybe there’s more worrying him than just the Committee.

8

“Kay. Kay Gill,” says a man’s voice, the second I leave the cafe.

I turn to find Mr Reed standing outside the Blossom with his hands behind his back – the head teacher of Longrove High, who rules over the students with an iron fist, except for the select few he decides are destined to do great things. They get a different side to him. I always thought head teachers weren’t supposed to show favouritism, but Mr Reed obviously never got the memo. He’s wearing grey trousers and a dark blue shirt with a blue tie, like he thinks he’s still at school. He hasn’t changed since the last time I saw him, a year ago, standing outside the town hall and watching the car as we drove out of Longrove, like he was making sure we definitely left. His moustache is dark grey and looks like it’s been clipped with a ruler, and his mouth falls naturally into a frown.

Jason Halford is behind him, his arms folded and a smug look on his face – like a kid who has snitched to their parent, which is bizarre considering he’s a good fifteen years older than Mr Reed.

But Mr Reed is also the head of the Committee – and Uncle Dara’s former boss. When Uncle Dara left Longrove High, Mr Reed told him it was the worst decision he would ever make and that he was destined for failure. I think that’s

also part of the reason the Committee hates the cafe – Mr Reed’s personal grudge against Uncle Dara. He even took to shooting *me* nasty looks in school before I left.

Did Jason Halford actually call Mr Reed over while I was inside the cafe? I guess my return to Longrove is the most interesting thing that’s happened all week. How sad *are* the people in this town?

“So, Kay, you’re back in town,” Mr Reed says, his nose twitching in displeasure. “How have you been?”

From anyone else, his question might come across as genuine interest, a teacher wanting to keep up with an old student. But from him it’s a challenge: *I hope your life hasn’t got better since you left Longrove, because this is the perfect place to live.*

“Fine,” I say, because *fine* could mean anything. *Fine* could mean since leaving town I’ve won the lottery and spend my time rolling around in money, or it could mean every day I wake up without breathing the fresh Longrove air is a day I feel like I’m wasting, because my life is incomplete without this place. He doesn’t need to know that I really have just been fine. Existing, getting on with life, building something new in London without Aunt Sandra. “And...what are you up to?”

“Just on a walk,” he says, tilting his head as he watches me. I shift uncomfortably – there’s something about him that still makes me feel as if I’ve done something wrong, like I’ve forgotten my homework or talked too much in class. “Doing some checks for the Committee. Making sure everything is in order.” His eyes flick to the Orange Flamingo.

I fight the urge to roll my eyes. The Committee has no *actual* power to stop people painting their houses the brightest possible colours, or letting their front gardens grow wild. They can’t control the decor of independent cafes. And yet the people of Longrove listen to them anyway,

because *that's the way things have always been done*, which is a good reason apparently to *keep* doing it that way.

He narrows his eyes at me, and I take a step back – for a moment I see a flash of malice in his expression, gone the next second.

“I know your visit to town will be pleasant,” he says. “I’ll be keeping an eye on things. Making sure you don’t do anything to tarnish Longgrove’s good name – like the rest of your family.” His eyes flick to Uncle Dara’s cafe again.

“I hope my visit will be pleasant, Mr Reed, that’s a lovely thing to say.” I smile at him, pretending I didn’t hear the second part of his sentence, and he looks genuinely baffled as I turn on my heel and walk away. *Be polite in the face of rudeness*, Aunt Sandra always used to say. *Nothing will get under their skin more*. I don’t think that’s entirely true – a well-placed insult goes a long way – but I know Mr Reed wants a reaction from me that he can use against my entire family. *Dara and his niece are feral – isn’t that yet another reason that the cafe should be shut down? Maybe we should give Nikki some additional detentions for no good reason*.

On my way wandering through town, I pass the little community library – it’s basically a cabinet on the side of the town hall that people take books from, returning a different one. It relies entirely on everyone being trustworthy enough not to take a book without giving another back.

I slow down as I walk past, because this cabinet is special to me for a different reason. There’s a false back, where Sophie and I used to leave each other notes when we were little, since it’s equidistant between her house and my old one. We’d tie a red ribbon around the handle if there was a note to read – other people thought it was just nice decoration.

Of course there’s no red ribbon now – that game stopped years ago, when we were eight – and Ivy came into our lives.

That's so uncool. And weird.

And now she's lurching at me, spit bubbling from her mouth as her lips pull back in a snarl. *You're pathetic, Kay—*

No. I force the memory away, the last one I have of her, and start speed walking. Maybe I need to go see her – speak to her. Because otherwise she won't leave me alone. There are too many places in Longrove that will remind me of her.

I turn into the road that leads to the graveyard – where Ivy now rests.

9

The graveyard is peaceful, with large trees and lots of greenery – it's a beautiful place. In London, I walk past a graveyard on my way to school and there are signs everywhere warning about camera surveillance. But not in Longrove – people trust their neighbours. Plus, it's stuck about fifty years in the past; technological advances haven't arrived yet. They don't even have full phone signal.

Aunt Sandra isn't buried in Longrove graveyard. She was cremated, and we scattered her ashes in the sea just like she asked. I was creeped out at first, at the idea of sticking my hand into what had been bits of her and tossing it into the water. But in the end it was nice, with the waves gently crashing against the shore. Peaceful, even. We went to a quiet, almost desolate stretch of coast that Aunt Sandra had picked out, and in the silence I could remember every good memory with her, every sly wink she gave me when she made a comment she knew only I would get. I wondered if she had wanted us to scatter her ashes in the water for her – or for us.

Ivy Harchester's grave has fresh flowers in front of it – probably left by her mum and dad. They're still next door to Uncle Dara and Nikki, along with her little sister Lola.

"How's it going, Ivy?" I say conversationally. The stone that marks her grave doesn't reply. I don't think I'd be

creeped out if it did. I quite like the idea of ghosts existing. Being able to communicate with the great beyond, getting to speak to her again.

I don't know what I would say. Sorry, for throwing all my memories of you into the box in my head and trying to forget about you when I left town. Or I'd let you know that the reason I wasn't fully myself the last time I saw you was because Aunt Sandra had told me that week that she had cancer. And that a few days after you died, Aunt Sandra sat me down and told me her cancer diagnosis was actually terminal – and there was so much to grieve I didn't know how to deal with it all.

Below Ivy's name is an inscription: *Beloved daughter, sister and friend. An angel in death.* Frozen in time, at sixteen – the fearless leader of our group, who has now been left behind...

At the bottom is her birthday, and the date she died – a few weeks shy of her seventeenth birthday. Something doesn't seem right about it, though. I read over again. It has the *days*, carved into the stone. Did it always? *Born on Saturday...*

Died on Monday.

A shiver goes through me. It's not really much of a coincidence, but I'd forgotten she died on a Monday, just like Aunt Sandra.

Get ready for your murder on Monday.

Someone clamps their hand on my shoulder and I jump, reflexively shoving my elbow out.

"Ow," says a voice, and I spin around. Topher Reed is rubbing his arm, looking confused. Mr Reed's son, the golden boy of Longrove High, with his messy light brown hair and deep brown eyes, his dimpled smile. Academically gifted, all-round brilliant. He was two years above me in school, so he must be nineteen now, nearly twenty. I think he's at one of

the good unis, and I expect he's going to have a charmed life where everything works out for him, because that's how things go for boys who look like Topher Reed. All the girls at school were in love with him, even Ivy.

Even me, I guess. Though it probably wasn't *love*, love – more like a crush on the one boy in school who looked like he had stepped out of a romcom. He had *muscles*. And on top of having brains, he seemed like a genuinely nice person too.

Now that I have the perspective of a year away, I see that my crush was just that – except he's got even *more* good-looking, which is unfair. I always thought he never noticed me, just like everyone else. That sort of stuff had started to weigh on me, especially in year nine when boys started paying attention to Ivy, who could outshine anyone.

I couldn't talk about that with Mum, though, because she had said for years I could only have a boyfriend when I got married. That doesn't even make sense, but obviously I couldn't argue with her. Aunt Sandra always said to be a good detective you had to fade into the background, let people underestimate you. And I couldn't get better practice than being overshadowed by Ivy. We had it easy, Aunt Sandra said, because Longrove was full of people who found it all too easy to underestimate anyone who looked like us. We were lucky.

And the day would come when I would find someone who would notice me, and see how beautiful I always was. I'm still holding on to those words, because the day hasn't arrived yet.

"Why did you hit me?" he says, tilting his head.

"Why did you sneak up on me and grab me?" I reply. This feels surreal – Christopher Reed speaking to me. It's like talking to a minor celebrity, the way I built him up in my head when I was at Longrove High.

"I didn't grab you," he says. "I was trying to get your attention – I called your name and you didn't reply."

"You don't know my name," I say.

He raises his eyebrows. "Kay Gill," he says. "Kay, short for Kavya, which is a nickname I don't entirely get. Surely, you'd be called Kav? Niece of Dara Khatri, owner of the Orange Flamingo."

Ah, of course. Mr Reed probably curses out Uncle Dara and his orange flamingos over dinner. "Nikki called me Kay when we were little, and the nickname stuck." *What do you want?* His eyes are weirdly bloodshot, so that means he's either on drugs, he's been drinking, or he's lacking in sleep. Or he has a medical condition. Or that's how he's always looked and I've never noticed because I've never stared deep into his eyes.

But now I am staring into his eyes. Like a weirdo. He's looking a bit disconcerted.

"You were really focused on whatever it was you were doing," he says, and his eyes flick to the grave. I can't read the expression in them. Is he wondering why I'm sitting by Ivy's grave? Does he know I was her friend – probably, if he knows about Uncle Dara and the cafe. And our group was infamous, for a while, because everyone knew we were the last ones with her. We were the ones who left her.

There's a pain in my chest now. Actually, I don't think Ivy would have thought of me as a friend, not after our last conversation. I left the river, and she chased after me just to call me pathetic for going so early, and said she couldn't understand why she'd even bothered to invite me in the first place.

"I was visiting a grave," I say. "It's a graveyard."

"So was I," he says. "My mum." He nods behind us. "She's a few rows back that way. My dad left the wrong flowers on her gravestone and I had to fix it."

His mum died six years ago, in a car accident. I was eleven or so, just starting at Longrove High, and I remember everyone in town talking about how sad it was. Mr Reed had gone around looking grimmer than ever, though Ivy swore he was faking it, and she'd seen him smiling when he thought no one was watching.

I pointed out he couldn't walk around looking miserable *all* the time, and she told me it was definitely possible, that was my natural face, which shut down the conversation.

But I couldn't help but wonder – everyone talked about how devoted Mr Reed had been to her, how much he loved her. Except Aunt Sandra said a man who loves his wife doesn't wait a whole day before reporting her missing, which everyone else seemed to gloss over. She drove out of town and never came back, and Mr Reed apparently thought it was completely normal for her to be gone for twenty-four hours before getting worried and informing the police.

And the people of Longrove – who love a gossip, who have dined out on mundane stories like the time Billy Jenkins tried to build a tree house in his own garden and it collapsed in the middle of the night, killing three of his gnomes – didn't talk about how strange her death was. Because Mr Reed was head of the Committee, and head teacher of Longrove High, and had some weird power over the town.

"It's all so unfair," says Topher, looking down at Ivy's grave then back at his own mother's. "I never said it, because you left town so quickly, but I'm really sorry about your aunt. After my mum died, I would have moments where I'd forget she was dead, and I'd be happy about some stupid thing – I scored well in a test or at football or something. And then I'd remember, and I'd feel selfish for forgetting, even for a second. For living my life without her."

That's exactly how it feels – it's like he's scooped my own thoughts out of my head. "Or sometimes I hear something,

and I think, *Oh, Aunt Sandra would love to know about that, I'll tell her later.* And it's painful every time."

"It's rats," says Topher, and the randomness of the phrase, like he's stepped out of a 1950s children's book, makes me smile. "This place has a weird amount of death attached to it, doesn't it?"

He's talking about Longrove – this tiny town, where mums get into car accidents, and get rare cancer. Where sixteen-year-olds die. Well, one – and that's more than enough.

"Yeah, it does."

10

It's nearly four p.m. when I get back to the house.

My phone buzzes with a message – Dad's name flashes up on the screen.

Dad: They're trying to charge us extra for Wi-Fi, which we're obviously not going to pay.

I snort. Dad wouldn't care about splashing the cash. It's Mum who keeps a tight leash on the budget. She says it means we've got money to spend on actual important things. Apparently keeping in contact with me is not one of them.

Dad: And I don't think we'll have much signal at sea. Might not be able to message as much as we'd like. Did you arrive safely?

I think about not replying, to punish him – both of them, for ditching me. For making me come back to Longrove without them.

But then the reason we left in the first place would be hanging in the air too. And we don't talk about that. Aunt Sandra's name is a taboo word.

Me: Yes. Uncle Dara and Nikki say hi.

Well, they would do, I'm sure.

Dad didn't get why I was so annoyed they were going on a cruise without me – he's easy-going, nothing's ever a big deal to him. He's normally the reasonable one when Mum and I argue. *Both of you just calm down.* Sometimes it works to get us to stop fighting with each other and gang up on him instead. *Don't tell us to calm down,* Mum says. *I'll get as angry as I like. And so will Kay. It's good to raise a daughter with strong opinions.*

And then she gets angry when I use those strong opinions on her.

Dad: Have a good week, kiddo.

Me: Don't call me that.

Dad: Your mum's phone won't switch on. She wants to call you.

Good lord, I haven't even done anything wrong.

Dad: I've suggested she should buy a new phone at the next port.

Better and better. I'll have a bit of time before we have to speak – I was all stiff when they said goodbye and wouldn't hug her properly, and she sighed in that annoying way she does and said, *Everything is not my fault. Maybe the week away will give you time to get some perspective.*

I *have* perspective. I never *said* everything was her fault.

Anyway, I don't want to think about this any more. And I have the perfect distraction – I'll ask Nikki about the weird

note. She's not in the living room, so I head upstairs and stop outside her door and knock.

"Yeah?" she calls.

I push her door open. Her room is a tip, clothes strewn everywhere, and dark too – she's already got the curtains half drawn, or maybe she never bothered opening them. There are sketches and drawings plastering the walls – scenery, I guess, of Longrove. Some are a bit more concerning than others – there's a bridge I think I recognize as the one leading out of town, and in the river beneath it Nikki's drawn skeletons being swept along. Dark.

"How was your walk, then?" she asks, turning around to face me. "Riveting?"

"Really delightful, yeah," I say. I thought *I* was sarcastic, but Nikki definitely has me beat.

"When'd you get back?" she asks.

"Just now," I say.

"Oh." Her eyebrows briefly knit together. "I thought I heard someone outside my room earlier...but I was a bit distracted by this..." She holds up a charcoal drawing of what looks to be a flying rat. "I'm introducing Rat Girl to the comic. I can't get her eyes right though – they're a bit too beady, don't you think?" She scratches her head as she stares at the page. I have no clue how to help her – a rat is a rat and it belongs in the sewers, not in comic books.

"Speaking of weird things," I say, "did you leave a note for me in the attic? About playing a game?"

"No," she says. "Although it'd be cool for Rat Girl to be interested in playing games. Round out her character."

"It wasn't a nice note," I say hastily, before Nikki gets back to speaking about the bloody rat. "It said something like 'get ready for the next week, because we're going to play a game. There's going to be a thrill on Tuesday, something beginning with W on Wednesday, treachery on

Thursday, a flooding on Friday...or fire... You get the idea. And it ended by saying it would be my murder on Monday." I feel slightly ridiculous saying it aloud – but as I speak the colour leaves her cheeks so quickly, I'm worried she's about to faint.

"Monday?" she whispers. "The note said murder on *Monday*?"

"Yeah," I say. She looks way too concerned to have been the person who left me the note.

"Show me," she says, holding out her hand.

"I left it upstairs..." I say.

Her eyes widen. "Why did you do that? Why didn't you take it with you?"

I have no idea why she's berating me, but she's so panicked I can't take offence. "Calm down, I'll go get it now." I turn on my heel and head to the attic room, where I left the note on the desk – except it's gone.

I frown, looking underneath the desk – it could have fallen off. But there's no sign of it – it's not in the drawers, or on the bed, not in the en suite or wardrobe.

Nikki is standing in the doorway, her arms folded.

"I have no idea what's happened to it," I say, scratching my head and trying to think logically. Occasionally I'll leave things lying around and forget where I put them – but I've checked everywhere in the room. I pat my pockets, just in case I somehow *did* take the note with me, but of course they're empty. "You didn't take it, did you?"

Nikki's lips are pressed together as she shakes her head. "Tell me exactly what it said?"

"I *told* you," I say. "Ish. It said: *Hi, Kay*, so whoever left it wanted me to have it. You were here all afternoon, weren't you?"

"Yeah," says Nikki, her expression tight. She doesn't seem to get what I'm hinting at – someone random can't have

snuck into the house, left the note, waited for me to leave, taken the note, and disappeared again. There's one obvious explanation – and one of the first things Aunt Sandra taught me is the obvious answer is usually the right one. Uncle Dara won't be messing with me, so it's got to be Nikki... Even though I'm ninety per cent sure she simply doesn't have it in her to do anything massively underhand. And I don't really get what her logic would be – she's not acting like this is a funny joke. "Tell me when the note comes back," she says, and goes downstairs again without another word. She hasn't even given me time to accuse her.

"What do you mean *when*?" I say. "How do you know the note is going to come back?"

Her door closes and I'm left staring at the bed, half wondering if the note might suddenly reappear as mysteriously as it vanished.

Monday – 4.23 p.m. – Kay

“This is perfect,” said Ivy, coming to a stop at the ledge beside the river. “Right here, this is where we’re going to have a great evening. A great time.”

She pulled out beers from her school bag. At once, Kay tried to work out how to say no without Ivy turning it into a big thing. But Ivy was already eyeing her, clutching a beer in each hand like she was debating whether to start an argument about Kay not wanting to drink. There was no way – not on a school night.

“Where’d you even get these?” said Mikey, frowning at her.

Ivy tapped her nose. “I have my ways,” she said in a sing-song voice, dancing around in a circle as she held the beers above her head, her black skirt fanning around. She was probably the only person in the world that made the regulation skirt and bright-red Longrove High jumper look good.

“Should we not have gone home and changed?” said Nikki. “If people see you drinking in school uniform, it might get back to Mr Reed...”

“No one is going to see,” said Ivy. “We’re in the middle of nowhere!” She spread her arms, gesturing broadly at the fact they were alone in the woods. “Besides, Sophie doesn’t want to go home yet, do you, Soph?”

Kay glanced at Sophie, who looked uncomfortable – but she would never contradict Ivy. Or anyone, for that matter. Sophie was the type of person who, if you spilled something on her, would apologize for standing in the wrong place.

“It is a nice evening,” Sophie said uncertainly, like she was worried about saying something incorrect. Kay could almost hear the buzzing of her thoughts. What if Ivy thinks it isn’t a nice evening? I could be mistaken. “Bit nippy, but we’re lucky it’s not raining.”

“Exactly. It’s a lovely evening,” said Ivy at once, before Sophie could start babbling again. “And we’ve been cooped up and worried about things, and tonight we’re going to forget about all the bad stuff, okay?”

Sophie nodded along, pressing her lips together like she was already trying to purge the bad stuff from her mind.

“One down, three to go!” Ivy spun around to face Kay, Nikki and Mikey. “Come on, you guys,” she said, dropping the beers. “You all look miserable for some reason. But it’s a Monday and you know what that means? It’s Funday.”

“Isn’t that supposed to be Sunday?” said Mikey. “Sunday Funday?”

He had used that expression unironically last Sunday to try and convince Kay to go for a fun run with him.

“Whatever,” said Ivy. “You know what we should play? Charades.” And she immediately pressed her middle finger and ring finger to her palm, and mimed pointing it at Kay.

“Spider-Man,” said Kay with a snort of laughter, and for a moment Ivy was right – all her worries went away. “You know that’s not how you play charades, right?”

“Who cares!” declared Ivy. “Who cares about the rules!”

TUESDAY

11

I wake at eight a.m. the next morning and for a moment I've not got a clue where I am. I roll over and check my phone - there's a message from Mum.

Mum: Got a new phone. Signal is poor, using Wi-Fi in a cafe. Make sure you behave for Uncle Dara.

Mum: Did you pack your sun cream? Don't forget to wear it - you can burn even if it's cloudy. See you next Monday.

Resentment builds in me. *See you next Monday.* Her return to Longrove is going to be brief, half an hour maximum, but then she'll be able to say she came too. *I would never make you do anything I wouldn't do, Kay.* She doesn't see the difference in what she's doing and what she's making me do. And Dad's happy to go along with it. Maybe he thinks I'm not as affected as she is, or something.

I pad down to the kitchen, which is awash with sun and put the kettle on to boil while I pour some milk and cereal into a bowl. Uncle Dara will already be at the cafe, for the morning crowd. The day stretches before me - as do the rest of the summer holidays. During term-time I make money by tutoring primary school kids on weekends, but since all my students are off for the summer, I'm a free agent. I could go

to the cafe and help for a while, then hang out with Nikki. She's a bit like a cat; I can't spend all day with her otherwise she'll get irritated.

A floorboard creaks above me – Nikki moving about.

Someone knocks on the front door, and I look up from my cereal. It's way too early for anyone to be delivering parcels, or for a neighbour to pop round.

I open the door, and Sophie Darlington is standing before me. My old friend. Her thin brown hair is tied up into a ponytail, and her blue eyes scan over me. She's wearing a grey T-shirt and shorts, and running shoes, and is panting slightly, her face red.

"Kay!" she says with a smile. "I heard you were in town. I thought I would swing by."

I stare at her. After Ivy died, we never properly hung out again. We sat together in school with Mikey, and Nikki, when she deigned to join us, but we didn't really meet up outside of that – and Nikki and I were focused on Aunt Sandra anyway, doing everything we could to help. With the cafe, with the cooking, anything to make it easier for our parents.

When I left town, Sophie said she would keep in touch, but what could we really say? Ivy's ghost hung over us.

Her eyes trail over my pyjamas and morning hair. "Have you...just woken up?"

"Yeah," I say. She makes it sound like I've slept in until mid-afternoon, even though it's not even nine. Sophie was always a morning person, although she definitely wasn't a runner. It's possible the exercise could help with the nervous energy she always had when she wasn't copying someone else.

I think back to primary school. When we were eight, Sophie had looked ridiculous in the baggy moss green clothes I was obsessed with wearing because I thought it would help me camouflage better and therefore be an amazing detective

just like Aunt Sandra. As the years passed, she looked a bit better in Ivy's cool clothes – Ivy always kept up with the trends.

"It's great to see you," she says. "I was just on my morning run, and I was going past and I thought you know what, I'll pop in and say hi to Kay. Maybe we should catch up properly? Go for dinner or something this week? That's how long you're here for, right?" She's speaking rapidly, which means she's uncomfortable. There's something off about her voice. It's like she's fishing for information.

"Yeah, I'm here for a week," I say slowly.

"Great," says Sophie chirpily. "And...how have things been, generally? I know we lost touch." She bounces from foot to foot – she wants to keep running, I can tell. I can't work out what the hidden agenda is here.

"Good," I say, still feeling confused.

"What are you studying? I know you were into maths back when you were around." Sophie is smiling at me. This is weird for two reasons – one is that she's making it sound like *I died. Back when you were around.* And the second reason is...we used to be *good* friends. Even before Ivy started in primary school, we would go around the playground together, linking arms and making up games.

"Yeah, maths, physics, chemistry, biology," I pause. "And you?"

Sophie hesitates. For a moment there's a flash of doubt in her expression – that means she's now overthinking what she picked, and whether she should have copied me. "A bunch of humanities," she says at last, glancing at her watch. "You know, I've got to get back on the run. Maybe I'll see you on the route at some point? I loop around the river and the fields behind your house. I just saw Nikki doing the circuit, you could join her. It's really nice."

Over my dead body would you ever catch me running. Nikki's always been weirdly athletic. I don't get how she's always so good at every sport she tries. "Yeah, maybe you will," I say.

Sophie pops her headphones back in and turns and jogs away, leaving me blinking after her. She didn't bother actually trying to set a date for dinner – she kept up with the vague *at some point*. For dinner, *and* for a run. Her whole visit was odd...

There's a prickling feeling down the back of my neck. Something is wrong about what she's just said. I run through the conversation again – nothing massively out of the ordinary – apart from the mention of Nikki running. But she can't be *right now*. Because Nikki's upstairs. I heard the floorboards creaking while I was eating breakfast.

"Nikki?" I call, then wait for a reply. Nothing comes. It's just empty silence, like I'm alone. Except there was *definitely* someone in the room above the kitchen earlier. That's...either the linen closet, or Uncle Dara's bedroom.

I mount the stairs. "Nikki?" I call again. Her bedroom door is ajar, and I push it open. It's empty.

Uncle Dara's bedroom door is closed. My heart is beating faster now, but I try to think rationally – this is an old house, the floorboards could simply creak on their own. The noise *sounded* like a footstep, but that could just be me mishearing.

I push Uncle Dara's door open. It's slow to creak backwards, and reveals...

An empty room. I breathe out. Of course it's empty, I'm just being stupid, imagining things. I quickly check the office and the bathroom and the linen closet, but it's not a big house – it's not like there's anywhere to hide. And not like anyone *would* hide. How would they have got in? Surely, I'd have heard a break-in.

Plus, this is Longrove. It's supposed to be *safe*.

I stop the stupid voice in my head. There's only one room I haven't checked - my room in the attic.

Slowly, I walk up the stairs, listening carefully. I'm greeted only by silence.

But when I walk inside, there's something wrong - I'm not alone.

Because lying in the middle of my bed is a dead, bloated rat - its eyes staring right at me and its mouth open in a silent scream.

12

I stumble, almost tripping over as I edge forward. I need to see the rat properly. It could be a stuffed toy or...

No, it's definitely a real rat. A dead rat. Lying on my bed. And beside it is a familiar looking piece of paper—

Hello, Kay,

Get ready for the next week, because we're going to play a game. Can you beat me and figure out my identity before the week is up? The stakes will keep getting higher - there's going to be...

*a thrill on Tuesday,
a wreckage on Wednesday,
treachery on Thursday,
a fire on Friday,
sabotage on Saturday,
a stabbing on Sunday -
and your murder on
Monday*

The note from yesterday, returned. There's a line added at the bottom, though:

Hope you've enjoyed your thrill! And don't even think about leaving Longrove to get away from me, because I will follow you!

Monday

There's a photo under the letter – of my house, in London. It's been taken within the past month, because Mum and Dad just had the outside painted, and it's white in this photo instead of the brown it was a few weeks ago.

My hands shake as I stare at our semi-detached – this person has been to my *house*. What if I hadn't listened to Mum, and I'd stayed there alone this week? Would they have targeted me there instead?

I put down the papers, and sink into the desk chair as I stare at the rat. "A thrill on Tuesday," I whisper. What the actual hell? I know I should probably run out of the house screaming or something – that would probably be the most sensible thing to do.

But now I've got past the initial shock my mind is whirring, trying to put things together.

I was left a note yesterday – this one. It was taken away. Today is Tuesday. I've been left a dead rat the note-giver thinks is a "thrill". If Uncle Dara is out, and Nikki was on her run, that means the noise I heard when I was eating my cereal was the person who left me this. The person who seems to go by "Monday".

That means they got into the house somehow, though obviously not through the back door, or the front door – I would have heard them or else seen signs of a break-in. There are only two rooms above the kitchen where I heard them: the linen closet and Uncle Dara's bedroom. And since they wouldn't have been rummaging for towels, that means they were in Uncle Dara's room.

I'm about to go downstairs to investigate, when I stop. I remember what happened with the note yesterday, how it disappeared.

Why didn't you take it with you? You're supposed to be smart, remember?

Nikki had known it was going to disappear. And she also knew that it was going to show up again.

She wouldn't have left this for me. I considered her a possibility yesterday, but the rat proves this isn't a joke. Except...how did she know that the note would vanish and come back?

I get my phone out and take a photo of the rat and the note, then send them to Chloe with a quick *will explain later*. Maybe she'll think this is some sort of horror Longrove game. It's a backup, in case my phone is stolen...or disappears.

I quickly change out of my pyjamas and into jeans and a T-shirt, shoving the note in my pocket. It's not going to leave my side now.

The rat I'm not so sure what to do with. I'm not massively squeamish, but it could be carrying a ton of disease and I don't fancy touching it. Maybe Monday, whoever the hell they are, will come back and throw it away for me.

I'm feeling oddly calm, considering the fact that someone has broken into my bedroom and left a dead rat for me. Maybe I'm in shock.

Get ready for your murder on Monday.

There's no way someone is going to kill me in six days. Absolutely no way – why would someone want to murder *me*? And besides, there's no logic to it – why the hell would they *warn* me, and not just try to off me when I least expect it? Why would they go to the trouble of concocting an elaborate game first?

But the note reappeared – and someone’s killed a rat. And been to my home in London to make sure I don’t immediately flee from Longrove.

My phone bleeps, with a message from Chloe – responding to the photos I just sent.

Chloe: What the hell is going on?

She sends a photo of her own – a dead rat, just like the one I found, lying in a cardboard box.

Chloe: This came in the post today. With this note.

A second photo follows – a piece of paper that simply says: *I know where your friends live too – Monday.*

Shock sweeps through me. Monday has been to my house, and they know enough about me to figure out who my best friend is and where *her* home is. And they’ve left another warning, because they *really* don’t want me to leave Longrove. They’re serious about wanting to play this “game” – but if that’s true, it means they want me to hang around for a week waiting for them to murder me.

I can’t wrap my head around it. Who would leave me this note – and *why*? What’s the benefit of having me trying to work out their identity?

I tap out a message to Chloe: *No idea what’s happening, but don’t worry I’m looking into it. Chuck that rat away.*

I need to check Uncle Dara’s room, to see if there are any clues in there about what’s going on – and then I’m calling the police. I’m not stupid. Someone has sent me a death threat, I’m getting the police involved.

I head down the stairs, listening carefully in case there’s any noise, but the house is very much silent. I enter Uncle Dara’s bedroom – it’s white and empty, but with a crazy

patterned rug that takes up most of the floor, which I guess was a design choice by Aunt Sandra. The bed is neatly made, with a bright yellow blanket folded over the top. The window looks out onto the garden at the back of the house, which leads into fields. Someone could easily hop over from there – there's a public footpath through the fields that comes up the side of the house. I wouldn't have seen whoever broke in from the kitchen if they kept to the far side of the fence.

And...bingo. The dining room was an extension, built on. It juts out underneath Uncle Dara's window – a ladder would get someone onto the roof of the dining room, and then they could simply climb into Uncle Dara's room if the window is unlocked...

Which it is. The latch is broken, and apparently has been for a while, since the wooden frame looks slightly rotted. Uncle Dara couldn't lock it even if he wanted to – and he probably doesn't. So he likely had this window open. It's summer, it's a warm enough day today, anyone breaking in would be able to do so easily.

I cross the room, and test the floorboards. None of them creak, but one just outside Uncle Dara's bedroom does. That must have been what I heard from the kitchen. Mystery solved – they must have left the same way too.

Could they have been here at the same time as I was chatting to Sophie? Possibly – though they might have left earlier if all they did was hurry upstairs and put the rat on my bed...

How did they know where I was sleeping? The letter must have been sent by someone close to the family, because they went straight to the guest bedroom and the attic was only done up in the last year.

As I move back towards the landing, there's a scuffling at the front door, then I hear it creaking open – and my heart leaps into my throat.

13

I wait, one second – two, before I peer over the banister. Maybe Monday has got the days wrong and is coming to murder me today, or to drop off another rat—

And then Nikki shuffles inside, dressed in running gear, her face shiny with sweat – looking so completely *normal* I can't believe where my thoughts were going, how stupidly I've acted. Yesterday, Nikki thought someone had broken into her house so she grabbed a vase to use as a weapon – here I am just gawping, with nothing but my bare hands to fight. What was I going to do if it *was* a murderer coming in...through the front door? With a key.

Of course they wouldn't have a key. I literally just theorized that they had climbed in through Uncle Dara's window.

And *of course* there's no murderer. There has to be a sensible explanation for what is going on.

Nikki looks up at me, standing at the top of the staircase.

"Morning," she pants, as she heads through to the kitchen. "It's a great day outside."

"The note I got yesterday magically reappeared on my bed this morning," I say as I follow her. Nikki is rummaging through the fridge, but she pauses with her back to me.

"And?" she says, still turned away so I can't read her expression.

"Tell me what's happening," I say, taking it out of my pocket and handing it to her. "What's going *on*?"

Nikki reads the message in silence, and her hand briefly clamps over her mouth when she gets to, I assume, the line about murdering me. Then she takes a deep breath, the moment of shock, or fear, passing – or she hides it well.

"It showed up this morning?" she says, her voice shaking slightly. "And what's, er...what's your thrill?"

"What?"

"It says 'hope you enjoyed your thrill'. And it's Tuesday. Your thrill on Tuesday – what was it?" Her nails dig into her palms – she's not baffled by the note, she's already questioning the nitty-gritty. None of the standard questions I would have asked: *is this a joke? Someone's threatening to kill you – why? What the hell is going on? Are you okay?* It's almost like...like she's seen something like this before.

"A dead rat on my bed. Appeared with the note. I think someone climbed through Uncle Dara's bedroom window and into the attic and left it for me to find. It's still there if you want to look." I'm having a flashback to yesterday, and suddenly I'm running back upstairs, because what if it's *not* there? I've got a photo of it, of course. I've got the evidence – and it would save me having to clean it up if it's gone. But if it is, it means someone has snuck *back* into the house again, without either of us noticing, in the space of a few minutes.

The rat is very much still on my bed, continuing to stare at me. It's like Longrove has sucked all the sense out of me. We're surely not dealing with a master acrobatic criminal here – they'd pick a much less boring place to live. "A thrill is going on a roller coaster or winning the lottery," I say, eyeing it. "Not sticking a dead rat on the place where I sleep."

"Monday isn't always literal," says Nikki. She's keeping well back, like she's afraid the rat might come to life and attack her. "The thrill might be, you know...the thrill of discovering someone is watching you. Someone has snuck into your house when you thought you were alone. It doesn't have to be a *nice* thrill."

I gape at her. "What do you mean *always*? You know who they are? This Monday person?"

Nikki shakes her head, and a bubble of irritation bursts in my stomach.

"Look, whatever you know, you need to tell me," I say. "Monday has sent a rat to my friend Chloe in London, and has threatened to *kill me*. As in *murder* me. Dead." My voice is getting more high-pitched - the rat is staring at me like it's judging me, and I don't think it's helping me to stay calm. I go into the bathroom, grab a towel and chuck it over the body. "So who the hell are they, and what do they want?" Stupid question - they want to kill me, they've made that clear enough. But why?

"I have no *idea* who Monday is," says Nikki. "Believe me, I wish I did. And I don't know why they've left you this message. But they have left me notes over the past year." She grimaces, forcing a shaky breath. "They come every few weeks. Telling me to do bad things, or else. They made me shoplift a few months ago - and now it looks like they're coming after you as well."

There's too much to process - Monday is a real person, with real threats. That means the stuff they're threatening - fire, stabbing, *my murder* - are all real too. "Okay," I say, trying to think things through logically. "They're a bully. But, er...how do they *make* you do anything? Can't you just...tell someone? Like the police?"

Nikki huffs through her nose. "It's not really police-worthy—"

"The shoplifting is," I point out.

"Yes, but I wasn't going to call the police on *myself*, was I? And Monday...they're serious. They wanted me to throw my performance in the music competition last October, and I didn't because their threat before had been stupid - it wasn't even a proper *threat*, more like a dare. Tell everyone I cheated on a mock test in year eleven or else dye my hair. I didn't tell everyone, and I didn't dye my hair - but Mr Reed found out about the cheating and suspended me for a week. I guess Monday told him as my punishment. It's on my permanent record now. And then at the Halloween fundraiser the Committee holds every year, I went into the haunted house, and someone shoved me into a cupboard and a..." She rubs her forehead and takes three steady breaths. "A body fell on me - I thought there was a dead body with me. And then I found a light switch and it was a mannequin, only it had a photo of my face stuck to its head and there was a knife in its chest, attaching a note that said: *Next time, do what I tell you to do, you stupid girl*. I was stuck in there for two hours before someone found me." Her chest is rising and falling quickly, like she's on the verge of a panic attack.

Okay, so Monday is serious. Nikki sits down at the desk, and I wonder if I should pat her or something - I'm not too good with giving comfort.

"So I did what you suggested," says Nikki. "I told Mr Reed someone was coming after me."

"You told *Mr Reed*?" I question. "The guy who hates our family? Why didn't you tell your dad?"

Nikki purses her lips. "You don't know what it's been like...after Mum died..." She shakes her head, and I can only imagine how hard it's been for them both - how tough it must feel for Nikki to worry about protecting the only parent she has left. "Anyway, I couldn't tell Mr Reed *who* was coming after me. But he believed me - sent an email around reminding everyone how seriously Longrove High takes

bullying. And then Monday spray-painted pictures of knives over the outside of the cafe. Dad thinks it was someone from the Committee but I knew it was a message to me to make sure I didn't tell anyone, and did whatever else they asked."

Okay, maybe all Monday does is *threaten* murder - the mannequin with the knife, the knives spray-painted on the cafe, and now the note to me. But I know what Aunt Sandra would say - we have to go to the police. Someone has broken into the house, and left a rat on my bed. I won't keep quiet like Nikki has.

"You still think I should have gone to the police, don't you?" says Nikki. She seems angry now, like I'm judging her. Maybe I am, just a little bit.

"Yeah," I say, refusing to take the bait. "Because that's the smart thing to do—"

"Okay, so in this scenario, you ring the police," says Nikki. "They're not fussed about hearing you out, but you convince them. They say to come into the station for a proper talk. You take the bus into Hillingate town centre. A nice solid hour-long journey because the bus passes through all the villages and you can't drive—"

"I'm not going to keep quiet because it's *inconvenient*—"

"You get to Hillingate," continues Nikki, like I haven't spoken. "You march into the police station and ask to speak to someone. Eventually they come down, but there's a chance they think you're wasting their time. You tell them someone broke into your house and left you a message. They ask to see it, you show it to them. It's a piece of paper printed out - no one would be able to get any info from it, there's no handwriting to decode, there's no fingerprints on it but your own... I'm assuming that, because I don't think Monday is stupid. The message says the person wants to play a game of you figuring out their identity. They ask what crime has been committed. There is none."

“Harassment,” I say at once. “Breaking and entering—”

“Right, harassment. *You’ve* only received one message, that’s not enough, not yet. Breaking and entering – sure, someone broke in, though there’s not actually any sign of forced entry.” Nikki is on a roll now. “What did they take? Nothing. They *left* something, but who ever heard of a burglar leaving something behind instead of robbing. What can the police do? Bugger all.”

“This person threatened to *kill* me,” I point out, because she seems to be glossing over that very terrifying fact. “That’s a crime.”

“Do you believe Monday is going to try and kill you next Monday?” asks Nikki, raising her eyebrows. “Really?”

I want to say yes just to prove her wrong, but I press my lips together – now that I’ve calmed down slightly, I can think about this more logically. Monday hasn’t actually *hurt* Nikki. Even if being locked in a cupboard for two hours was horrible. And I come back to the fact that this note is... stupid. Someone pre-warning me that they’re going to murder me in six days. All I’d need to do is lock myself in the house, and I’d be fine, or go and hide in the woods somewhere, or take a day trip out of town. They might know where I live in London, and where my friends are, but the note made it clear it’s *me* they want... And there are loads of ways I could disappear. There’s no sense to it. “It doesn’t matter if I don’t believe this murder threat,” I say. “A death threat is still a crime. And so is breaking and entering.”

“Okay. And what do you think the police are going to *do* about your death threat?” asks Nikki, her voice triumphant, like she’s pulled a winning card on me.

I see her point. I don’t have the first clue who left me this message, so what chance would the police have of finding them? “Fine, what if I figure out who Monday is? Then I can tell the police and they can arrest them – Monday *wants* me to work out who they are, anyway. As part of this...game.”

The word sounds wrong – since when is threatening wreckages and fires and stabbings supposed to be a *game*?

“Do you think I haven’t tried?” says Nikki. “I have no idea who Monday is, or where to begin looking. They could be *anyone*.”

“No,” I say. “It’s obviously someone in Longrove – that’s why you’ve been targeted until now, and not me. I’ve not been here. And it’s someone we *both* know, because we’re *both* being targeted. So, the likeliest suspect is Sophie...and potentially Mikey.” The two friends we have in common. I haven’t seen Mikey yet, but that doesn’t mean he doesn’t know I’m back in town. Even though it feels incredibly unlikely that it’s him, because we were once very close friends and never argued and every time we hung out we always ended up laughing. But I can’t rule him out because of that. “Sophie was here just before I found the rat in my bedroom. But, well...I heard the floorboard outside Uncle Dara’s room creaking, and that could have been Monday *leaving*. To jump out of the window and go around the front...”

Nikki nibbles her bottom lip. “But I don’t even speak to Mikey and Sophie much any more. I sit with Addy and Michelle at lunch.”

That’s a fair point. And I know a good detective needs to consider all the options, not just jump to the first conclusion. I think back to yesterday – and my meeting with Topher. *It’s rats*. The odd turn of phrase that I noted, and thought was funny – but what if it wasn’t a coincidence? What if he was giving me a clue that he has something to do with this?

Or maybe I don’t really think he’s involved, and I just want to see him again to gawp at how pretty he is.

“Why do you want to investigate anyway?” Nikki asks. “I mean...you think you’ll be leaving perfectly fine next Monday – why bother?”

"You can't leave," I point out. "And even if I think Monday isn't going to hurt me..." I trail off, because using "Monday" as an anonymous name sounds pretty stupid to me. Couldn't they have called themselves something like *Your Murderer*? Or something sinister, like *Hickory Dickory Dock*. Nursery rhymes out of context are always scary.

I realize I'm thinking along the lines of what I'd enjoy in a detective book, and force myself to focus.

"Even if I think Monday isn't going to hurt me, they still left a dead rat on my bed," I say. "They could do other grim things even if they *don't* kill me. And they're bullying you, and that needs to stop."

Nikki smiles slightly. "It's nice to have you back in town sticking up for me," she says. "When Monday started sending the notes, you're probably the only person I would have told."

"You still could have told me," I say, feeling touched and also somehow guilty, for leaving, like it was entirely my choice. "I was just on the other end of the phone."

"I know," says Nikki. "But it wouldn't have been the same... And things were different, anyway, after you moved."

Things were different after Aunt Sandra died is what she's really saying. She would sometimes get spiky when her mum was alive, and I knew she needed alone time, but she always came back. After Aunt Sandra's death, she got even *more* prickly, and I got distant. It's hard to keep in touch properly over messages and when she visits with Uncle Dara we never get to spend that much time together, just us.

But who knows? Maybe investigating this dead rat on my bed can be the thing that brings us back together.

14

"First things first," I say, rolling up my sleeves. "We need to get rid of the rat." I wrap the towel around its body, wincing and trying not to think about what I'm holding. Then I pause, looking back at the bed, which probably has dead rat juice on it.

"Strip the sheets for me, will you?" I ask Nikki. She looks clammy as she stares at the bed, shaking her head.

"No, I don't want to go anywhere near," she says. "That's where the rat *was*."

Great, she's cool and snarky when she's telling me all the reasons I can't go to the police, but suggesting she go near a dead rodent and boom. She's as much a coward as I am.

"Fine, I'll strip the bed," I say. "Here, hold this." I hand her the rat wrapped in the towel, and she takes it without thinking - before shrieking a few seconds later and dropping it. The towel unravels, revealing the rat's pale pink tail.

Grim. I didn't think that through.

Quickly, I strip the bed and bundle the sheets under one arm, the rat wrapped in the towel in the other. Nikki hurries down the stairs in front of me, into the kitchen like she's worried I'm going to lob the rat at the back of her head.

I shove the sheets into the washing machine - I'll put them on the highest heat possible when I've got rid of the rat.

I head to the front door.

"Wait, what are you going to do with the rat?" says Nikki.

I pause, turning to look at her. "What do you mean, what am I going to do with it? I'm going to chuck it in the bin."

"But..." Nikki nibbles her bottom lip as she eyes the bundle in my hands. "I mean, don't you feel a bit bad?"

"Why would I feel bad?" I blink at her. "*I* didn't kill it."

"I know, but it was alive once. Maybe it deserves a proper burial."

I sigh with impatience. "Okay. You start digging the rat grave. In the meantime, I'm just going to store it in the bin outside." I head out before she has a chance to respond, although I do feel slightly callous as I chuck the towel and the body inside one of the bins at the side of the house.

"Hi," says a squeaky voice behind me. I turn around - there's a little blond girl on a pink bicycle staring at me. "What are you doing?"

There's something unnervingly familiar about the shape of her face, her deep blue eyes...

Ivy.

It's like she's been reincarnated in front of me as a five-year-old.

My heart thuds for a second before I recognize her - Lola, Ivy's little sister. I didn't realize there could be that much of a difference between a four- and a five-year-old, but in the year since I last saw her she's got taller, her hair longer, her face morphing more into Ivy's. A familiar blond woman comes up behind Lola.

"Kay?" she says. "Kay Gill?"

She's older, and her blond hair is lighter, veering into grey, but I recognize her at once - Angela Harchester, Ivy's mother. She and her husband Peter moved next door to

Uncle Dara and Aunt Sandra when me, Nikki and Ivy were eight.

"Hi," I say, closing the bin lid and hoping she didn't see what I just threw away - there might have been a rat claw poking out. "It's so nice to see you."

"And you," she says, and her face breaks into a genuine smile. "I knew you'd moved away after Sandra...passed. It's good to see you back."

"I'm here for the week," I say for what feels like the thousandth time. Surely it'd be more efficient if everyone gossiped about my return properly, rather than me having to tell people individually? I thought the whole point of small towns was that everyone spoke to everyone. Although... there wasn't really anyone who would have fed back my return to Angela. Ivy would have been that person.

There's now an Ivy-sized shape hanging between us. A topic neither of us wants to speak about.

Lola is tugging at me. "Want to ride my bike?" she asks.

After getting past the jump scare she gave me, I am remembering how cute she is. Her face is open and innocent, and when she smiles at me there's a big gap where one of her front teeth is missing.

Even when Ivy smiled you could never be sure she was genuine. Maybe there's not as much of a resemblance as I thought.

Lola climbs back on her bike with its pink training wheels, and still manages to wobble.

"I'm getting better," she tells me. "I've only fallen over once. Watch me." She pushes off and starts rolling along the street - there's a slight downhill the way she's going, which is good because she doesn't seem to have figured out she can use the pedals yet.

"She's very demanding," says Angela, watching after her with a sigh. "And how are you, Kay?"

I've been asked this question a few times in the last day, but this is the first time it's seemed like the person cared about the answer. It was always a surprise that Ivy could reach the heights of cruelty she sometimes did because she always flipped around her mother, changing into someone sweet and caring. That side came out occasionally with her friends, but less and less as we all got older. Angela is the kind of person who bakes cookies for her daughter's friends coming over, who always insists on people staying for dinner. She's a good person – she's like Aunt Sandra was. There's a reason they were friends.

"I've been better, but I've been worse," I say, which is something Aunt Sandra used to say.

Angela chuckles, like she remembers too – but the humour slides off her face as Lola veers sharply to the right, and falls over.

"I'll see you," she says, hurrying over to her daughter, who is picking herself up, and looks like she's trying to decide whether or not to cry. Angela says something to her, and she suddenly laughs – and the sound reminds me so strongly of Ivy I have to take a sharp breath.

I head back inside the house, and lock the front door – but it's like Ivy's ghost is following me inside.

Nikki is waiting for me in the kitchen, her hands interlocked on the table. She looks pale, but determined, like she's ready to tackle the case.

"I just ran into Angela Harchester," I say, to explain why disposing of the rat took so long. "And Lola."

Nikki smiles slightly. "She's a great kid."

"And now, my sidekick, on to the main event," I say. "Figuring out who the hell Monday is and why they're so obsessed with us."

"You're the sidekick," says Nikki. "What's the next step, then?"

My mind is already whirring, as I think about how Aunt Sandra used to talk about her old cases, how she would approach them. I'm starting to feel...excitement. My first proper case, just like Aunt Sandra used to tackle. And it's a super weird one too; she would have *loved* this. The thought makes me happy and sad at the same time. "We need a murder board."

15

I drag the old whiteboard from Uncle Dara's office up the attic stairs. He bought it after he first opened the cafe, in case he needed to do freelance tutoring to earn some extra cash, but quickly discovered he didn't have any extra time. "We need to think about things as logically as possible. Have you got the printer?"

Nikki grunts from somewhere behind me, which I take to mean, *Yes, I do*.

I prop the whiteboard up on the far wall of my bedroom, as Nikki staggers over to the desk and plugs in the printer we've also borrowed from Uncle Dara's office. I connect to it through the Bluetooth on my phone, and the photo of the dead rat is spat out in black and white.

"Does this printer not do colour?" I say, frowning as I hold it up. Nikki looks like she's going to throw up. "Come on, the photo won't hurt you," I say, as I stick it to the whiteboard. "It *would* look better in colour," I try again, hoping she'll get the hint.

"We only have black and white," says Nikki.

"Fine," I pout. What I'd really love is a proper noticeboard and to be able to pin stuff to it, and then use lots of string to connect things together, but this will have to do. I print out a photo of myself next, one where I look fairly decent - I'm smiling at the camera and my hair looks curly

and not bushy – and stick it in the middle of the board, above the rat. Then I use a dry-wipe marker to draw a line between us. “Our first link,” I say.

Next come photos of Mikey and Sophie, and I draw links from me up to them, and then a little link to each other. Even if they’re not still friends, they were once. I put Nikki up next, picking a decent picture too, but she doesn’t seem to care what she looks like. And then finally Topher, who hangs out on his own in a little corner, no connections to anyone – I draw a tiny line from him to me.

Nikki is frowning at the whiteboard, like she’s seeing something I’m not.

I stand back and admire my handiwork. “It looks good so far, don’t you think?” I say. “Bit bare, but I’m sure we’ll find people to add. It’s a shame no one’s got a doorbell camera around here – unless Longrove has actually got up to date with the tech over the past year?” It’s a bit of wishful thinking, and I’m not surprised Nikki ignores me.

She tilts her head to the side as she looks at my board. “You know the way you’ve drawn it all out, with you in the centre...it sort of looks like *you’ve* died. Like you’re the victim.”

I roll my eyes, about to say that’s rubbish... But she’s sort of right. The black and white really doesn’t help. “I mean, I *am* the victim. I’m the one targeted with the dead rat. But also, so far everyone links to me...”

“You’ve never said one word to Topher,” Nikki points out.

“I spoke to him yesterday,” I say. “He used the phrase *it’s rats*, which could have some sort of significance.”

“That’s the biggest reach you’ve ever made,” says Nikki. “And you’ve made some reaches in your time. Remember when you thought—”

“It doesn’t matter,” I say. “We don’t want to dent my confidence, just as we’re starting out.”

"I don't think that's going to be an issue," mutters Nikki.

I ignore her, as I draw lines from Mikey, Sophie and myself to Nikki as well. "Now we need to figure out who the rat links to..." I scratch my head. "Sophie was here, just before I found the rat, so she's the most obvious person. We should try and work out if it's possible for her to have got into the house and left the rat on my bed." There's a small voice in my head that says it would be way too obvious if the person who was here just before Monday left their note did, in fact, turn out to be Monday. They've been smart so far - yeah, Nikki might not be interested in the art of investigation, but she's still been baffled by them for a year. And they've clearly got a serious grudge against us, and a big flair for the dramatic - Sophie was never dramatic, she was always quiet and a bit wispy, like one mean word would knock her over.

But, hey, it's good to be optimistic that we'll quickly be able to crack this case.

Sophie's smiling face stares back at me from the board.

Or maybe not... One of my old friends threatening to kill me would not exactly be a good thing.

"And how are we going to prove it was Sophie?" says Nikki. I feel like she's just here to question everything I want to do.

"We need a ladder," I say.

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"This is stupid," says Nikki, as she helps me drag bags of soil out of the shed at the bottom of the garden to get to Uncle Dara's old ladder. He's obviously not much of a handyman, because according to Nikki it's buried right at the back, behind old pots of paint and the lawnmower. "Can't we just *ask* Sophie?"

"Yeah, that'd be smart," I say. "Hi, Sophie, did you leave a dead rat on my bed? No, you didn't? How can I tell if you're lying or not? Oh, I can't."

"But why is *this* the solution?" Nikki pants as she stands and wipes sweat from her brow. Poor thing, went for a run and just when she thought her exercising was over, got roped into helping me do heavy lifting.

"*You* don't need to do anything," I say. "You just need to time me..." I move the lawnmower out of the way, and swear – there's no ladder. "The ladder isn't here," I say, backing out of the shed. "Where's the ladder?"

"I don't know, maybe it went for a walk," snaps Nikki.

"Ha ha," I say, not feeling at all amused. I go back into the shed – maybe I somehow missed it.

"Hey, genius detective," calls Nikki. "You need to work on your observational skills."

I come out of the shed again, and she's standing by the extension, pointing to the side of the house. The ladder is propped against the wall – how the hell did I miss that? “You said it was in the shed,” I say, feeling slightly defensive.

“I forgot Dad had to clean the gutter the other day,” says Nikki. “But I swear I thought he put it back.”

“*You* need to work on being more helpful,” I grumble as I prop it up against the wall. The ladder being out in the open for anyone to spot – if they haven't been fed misinformation, like that it had been stored away in a shed – means that anyone wanting to climb onto the roof of the extension would have super-easy access. Which makes more sense than the alternative – they lugged their own across town, a sort of bring-your-own-ladder type situation. Although, how would they have known Uncle Dara left this one out? I suppose they could have been planning on climbing the tree next to the house – the branches hang down quite conveniently.

I'm getting caught up in something that probably isn't very important, and force myself to focus once more. As I'm about to mount the ladder, I pause. “Do you think...maybe I should get the rat?”

Nikki stares at me.

“You know, to test how heavy it would be to climb with it,” I clarify, just in case she thinks I want to fish the body out of the rubbish for fun. I realize as I'm saying it that I'm going overboard – I can easily get a backpack and put something in that weighs the same as the rat. “Scrap that, google how much a dead rat weighs, please.”

Nikki continues to gawp at me.

“It's part of my process,” I say, even though it's really not – but I'd like it to be. I know Aunt Sandra was always thorough when she investigated. I want to be like her.

She does a quick search on her phone. “Up to about five hundred grams,” she says.

I consider rooting around the kitchen for something that weighs five hundred grams – but then I figure that’s probably the weight of a loaf of bread and wouldn’t slow me down at all. “I’m going up,” I say. “Hold the ladder.”

It shudders beneath me – the ground isn’t even. As I scramble over the side and onto the roof, the little rocks that cover the flat surface crunching beneath my trainers, there’s a small “Hi!” from my right.

Lola is in her garden, gawping at me.

“How’s it going?” I say, like what I’m doing is completely normal. “Just cleaning the windows.” It turns out you don’t need to explain things to a five-year-old – she shrugs and goes back to playing with her bucket and spade, her bike lying on its side by the flower beds, apparently forgotten.

I get to my feet – the ground looks alarmingly far away. I remember I’m being timed – Nikki is looking up at me with her phone – so I climb in through Uncle Dara’s bedroom window. I immediately trip, because I underestimate how far down the floor is, and land with a huff on the bed. Monday didn’t do that, because I would have heard it.

I get to my feet and walk through the room and out onto the landing – it’s easy to avoid the creaking floorboard outside the linen closet if you know about it. But Monday either got unlucky on the way out of the room, or the way back. Maybe that points to Monday being someone who has never been inside the house before – although it’s a pretty weak clue. They might have just forgotten about the squeaking floorboard, or never registered it in the first place.

I walk up to the attic, and mime opening a backpack and placing a rat and a note on the bed. Was the rat neatly arranged? I glance at the photo helpfully on my whiteboard – it was dumped on the bed, with the eyes fixed on the door. Then I leave – back through the bedroom and out onto the roof.

I hesitate when I get to the ladder. "Maybe I won't climb down," I say, my stomach lurching at the thought of it falling backwards.

"Yeah, my dad wouldn't be happy if you broke your leg on your second day here," says Nikki.

"I wouldn't break my leg," I say. "If I fell from up here, I'd be okay – it's not *that* high. And pause the timer."

Nikki does. "Three minutes-ish."

I think back... I'm pretty sure there was at least three-minute gap between the floorboard creaking and Sophie knocking. Which means she's definitely a suspect for Monday.

"What do we do now?" calls Nikki.

"First things first," I say. "Lock that ladder away so someone can't get into the house again. And then come up to the attic." I climb slowly back through Uncle Dara's window and into the house. Our first line of investigation should be to find out where the rat came from – if Sophie bought it, she could be a front-runner.

Nikki arrives in the attic just after I do.

"Is that pet shop in Hillingate still open?" I ask.

Nikki frowns at me. "I don't know. I don't keep track."

I google it – it's open, and apparently does sell rats. Without thinking I hit the call button.

"Wait, what are you going to say?" asks Nikki. "They won't tell you private information about who bought what pet."

"It's not like I'm asking for medical information," I reply as someone picks up the phone. "Hello! Hi!"

"Hillingate Pets, how may I be of assistance?" comes a bored voice on the other end – it sounds like a boy, quite young. Maybe a teenager working a summer job, which

should hopefully make my life easier. He won't be massively fussed about telling me what I want to know.

"Hi, I'm calling to enquire about buying a rat," I say. Nikki scrunches her face at me, mouthing *what?* I wave impatiently at her – it's not like I'm actually going to go through and buy one. "Do you...have any in stock?"

"Yes," says the boy on the other side. "We've got three. But we don't sell over the phone."

"Yeah, of course," I say. "I was just worried about coming all the way into the store and there not being any...er...left. I'd be travelling from Longrove and it's a bit of a journey on the bus."

"You're a crap liar," whispers Nikki.

I put a finger to my lips and try to look as annoyed as I can. How am I supposed to get in the zone of someone who is really interested in buying a pet rat if she's being negative in the background?

"Right," says the boy. "Well, we do have rats in stock. They're selling well at the moment."

"That's good," I say. "Because I know it's a trend in Longrove now, to have a pet rat. I'm looking for an older one, actually. A full-size one."

"Oh, well, we've only got quite little ones. We sold our last adult one yesterday."

I widen my eyes at Nikki, and try to keep the excitement out of my voice. "Oh, really? Who was that to? Only, I'm buying it as a gift and..."

"You're trying to tell me you're worried you'll accidentally buy a rat for the person who bought one yesterday?" The boy's voice is deadpan – he's clearly not believing my story. Not that I can blame him. I wouldn't buy it either.

"Okay, I'll tell the truth. I think my sister has bought a rat and let it loose in the house and I want proof," I say. "She's from Longrove, she's got dark brown hair, she's

seventeen..." I'm describing Sophie - if he says the description fits her, then our job is done.

The boy snorts - I can't tell if he believes me. "The person who bought the rat was an older woman. Hang on..." There's some rustling papers. "A Ms Kerry Richmond."

The name doesn't mean anything to me. Disappointment swoops in my stomach as I thank the boy and hang up. "That was a dead end," I tell Nikki. "Sophie didn't buy the rat. Do you know a Kerry Richmond? Old lady? Maybe she's a new teacher at school or something?"

"No," says Nikki, as she sucks in her cheeks. "But the name is definitely familiar..." She leaves the room, and returns a minute later brandishing a leaflet, which she triumphantly hands over to me. "Look - there. Kerry Richmond - a member of the Longrove Committee. Owner of a bookshop in Longrove. All round nice person."

It's a sheet introducing key members of the Committee, with a picture and a little blurb about each of them that says sickening stuff along the lines of: *Arnold enjoys wholesome activities like pottery*. "They posted this through the door?" I say. "What a waste of ink."

Nikki glances at my whiteboard but says nothing.

Kerry's photograph is at the top of the page, right underneath Mr Reed. "Ah, okay," I say. "Now we're on to something." I'm not sure what, exactly, but it's progress. Why was Kerry Richmond buying a rat, if not to kill it and put it on my bed? "The issue is...I don't think either of us have ever spoken to her before."

"That's a fair point," says Nikki. Finally, she agrees with me. "But what about the rat that got posted to Chloe?"

I swear. I'd forgotten about that one. "Kerry might have bought that one a while ago. The boy said the rats are selling well. It would have taken a few days for the rat to get to

London in the post, longer if Kerry opted for the cheaper delivery option. I bet she's cheap."

"Thirty seconds ago, neither of us had ever heard of her," says Nikki.

"Well, we know she's part of the Committee," I say, and I pick up my whiteboard marker and add a new heading in the corner of my board - *The Committee*. "We know they don't like the Orange Flamingo, and they were strongly against Aunt Sandra joining them." At the mention of Aunt Sandra's name grief briefly flicks across Nikki's face - it's the same way I feel a rush of sadness whenever her name is brought up and I don't expect it. I don't know if Nikki wants to talk about it. Aunt Sandra was her *mum* after all - so I move past the moment, because maybe the investigation will distract both of us. "It'd be a bit weird for a bunch of adults to be getting together to, you know...threaten to *murder* us, but it's Longrove. It's a weird town." Plus the theory doesn't need to entirely make sense yet - we're peeling back the onion. Investigation is a process, that's what Aunt Sandra always said. We'll reach the point where we'll be able to look at the board and put everything together.

"Right, and what do we do now?" asks Nikki, her hands on her hips as she stares at the board with its seven photos and the scrawl of *The Committee* in the corner.

I think for a second, then print out another photo - Mr Reed goes up on the board, above the Committee, because he's in charge of them. I draw a link from Topher to him - father and son. I'm a former student, and Nikki, Mikey and Sophie are all still currently at Longrove High.

"Mr Reed always just ignores me," says Nikki. "Like I don't even exist. But he likes Mikey - because he's on the football team and they're doing well. Glory for Longrove and all that. Though I'm not entirely sure how much Mikey actually contributes to the team..."

There's adrenaline spiking through me now - proper excitement. I haven't felt this way in a long time. In London, I've just been existing, trying to put the past behind me. All I planned to do this week was relax, but now I've got a case, my first-ever case, and it's like Aunt Sandra is standing next to me, in her home, egging me on. Suddenly this place is not a sad reminder of her - it's somewhere she was *happy*, and I was too.

We're going to take down Monday, who left a rat on my bed, posted one to Chloe, took a photo of my home in London, shoved Nikki into a cupboard and has threatened to kill me.

And I'm going to like doing it.

I point at Mikey's smiling face then look back at Nikki. "It's time to speak to our next suspect."

"Mikey has a job at Bright Books," says Nikki, as she locks the front door and we head out. "He works there on weekends during term-time, but I think he might be working mornings too now, because it's summer."

"Why didn't you mention that before?" I ask, thinking back to the leaflet about the Committee we've just read. "Kerry Richmond owns that shop!"

"So?" says Nikki, and I try to remember that she's practically my sister, and I don't want her to be afraid of Monday any more and that's why I'm investigating. Because right now she's being annoying as hell.

"It's a link between the woman who happened to buy a rat the day before one showed up in my bed, and one of our suspects," I say, because it's incredibly obvious.

"This is Longrove," says Nikki. "There are links between everyone. It's a small town."

"And how do you know Mikey works there anyway?" I ask, feeling jittery now. I'm not sure how I feel about seeing Mikey again - will it be awkward, considering what good friends we were? Will the fact I suspect him of sending me death threats make things strange?

Now that we're outside in the sunshine, getting things done, the fear I initially felt upon seeing Monday's note has

faded slightly. All I'm feeling is that buzz, a sort of righteous sense that we're pursuing the truth. And the idea of someone killing me in six days feels even more ridiculous.

Nikki looks at me like she thinks I'm stupid. "Because I've...bought books from there?"

"Right," I say. Fair play. That was a pretty pointless question. I need to work on that – Aunt Sandra always took care when she asked questions, mulling them over. Everything she did was pointed. Although maybe it just seemed like that because she only wrote important things in her notebooks – but she always did say to think things through before I spoke.

Bright Books is Longrove's bookshop. It's mostly sustained by tourists who realize snapping photos with the Old Guy takes five minutes max, and they've driven all the way out to the middle of nowhere for nothing.

When we go in, it's quiet; there are two old ladies browsing, both of whom look vaguely familiar. One of them shoots me a dirty look – I think I recognize her from that Committee leaflet.

There's no one behind the counter, nor is there any sign of staff – or Kerry Richmond. If I had this job I'd probably be using the time to have a nap, but I know that's not Mikey. He'll be taking this really seriously, probably bouncing off the walls trying to figure out ways to make the shop better.

"What do we do?" asks Nikki. She looks at me like she expects me to lead us – and yet she doesn't want to be called my sidekick. She needs to pick a lane.

"I don't know, you're the one who said he'd be here," I reply, feeling slightly grouchy. Why *don't* I know what to do? Aunt Sandra would have a plan already.

"Maybe Mikey's not working today," she says.

"Well, *someone* must be," I say. "We can ask them when he's next on shift." I go around the till.

“What are you *doing*?” Nikki whispers as I pull open the door that leads to the backroom. It’s a dim space with no windows, and stacks of books on metal shelves. In one corner there’s a little kitchenette with a microwave and a kettle – and on the far couch is someone sitting, sorting books.

Mikey.

I almost don’t recognize him. He’s stuck in my mind as being lanky and awkward – but now he’s got an air of confidence about himself and looks...well...*hot*. The thought makes me cringe – that’s *Mikey*. The same kid who got so scared the one time we watched a horror film he insisted we turn on all the lights in the house and follow up with at least three episodes of a cartoon to “cleanse our memories”.

But despite the uncomfortable fact that he’s grown into his height well, there’s lots about him that’s familiar – the way his messy blond hair sticks up in a shock around his head, how his blue eyes always look like they’re smiling.

“*Kay*?” he says, gaping at me. His face lights up, like it’s the best moment of his day to see me – just like it always used to.

“Hey,” I say awkwardly, and I wish I had thought this through – how the hell do I navigate all the small talk that comes with not speaking to someone for a year before I get to the big question of *did you kill a rat and put it on my bed*? “How’s it going?”

His smile wavers slightly – I probably sound like a stilted robot. “Let’s go speak in the main shop area,” he says. “You’re not supposed to be back here.”

I nod, feeling a little bit like I’ve been told off as I head out of the back area. Nikki and Mikey follow.

“So what are you doing here, *Kay*?” Mikey says. He still sounds really friendly, but at the same time more guarded than I remember him being – like he’s slightly wary of me.

"I'm in town and I wanted to catch up," I say with a shrug. "You know, for old times' sake." I don't know what I'm saying – Mikey was one of my closest friends just a year ago. Before everything went to crap.

Our friendship used to be so easy. I met him in high school, and when we were eleven and still pretty dorky – as opposed to how cool I am now – we'd ride our bikes around Longrove and look for treasure, because his older brother told us the Committee had buried some years ago and forgotten where they put it. Neither of us actually believed Danny, but it was fun all the same.

Mikey joined the fold with me, Nikki, Sophie and Ivy, slotting into our group straight away. The next few years were easy friendship, complaining over maths homework and panicking about stupid things I don't even remember any more.

Except then Ivy died, and Aunt Sandra got sick, and Mikey stopped being the happy, golden-retriever friend I'd always known, and got serious and started asking me how I was, and should we talk about the night Ivy died, and did I need any help, and obviously I didn't.

I didn't.

I did, but admitting it would have made it all even worse. And then I left town.

Mikey's eyes are flickering over me – he doesn't believe I'm just here for a catch-up. I'd forgotten how perceptive he is, which is annoying, since that gift would have helped massively in my quest to become a first-rate detective just like Aunt Sandra. I'm good at making assumptions about people, but half the time they're not right. Not that I won't keep trying. One day I'm sure I'll strike gold. Hopefully before I'm murdered.

"Okay, so catch up with me," says Mikey. He glances at Nikki – he's trying to work out why she's here too, and she

picks up on the hint because she starts rummaging through a box of bargain comic books nearby, though she stays within earshot. "Fill me in on your life since you've been away."

"I'm really here to talk about you," I say. "What have *you* been doing? Bought any...pets lately?"

He blinks at me and my face burns red.

"And I'd like to buy this book as well." I grab a random one off the shelf - *Every human is an alien. This isn't a conspiracy - it's the TRUTH*. It's the wordiest title I've ever seen - and why do they even have it in stock? Who the hell is buying it? Mikey's eyebrows raise as he scans it, but he doesn't comment. "Are you, erm...still in touch with Sophie? Do you hang out?" Maybe they teamed up - Sophie distracted me while he snuck the rat into my bed.

"No," he says. "We've got our own crowds now. After Ivy..." The air is heavy with things we can't talk about. The machine takes for ever to churn out the receipt, like it's doing it on purpose. "After that night, even. You know. You were there."

The night Ivy died. Yes, I was, for a bit. Before I left early because everyone was being weird - Ivy was annoyed, and everything Sophie said to make her feel better just seemed to piss her off more. Nikki was mopey and even quieter than usual. And Mikey was distracted, constantly on the phone with his brother because their parents were having a huge argument.

Mikey hands the book over to me and I grasp it. *Focus*. I'm here to investigate, not reminisce. "I saw Sophie this morning," I say as casually as I can - I need to get *something* out of this conversation. "She was going for a run - at eight a.m. In the *morning*."

Mikey snorts. "You were never a morning person, were you?" he says. "I bet someone willingly doing exercise at eight a.m. is baffling to you."

I'm annoyed that he's right. I can force myself out of bed in the morning, but I really don't like it. Sleeping is one of my favourite hobbies. But I also sense an opportunity to bring the conversation around to a useful line of questioning. "Not like you – morning person, evening person... I bet at eight a.m. you'd already been for *three* runs."

Mikey shakes his head. "At eight a.m. Danny was driving me back from Dad's house in the death-mobile. Do you remember it?"

"He's still got it?" I say, slightly impressed that the death-mobile is still running. It's a vile-coloured green car that Danny got when he turned seventeen. He'd occasionally deign to give us rides into Hillingate when we wanted to go to the cinema, or the bowling alley, or do something other than mooch around Longrove and hang out in the woods or the abandoned house there – as in, when we all had a bit of money to spend. Although it was always a bit of a risk getting in the death-mobile...as the name suggested. I have no idea how it managed to pass all the tests to be allowed on the road. If I didn't know that the Kelvin boys were probably the most law-abiding citizens known to man, I'd have thought Danny bribed someone.

Which, come to think of it, makes it a *lot* less likely that Mikey killed a rat and dumped it in my bedroom. Plus, he's got an alibi – coming back from his dad's with his brother this morning means he wasn't calling himself Monday and crawling through Uncle Dara's bedroom.

"The death-mobile still clings to life," Mikey says proudly. "And I get to share it now. Of course, the locks somehow no longer work and the engine won't stop making choking noises. Mum's really hoping that it's on its last legs, or that someone will steal it or something."

"I think even thieves have standards," I say, as I grin at him. I'd forgotten how easy it was chatting to Mikey – and

I'm feeling much warmer towards him now that I can rule him out of the whole Monday/rat-killer thing.

He smiles back. I feel like I've got everything I can out of this conversation and, since he's probably innocent, I realize I've just spent £15.99 on a book I'm never going to read.

"On second thoughts, I'd like to return this," I say.

18

"You know you didn't even ask about Kerry Richmond," says Nikki as we leave the bookshop. "And you were the one throwing a strop because I didn't mention Mikey works for her."

I'd completely forgotten about Kerry, but I'm not about to tell Nikki that. "Well, it's because Topher has a closer connection. His dad's on the Committee with her, *and* he mentioned rats."

Nikki makes a *hmm* noise, but doesn't comment. "We should probably stop by the cafe before we go digging into Topher," she says. "It's almost twelve - we can get some early lunch."

Uncle Dara is delighted to see us, and piles our plates with food. There's a group of girls who used to be in my history class sitting by the window, and they end up joining me and Nikki. We never really spoke when I lived here, but I'm a novelty now and they're happy to see me and catch me up on all the gossip - and hear all about London, where, supposedly, things *actually* happen. They're unimpressed by the number of escape rooms I've managed to complete, and disappointed I've never seen a celebrity in the flesh.

"Joys of a small town," says Nikki, as we finally leave an hour later to carry on with our investigation.

Mr Reed lives in a part of town where the houses are old and grand and have got at least six bedrooms and enormous gardens, and the people don't ever have to see their neighbours if they don't want to, because their homes are hidden behind electric fences and towering hedges. But it turns out we don't need to go that far – as we walk down the high street, there's a bunch of people hanging out on the green opposite the community library, and Topher is one of them.

I smooth down my hair, and Nikki snorts. We sidle up, and suddenly I feel like a kid, even though the group are all only two years older than us. I recognize a few of them from Longrove High – obviously back from university for the summer, and in no need of a job.

Liam Maldin is walking across the green towards us – and for a wild moment I think he's going to join the university students. But then he swerves, his hands in his pockets: the perpetual loner. His eyes briefly meet mine, and there's a look of deep dislike in them. I get that I wasn't *that* friendly to him, but I surely haven't done anything to warrant his reactions when he sees me.

I try to put him out of my mind as I take a deep breath. *Focus*. I'm nervous about speaking to Topher – what if he denies ever having a conversation in the graveyard? But while a few people are shooting each other looks that say *what do these two kids want*, he turns and smiles, then gets to his feet, brushing off grass.

"How's it going?" he says with a smile, his hands in his pockets. Amongst his friends he seems even *cooler*, and I'm tongue-tied.

"Hey," says Nikki smoothly. "We were just wondering if maybe you know Kerry Richmond's number? We'd like to speak to the Committee about, er...my dad's cafe."

Topher raises his eyebrows. "Wouldn't it be better to chat to *my* dad? Although you're barking up the wrong tree, I'm

afraid. I don't think your family and the Committee are ever going to get along." He shakes his head. "I don't get it, honestly. And Mrs Khatri seemed so great - I never understood why Dad never let her join."

It's weird to hear Aunt Sandra referred to as *Mrs Khatri*. All formal.

Nikki sucks in a breath at the mention of her mum. "Why *didn't* he let her join?" she says.

"Not a clue," says Topher. "Maybe he was intimidated by her. You know, I remember a few weeks before...you know. She was sitting on one of those benches, watching everyone." He nods behind us. "And she had this notebook that she was writing in, and she looked really serious, and I've never felt more judged in my life."

I hold back a smile - that's Aunt Sandra. She always had her notebooks, scribbling down her observations. I have her notebooks now. Uncle Dara gave them to me, said I would probably enjoy going through her old cases. Mum thought it was morbid, and told me to chuck them - I had to hide them at the back of my wardrobe, because I knew she would follow through and bin them even if I told her not to.

But Aunt Sandra stopped writing in them ages ago. Soon after she was diagnosed.

"Are you sure it was only a few weeks before when you saw her?" I say as casually as I can.

"Yeah, it's not something I could forget," says Topher. "That was probably one of the last times I saw her out and about."

Suddenly I don't care about the investigation, about Monday and their death threat - I want to know what happened to that notebook, Aunt Sandra's *last* notebook. My heart is thudding - maybe Uncle Dara missed it when he gave me all her other ones. Maybe it's buried in a corner

somewhere in the house. What secrets did she record in there? What thoughts?

I've already gone through everything else she left me, over and over so many times I could probably recite it all. And now there's a chance for fresh material, new thoughts from her that I never thought I would have.

"We'll see you around," I say, and half drag Nikki away.

"There's nothing in here," says Nikki, as she hunts through Uncle Dara's wardrobe. "And I feel weird about rifling through my parents' stuff."

"It's not rifling. Uncle Dara gave me all Aunt Sandra's notebooks - it's just finding the one he missed." I'm crouching, looking in the gap underneath the bed. There is a *lot* of dust.

"Maybe he deliberately didn't give it to you," says Nikki.

"Or maybe it just wasn't with the others," I say, getting to my feet. "Your mum might still have been writing in it when she... Maybe she kept it somewhere else." Nikki doesn't seem to understand the significance of there being a *new notebook*. It's like...discovering a new season of a favourite TV show after you thought it was already over. A chance to feel connected to new passages of Aunt Sandra's writing. But then again, Nikki never showed interest in Aunt Sandra's notebooks. I don't think she feels the same connection through them that I do.

"She used to write at the desk in the old guest bedroom," says Nikki. "That's now my dad's office..."

I hurry across the hallway into the office. Uncle Dara hasn't even noticed we've taken the printer and whiteboard, because he uses it so infrequently. The desk looks like it hasn't been touched in a while - Uncle Dara's got it right in the corner to make space for his couch. I pull one of the

drawers open, and it rattles as I do so, revealing a few pens. But when I yank the second drawer open, a gold notebook slides out.

It's here. It's real. Another notebook I haven't read. An hour of new, additional Aunt Sandra content that I thought I would never see.

I hold it out to Nikki, because really she should get to look first. But Nikki shakes her head, her hands balled into fists.

"No," she says. "It's yours."

My *thank you* lodges in my throat, and my hands shake as I pull back the cover. Nikki stands at my shoulder to read. There are only a few pages of writing, and for a second disappointment floods through me. I wanted an entire journal of new thoughts, to keep me going. But then I register what I'm looking at – bullet-pointed notes. Names jump out at me – *Sophie Darlington. Mikey Kelvin. Kay Gill. Nikki Khatri. Topher Reed. John Reed. Liam Maldin.*

"You skipped the first page," says Nikki. I go back to the first page and try to process what I'm seeing, but the words still don't make sense, even though they're nice and simple. *Ivy Harchester's Death* is in neat letters on the front page, the time she died, where it happened.

"I don't understand what we're looking at." Nikki frowns. Even if she does, she wants me to be the one to say it aloud.

"Your mum was investigating a case when she died," I say. "Her last case. She thinks Ivy was murdered."

Monday – 5.14 p.m. – Mikey

There was a chill to the air – it was early May, but the sun had vanished behind clouds. Mikey sat with his back to a tree, his legs tucked up against his chest, clutching his phone, which kept vibrating with messages from Danny.

Danny: I think it's better if you don't come home. All they're doing is shouting and Dad's packing bags.

Mikey took a swig of the cheap beer Ivy had managed to procure. He didn't massively like the taste, but if he drank enough he hoped it would give him some sort of buzz, so he could stop thinking about what was happening at home – and how his dad was probably going to walk out on them. He knew his dad loved him and Danny, just not enough to stay. Just not enough to stop him from having an affair.

The girls had played charades, laughing at each other's poor acting. Ivy even managed to get Nikki involved. Any other time, that would have been surprising, but today it was a miracle. Nikki and Kay had been down all week, but Ivy had a knack for bringing the fun out in people. They had just switched to tag, but Mikey couldn't bring himself to join in with them.

"This is the life, hey, Mike?" Ivy was sitting on the ledge that jutted out over the river. This far out of the town

centre, the bank was way too steep to get down to the river; it was almost vertical in places. On the ledge it could feel like you were sitting in the middle of the rushing water. Ivy had moved on from the beer, and was holding a bottle of vodka with a special gold screw cap. She had already taken three big swigs, and while she seemed pretty sober the use of the nickname Mike, which she knew he wouldn't respond to, told a different story. "Isn't this the life?" she repeated, a slight edge to her voice.

"Sure is," said Nikki, as she took the bottle from Ivy, and had a big glug herself.

"Look at that, Kay, Nikki's really getting involved," said Ivy. Kay was sitting away from everyone else, shifting uncomfortably. She had played tag but then Ivy had wanted to introduce drinking to it, and she said no. Mikey knew her mum would have a fit if she drank anything – her mum was scary at the best of times.

Sophie was sipping beer, wincing as she did so and glancing at Ivy every so often, like she was hoping Ivy would send some praise her way.

Mikey looked at his phone again. Danny hadn't sent an update.

He took another swig of beer, as Ivy got to her feet, swaying slightly. Definitely not sober.

"You're all boring twats," she said, and her good mood from earlier was gone. "Boring, boring, boring. Just little kids, really. Hey, Mikey, how's your dad?"

His blood went cold – Ivy knew about his dad's affair. She'd seen him and his new girlfriend in Hillingate, kissing on a street corner in broad daylight, like they had nothing to hide. She had told him about it, and he had asked her to keep it a secret because he knew his mum didn't want the gossip to spread around town. And her eyes had gleamed,

because Ivy collected secrets like other people might collect books.

“He’s good,” said Mikey, and Ivy threw back her head and laughed, and her hair cascaded in golden locks down her back, and she looked beautiful - and he had never hated her more.

WEDNESDAY

19

I sit on my bed cross-legged, Aunt Sandra's golden notebook in front of me. It's 8.21 a.m., but I've barely slept - I have everything in those few pages memorized. There's one page ripped out, and all that remains is jagged edges - it's frustrating. What if there was something important on it? But Aunt Sandra sometimes took out leaves from her notebooks to use for other mundane stuff, shopping lists and reminders to Uncle Dara.

In her notebook, Aunt Sandra sets out what I know of that night - I left the river first, then Nikki, with Mikey and Sophie following shortly afterwards. But Ivy stayed - she told Mikey and Sophie she was waiting for someone, except she wouldn't say who. But Mikey didn't think she was meeting anyone, he figured she was trying to save face because everyone was ditching her. Although he obviously put it much more nicely.

An hour later there was a 999 call - Aunt Sandra hasn't put down who made it. We all assumed the police had traced the call, but the person who discovered the body was never publicly revealed. Everyone thought it was someone trespassing in the woods like we were, and the police thought it wasn't necessary to release their identity.

The police and ambulance arrived to find Ivy dead at the scene, and it was quickly called an accident. She had fallen

and hit her head on the sharp rocks jutting out of the river. The combination of her head injury, how drunk she was, and the river rushing meant she couldn't get out, and drowned.

But Aunt Sandra thought differently. And she had a list of suspects too. A list which includes me and Nikki. From her notes, she thinks one of us came back to kill Ivy, or snuck through the woods to attack her, like Topher or Liam. But why is *Mr Reed* on her list? Our *head teacher*? And I never once saw Topher speak to Ivy. Though Liam would make sense as a killer, because Ivy had told everyone he was stalking her. He might have taken it to the next level.

Except...Aunt Sandra was also sick. It had been years since she had investigated murder cases – her time in Longrove had mostly been hobby cases she had taken in between being a stay-at-home mum. What if she was just trying to make a murder out of an accident as a sort of last hurrah? There's nothing in her notes to support this, but I know how tired she was, how tired she was of being tired. How much she spoke about her glory days.

There's something else in the notebook which has unsettled me. Apart from the fact there's nowhere near the normal detail of Aunt Sandra's usual cases – in fact, there's barely any information at all, just random thoughts like: *the report was interesting, Ivy was a liar, I'm surprised by that piece of information* – there is one paragraph that chills me:

Ivy had received a few anonymous notes. There were probably more, but her mother only knew of two, which read as follows:

Don't be boring, let's play a game next week.

On Monday you should walk out of maths.

On Tuesday you should wear tie-dye instead of your school uniform... I'll think of something fun for

Wednesday, don't worry.

And note two read:

You'd better do what I say, or it'll be the end.

My stomach churns as I read over the paragraph, again and again, even though I could recite it word for word now.

Get ready for the next week, because we're going to play a game. The first note follows a similar pattern to...

Monday.

Asking to play a game, listing days of the week – only it's nowhere near as extreme as the note Monday gave me and doesn't even get to Wednesday. But Monday has had over a year to develop their threats and make them more menacing, rather than the basic *wear tie-dye*, which is similar to the demand Nikki got to dye her hair. I think I even remember Ivy randomly leaving maths, and coming back wearing tie-dye – but I just chalked it up to Ivy being Ivy. Wanting to test boundaries.

And when the first note is combined with the second, it's a lot more alarming – *do what I say, or it'll be the end*. That's a death threat.

Ivy was getting notes from Monday.

And Ivy ended up dead.

Monday's death threat is *real*. They're really going to try and kill me. Just like they did Ivy.

Blood roars in my ears – maybe I *should* get the hell out of Longrove. Home isn't safe, not this week, not when Monday knows where I live – but maybe I can hide somewhere else.

Only I can't hide for ever – and Monday still knows where Nikki and Uncle Dara live. And knows where Chloe lives too.

They could still hurt other people – *stabbing. Fire.* Who knows – Monday might murder others as well.

Although maybe Aunt Sandra was wrong. Maybe Ivy wasn't murdered, and maybe the way those notes are worded is pure coincidence. After all, *walk out of maths on Monday* is very different to *get ready for your murder on Monday*. And stabbing.

And wreckage. Today is *wreckage*, whatever that means.

The stairs leading up to the attic creak, and a moment later Nikki peers around my bedroom door. She looks like she hasn't slept either – her eyes go straight to the notebook in my lap. She read it through a few times. We discussed the theory that Monday might have murdered Ivy, and Nikki said she always knew how dangerous Monday was. She was mostly silent after that – she did that thing she does where she closes off, trying to process something. After Aunt Sandra died she was so wrapped up in grief, we didn't speak for a month.

Of course, I do the same. And Mum. And Dad. It runs in the family.

"What do you think?" she says, as she shuffles into the room. "Do you think she was right?" Her voice shakes as she says it.

Her mind is clearly also on Aunt Sandra. But for the first time in my life, I don't want Aunt Sandra to have been correct – because if she was, and Ivy was murdered, and Ivy was being sent messages from Monday...

"I don't know," I say. "There's hardly any info in here – I don't even know why Topher and Mr Reed are suspects... Or if this actually is a suspect list, because she hasn't even said that."

"She was right," says Nikki, as she looks at my whiteboard, at the photo of herself. "Ivy was murdered."

“How can you be sure?” I say with a frown, sitting up straighter. Her voice is certain.

“Because...” Nikki takes a deep breath. “I was there.”

20

"What do you mean?" I say. "You...saw Ivy...?"

"No," says Nikki quickly. "No. I left just after you did – only I was drunk, so I sort of stumbled around in the woods, and then I sat by a tree until I stopped feeling sick... I must have fallen asleep, because I woke up and it was much later. And I hadn't gone far from where we had been, because I could hear Ivy...yelling." She turns away, like she wants to examine the whiteboard again – but I get the sense she doesn't want to look at me. "And she was screaming, *I won't jump. I won't jump.* Over and over and over – and I didn't move. And then I heard another scream and it cut right through me. And I got up and ran back to the ledge – and there she was..."

"You saw her...her body?" I whisper, horrified.

"I couldn't get down to her," says Nikki. "It was too steep. So I called the police, and my mum, and I told them what I'd heard, and I told them Ivy had been murdered but...but no one believed me. They said I was drunk and confused and got details mixed up, and that I didn't actually *see* anything. I guess they felt sorry for me – they didn't publicly announce it was me who made the call, they didn't think there was any point." She turns to face me, and there are tears in her eyes. "No one believed me. And I knew all this time that Ivy was murdered and there wasn't anything I could do."

I don't know what to say – I want to comfort her. Because she *should* have been believed. And she shouldn't have had to keep this secret to herself, this horrible knowledge that Ivy was murdered. It's like the Monday secret all over again. She's been carrying this on her own, without me, and I feel like there's a gulf between us now. "Your mum believed you," I say at last, holding up the notebook. Surely, that fact will help her?

Nikki shakes her head. "She told me to forget about it. She said it was an accident and I needed to stop worrying... that it would all be okay. But I felt so *guilty* – if I had been quicker, I could have seen who pushed Ivy. Maybe I could have stopped them."

She had been drunk; she wouldn't have been able to help. But even now I can see the guilt is eating her up. Maybe that's why her messages to me over the past year have been so clipped, why she's been quieter in person. It's not just about Aunt Sandra.

"Your mum believed you," I repeat. "This notebook proves it."

"Now you see why I don't think there's any point going to the police about Monday," says Nikki, avoiding my statement. "They didn't listen to me about Ivy – it shouldn't matter that I was drunk. I know what I heard."

"Yeah, if we were to go to them now, we're still in the same position," I say. "We don't have any proof that Ivy was murdered, which means we don't have any proof that her death was linked to Monday. There's still nothing the police can really do to help us..." What can we even do to help ourselves? My board is horribly empty, and it looks like I've already wasted two days of dithering – we're five days away from my *murder*.

I run my fingers over the names Aunt Sandra has in her notebook. If Ivy's death and Monday are linked, that means I'm looking for the same person she was. A shiver goes

through me, and it's almost like she's in the room with me. Aunt Sandra would have loved for me to figure it out, because that's what she always wanted for me. To walk in her footsteps, to use my mind to solve puzzles other people couldn't.

I can make her proud.

And Aunt Sandra has cemented that I'm looking in the right direction. Liam, Mr Reed, Topher Reed were all on my murder board, and they're also in her notebook.

I get cracking printing off more photos for my whiteboard.

"Is that really the most pressing thing to do right now?" asks Nikki.

"Yes," I say, as I stick a photo of Ivy up. It was taken a few weeks before she died, at school - she's in her uniform and she's turning around and beaming at the camera, and for a second a wave of grief rushes through me, so strong I don't know where it's come from. In this photo, she had just told me that she wished she could have hair like mine, and I said what, thick and messy, and she said no - *luscious*. And then she burst into that giant smile. "When did your messages from Monday start?" I say, clearing my throat, which suddenly feels like it has a lump stuck right in the middle.

Nikki scrunches up her face. "I can't be sure... I didn't keep them at first because I thought they were a stupid joke. It was always pieces of paper put through the letter box but...I guess they started just after Ivy's funeral. And then they stopped when Mum died and then...started again. They weren't regular messages."

"Monday stopped when Aunt Sandra died?" I mutter. I don't know why that feels like a key bit of information, but it does. It shows...compassion? Like Monday wanted to give Nikki time to grieve before they went back to attacking her?

“Yeah, for a bit,” says Nikki with a shrug. “But like I said, the messages weren’t regular. Maybe that was one of the times Monday was busy with other stuff before they went back to harassing me, who knows?” We fall silent as Nikki looks up at the whiteboard. “This is a solid list of people,” she says. “But it doesn’t feel right to have Mr Reed on this list. I know Monday isn’t exactly a normal person, but it’d be especially weird for an *adult* to have been the one harassing me. And...it’s still really unclear to me why *we’re* the ones Monday has targeted. And specifically *you*. You don’t even live in Longrove any more.”

I don’t get it either. Not that I think it makes any more sense for *Nikki* to have been targeted, but surely I faded from people’s minds when I left town. “What reason could Monday have had to go after Ivy? What could have motivated someone to want to *kill* her?” Nikki doesn’t answer, but even though I’ve got some ideas I don’t feel comfortable saying them aloud, because it feels...cruel.

Ivy could be your best friend – or your worst enemy. Or both.

Nikki’s phone starts vibrating.

“Is someone calling you?” I say. She shakes her head.

“I’m just getting a lot of messages – there’re a few from Grace...” Her faces goes pale.

“What’s happened?” I say, as I scramble to take the phone off her.

Grace Deborah: There’s been an accident outside the cafe.

Grace Deborah: Your dad was in the car.

Grace Deborah: He’s okay right now, but get over here.

Nikki is breathing heavily, staring into space.

“It’s going to be fine,” I say, even though I obviously don’t have a clue if it is – he’s okay *right now*. What if something changes? But he has to be fine. There is no other option. “Come on – let’s run.”

Nikki nods, and hurries out of the room, down the stairs so fast she trips and slides down the last two steps, stopping herself from falling by grabbing the railing.

I’m right at her heels – and one thing is ringing in my mind.

Get ready for a wreckage on Wednesday.

21

An awful sight greets my eyes when we arrive on Blossom Avenue; Uncle Dara's car is wrapped around a lamp post. There are already police cars blocking the road, and two ambulances, and people milling around on the pavements, like it's all a spectacle to watch.

Nikki and I rush through the crowd to get to the ambulances. Ivy's mother, Angela Harchester, is standing outside one, speaking to a paramedic with Lola in her arms – and Lola is wailing, beating her hands against Angela's chest.

Uncle Dara is speaking to another paramedic outside the other ambulance and relief floods through me; he's standing and chatting normally. He looks okay, apart from a single bead of blood rolling down his forehead. His eyes slide to us as Nikki runs forward and hugs him, sobbing almost as loudly as Lola.

"It's fine," he says, patting her back. "We're all fine. Angela and Lola were in the car with me, and a car came up behind us and rammed me into the lamp post. We'll need to go to the hospital just to get checked over..." He trails off as Nikki pulls back.

"You're sure you're okay?" she says. "You're bleeding."

"I can't say the shock has been good for me," says Uncle Dara, rubbing his chest. "But the paramedics have done a quick check and it all seems good." He doesn't look fine,

though. He's blinking too much, like he doesn't understand what's going on.

"We'll still need to do scans at the hospital," says the paramedic. Angela and Lola are getting into their ambulance.

"What about Lola?" I say, because surely she shouldn't be crying that much? It doesn't even seem like she's stopping to breathe.

"We're all okay," repeats Uncle Dara, as the paramedic takes his arm and helps him into the ambulance. Nikki slides in behind him.

I try to follow her, but the paramedic shakes her head at me.

"Sorry, I can only fit two people in here," she says.

Uncle Dara looks at me. "Don't worry, Kay," he says. "The car took most of the damage."

"Move back, please," says the paramedic, and I do as I'm told. The door is slammed in my face and I blink a few times, shock still pulsing through me. Uncle Dara said he was fine and the paramedic didn't seem worried, but could they have missed something? There was a bead of blood on Uncle Dara's forehead – what if he's got a head injury?

The engines of the ambulances start and they drive off, and all of a sudden I'm left behind with Uncle Dara's damaged car. The front of it has completely crumpled on impact with the lamp post.

The police are speaking to people in the crowd. I wonder if any of them saw anything, or if they're just eager to be part of the drama.

Get ready for a wreckage on Wednesday.

Monday did this. Monday rammed into Uncle Dara's car, while Angela and a five-year-old were also inside.

They're completely sick – this is someone who doesn't mind hurting, or killing. This is someone with a serious

vendetta. They want to kill me. And they're willing to hurt the people around me too, before the grand finale on Monday. The note was for me, but the wreckage wasn't.

The police – two men who look like they're in their early twenties – draw closer to me, telling people to move away now.

I take a step towards them. I could tell them everything, let them take over...

Uncle Dara's smashed car is a clear reminder that I am way out of my depth – that Nikki and I can't handle this. Monday is going too far.

"Excuse me," I say, sidling up to them. I suddenly feel shy as they turn to look at me – I don't know how to begin. "My uncle was in that car crash – and I think...I think I have some information about who caused it." My voice sounds shaky. How am I supposed to tell them anything of what's happening, when it all sounds so...ridiculous?

I'm expecting them to turn me away, or roll their eyes. Instead one of them, who has dark hair and glasses, raises his eyebrows. "Oh?" he says, and his tone is encouraging.

I can't bring up the fact that I think Monday murdered Ivy – the police closed that case, and Nikki was right, we don't have any evidence since they won't listen to her account because she was drunk and came across confused. But I have the death threat I received, the fact that Monday said there would be a wreckage today – they would surely have to see it as more than a coincidence.

But before I can speak, Mr Reed appears behind the policemen, and slaps his hand on the shoulder of the man with the glasses. "Tony!" he says. "How *are* you? And Adam too!"

The policeman with the glasses – Tony – smiles, his face lighting up. "Mr Reed!" His colleague, Adam, who is wearing

so much gel in his blond hair it looks solid, also seems delighted.

"Call me John, Tony, you're not a student any more!" says Mr Reed, and his voice is so jovial I feel ill – how is he not in complete shock over what's just happened? *Lola*, a five-year-old, was in that car.

Tony doesn't seem to notice anything odd. "Sorry – old habits. You'll always be my head teacher."

"Me too, sir," says Adam, his voice reverential.

Mr Reed nods at me. "So many of my students go on to become important and influential," he says proudly.

Tony shifts uncomfortably. "I would hardly say that, sir. We're very much at the bottom of the food chain."

"But you'll be at the top one day," says Mr Reed, beaming. I've never seen this side of him, this charming adult. And it's weird how the police officers are acting like they're teenagers trying to impress him. "And you'll remember where you came from, too. I watched what happened from the Blossom cafe." He directs this last part at me. "A car came out of nowhere and rammed Dara's. I'll happily make a witness statement. Got to make sure justice is served, don't we?" He nods at the police.

Jason Halford is peering out of the cafe's window, and next to him is a woman who looks to be in her mid-fifties, with badly dyed blond hair and thick-framed glasses. I recognize her from the Committee leaflet – that's Kerry Richmond. A shiver goes through me. Her lips are pressed into a line, like she's *angry* to see me.

"You had something to tell us?" says Tony to me. I glance at Mr Reed, and the fact that he's a potential suspect, listed by Aunt Sandra too, makes me pause. He's made it clear he wasn't the one in the car – but someone else could have been driving the car under his direction. Maybe Tony senses that I

don't want to speak in front of him, because he adds, "We'll need to take a confidential statement."

But the police are in Mr Reed's pocket. How do I know they won't tell him everything I say? Or just completely disregard me?

"No, sorry," I say. "I'm just feeling a bit...strange. I might go and sit down." I hurry away, expecting one of the police officers to stop me, but neither of them does. I glance behind, and they're chatting and laughing with Mr Reed again. Was his timing, cutting off my conversation with the police, intentional? Or was it coincidental, because we were standing in front of the Blossom cafe, and he came out because he genuinely wanted a chat with his former students?

I'm in the Orange Flamingo before I've remembered Uncle Dara isn't here. Grace is behind the counter, talking to a customer, but she looks up at me and immediately hurries over.

"Are you okay, my dear?" she asks. "I'll make you a cup of tea, and we can wait to hear news from Dara. Though I don't think there will *be* any news - he seemed absolutely fine, didn't he?" She looks anxious. "He seemed to be walking and talking normally - Lola and Angela too."

"Yes," I mumble. I can't actually give her any reassurance, because I don't know anything - I've been left behind.

"Honestly, I couldn't believe it," says Grace. "The car just...appeared. And it went straight for Dara's car as well - no hesitation, I'm fairly sure it *sped up* when it got near."

"Did you see what happened?" I probe, my heart hammering.

"No, I was in the back of the cafe," says Grace. "But it was on our CCTV - I've handed it over to the police."

"What did the car look like?" I say quickly.

“Oh, it was a car, they all look the same.” Grace frowns. “It was green, a sickly green, I think, not a nice green. Hopefully the police will be able to trace the number plate.”

My stomach flips. “Was it a really old, ugly car?” I ask.

Grace’s brow is still furrowed as she looks at me. “It might have been. In fact...yes, I think it was.”

I stare at her, because I might know whose car it was – I’ve been in that car, I *discussed* that death-mobile just yesterday.

I think that car belongs to Danny and Mikey Kelvin.

22

Grace promises to tell the police my suspicions about who the owners of the car are - and in the meantime, I'll be going to speak to Danny and Mikey. Neither of them could have put the rat in my bedroom on Tuesday, since Danny was with Mikey coming back from his dad's, so I don't really understand what this new information means.

"I'll see you later," I tell Grace. She nods, still looking concerned as I walk away. A woman tries to stop me as I go, reaching out to grab my arm. I pull away and stare at her.

"Is your uncle okay?" she asks, and several other people turn to look at me. There're a few teenagers from Longrove High that I recognize, some from my old classes, all eagerly milling forward - again, the joys of a small town. I nod, pushing past them as quickly as I can - vultures, that's what they are, trying to get any bit of gossip to pick at.

I speed up, nearly breaking into a jog until I turn the corner onto the high street and I'm out of their sight. I'm already slightly out of breath - maybe I should take Sophie up on the suggestion of going for runs...if she's not the one who's secretly out to get me.

The woman in Bright Books says Mikey isn't working this morning, so I'll have to head to his house. To get there, I have to go past Uncle Dara's - I slow down as I approach it. There's a piece of paper sticking out of the letter box,

probably a leaflet advertising something the Committee is up to. I sigh as I go up the garden path to take it out – it's actually made of card, and curled into a tube, that's why it's wedged in the letter box.

The letter box snaps shut as I tug it out – and it's not a Committee leaflet.

*You clearly aren't clever enough to solve this puzzle,
are you?*

Hope you enjoyed your wreckage on Wednesday.

*And I hope you understand that things will only get
worse if you tell anyone about me.*

Can't wait for

Monday

I stare at it, not properly registering what I've read. The back of my neck prickles, and I suddenly get the sense I'm being watched. I look up and down the street – it's empty, though knowing the people of Longrove, there's at least one nosy neighbour watching me from behind their net curtains.

My blood boils – they're *taunting* me. It's typed again, printed out. I wonder if that means Monday thinks I'd recognize their handwriting, or if despite their threat they're worried I'll take this to the police.

Maybe Monday has been inside the house again.

I want to go and see Danny and Mikey, but the thought has burrowed inside me now. I have to do a quick check, just to make sure.

Quickly, I unlock the front door and step inside.

My phone buzzes with a message, and I pull it out of my pocket.

Nikki: Dad is okay and the paramedics don't seem too worried. We're still going to hospital but might be a while since it doesn't seem like a massive emergency.

I take a deep breath, and some of the stress is lifted off my shoulders. But even if Uncle Dara is going to be fine, it doesn't change what Monday did, what they're capable of.

And I hope you understand that things will only get worse if you tell anyone about me.

For some reason that part of the message eases my mind a little bit – I've obviously told Nikki. But the fact they don't know that...it means they're not omniscient. Which is a stupid thought, because of course they're not, but so far they've been able to slip in and out of the house without being seen, and cause a car crash in broad daylight.

I quickly type out a response to Nikki – thanks for letting me know, and then take a photo of Monday's message. I'll show it to her later, but in the meantime I'll add it to my board. I quickly double-check downstairs, then all the upstairs bedrooms, but there's no sign anyone has been inside. I head up to the attic, half expecting someone to have come in and moved things around, but everything is exactly where I left it.

All the same, I hesitate as I stare at my board – maybe it's not the best idea to have it out in the open like this, especially since someone's managed to break into the house twice to leave the notes, and is still targeting it through the letter box. What if they see it?

But then again...maybe that wouldn't be a bad thing. They could see my investigation, the links I'm making – how close I am to solving this. Because I've got a solid list of suspects... even if I still have no clue who is behind it all.

I print off a photo of Uncle Dara, and draw a link to me and Nikki, and then to Mr Reed as his former employer. Then I print out two more photos – Danny Kelvin, and a generic green car I found off Google, which spits out in dark grey. I write “sickly green” on the whiteboard next to it, and both photos get a link to Mikey.

I stand back and admire my handiwork, lingering on Uncle Dara’s smiling face – it’s a photo from a few years ago, before Aunt Sandra died. There are considerably fewer wrinkles lining his skin, his face is rounder – and there’s a twinkle in his eyes that’s now lost.

This is my fault.

The thought comes unbidden into my mind. If I had figured out who Monday was by now, I’d have been able to make sure the accident didn’t happen. They’re right to taunt me – I haven’t made any real progress.

Considering how eager I was to follow in Aunt Sandra’s footsteps, I’m a disappointment. To her memory, to her.

I print a final photo out – a black silhouette with a question mark over the face, and stick it right at the top of the board.

Underneath I write: *Monday*.

Because I won’t be scared, cowering as the days count down to my own murder.

I’m determined to take them down.

23

The walk to Mikey's house is a quiet one, through silent back roads.

As a group, we mainly hung out at Ivy's house or Mikey's, though most of the time we preferred hanging out in the woods.

The one place we *never* hung out was Sophie's. I know it's just her and her dad Chris, but even when I lived here I only saw him on a few occasions. He was older than the other parents, with wiry grey hair and cold blue eyes. Sometimes I'd run into him at the corner shop, where he'd be purchasing cigarettes and beer. Sophie never spoke about her dad, and even Ivy knew not to pry, or mention her home life.

On the flip side, Mikey's mum loved inviting us over for dinner. She'd often work late, because she's some sort of criminal defence solicitor, but on the occasions she was home she'd cook up feasts.

As I walk, I pass a row of identical-looking houses that are only about ten years old – newbuilds in Longgrove terms. Liam lives in one of these. Ivy told me to look out for him after she shared that he was stalking her.

As I'm heading down Liam's road, a silver car drives past and parks in a driveway. A man gets out, looking weary and stressed but with a face that suggests he smiles a lot – he's got laughter lines around his eyes.

He rubs them as he glances back at the road, towards me – and does a double-take. At once I'm smiling. Richard Maldin, Liam's dad, is a surgeon. Despite the fact that I was never friends with his son, I always liked him – he was one of Aunt Sandra's friends, one of the people who welcomed her and Uncle Dara when they moved to Longrove. He was supposed to be on Aunt Sandra's medical team, but stepped aside because he couldn't handle her case knowing her as well as he did. Instead he offered support, sitting down with us all to explain exactly what was happening, which was a great help when doomsday searching on Google revealed that everyone in the family, actually, had cancer, and I also had several other incurable diseases too.

"Kay Gill," he says with a small shake of his head, his eyes lighting up. "Liam said you were back in town. How have you been?"

I wonder exactly what Liam said about me – did he mention he told me to leave town?

I grin back at Richard.

"I've been better," I say. "Uncle Dara's just been in a car accident... He's fine," I add quickly, because Richard's expression immediately turns into concern. "But he's being checked out at the hospital."

Richard's smile fades. "Oh, I hadn't heard. I just got back from the hospital, actually. Are you being updated? I can get in touch and see what's going on?"

"Nikki's with him," I say. "But thanks." All of a sudden I'm flashing back to a year ago. It's like nothing has changed – he's got the same concerned expression on his face, and he's making the same offer to try to find out more information for me. Only this time the person connecting us is gone.

"Any time, Kay," says Richard. His eyebrows furrow. "It's nice seeing you again. Sandra was always so proud of you, and I know from Liam what a kind person you are."

I stare at him. "Er..." Liam told his father I'm *kind*? Why? What game is he playing? He definitely didn't think I was *kind* when I saw him on Monday. Plus, he barely spoke to me at school; Ivy made sure he was iced out of our group. How would he have even reached that conclusion? I can't forget that he was on Aunt Sandra's list, for some reason – now is the time to see whether he's got an alibi for today. "Is Liam around?" I say.

"No, I called this morning to check in and he said he was out," says Richard. "He didn't say where, but he's performing in a play this summer, in Hillingate; they've got rehearsals at all sorts of hours."

"Oh, is that where he was Tuesday morning?" I say. "I knocked to say hi but he was out." It's a risk, because Richard and Liam might both have been home – I'll have to pretend I didn't ring the doorbell and just tapped the window lightly if he says he was there.

"Probably," says Richard. "He's very dedicated."

"It sounds really interesting," I say. "What's the name of the company? Nikki's really into acting."

"Performance Hillingate," says Richard.

I try to hold back a smile – now I can check on Liam's alibi. "Thanks, Mr Maldin. It was really great to see you too."

He nods at me, smiling. "Hope you have a lovely rest of your stay here." There's something reassuring about him that takes me back to how he was the only doctor I thought I could trust to tell me the truth about what was happening with Aunt Sandra. I resented him at the time, because I knew he was one of the best surgeons the hospital had, and I wished he could put aside his personal feelings and focus on getting Aunt Sandra better. I thought for a while that he was the only one who would be able to cure her, that he'd be so sure and precise during surgery that he could scoop out

every single cancer cell and make sure it never came back. But when I mentioned that to Aunt Sandra, she shook her head and smiled sadly. "Sweetie, the best surgeon in the world couldn't make me better."

"I'll see you around," I say as I continue walking.

It's odd that Liam is so strange, when his father is so nice and ordinary. I'll need to look into him further as a suspect, but more pressing is Monday's attack on Uncle Dara.

I keep walking, quicker now, to Mikey's road. The houses all look the same here too, though they're an older style, built over a hundred years ago. As I walk down, one house stands out compared to the rest. The white paint looks fresh, and the front lawn is neatly mown, with flowers blooming across the flowerbed. There's a deep green front door with the letter box a bright yellow.

Mikey's house, as familiar as ever.

I knock.

No one responds, and I'm wondering if I should try knocking again, or maybe come back later, when it finally creaks open and a head appears around it. Danny. He looks like an older, cooler version of Mikey – he's got a little earring and there's a tattoo peeking out from underneath the bottom of his T-shirt. His once blond hair is now dyed black, though it looks like he just went through the printer at a really high setting.

"Hi," I say. "I don't know if you remember me... I'm Kay."

Danny's face lights up, the same way Mikey's does. "Kay," he says. "Of course I remember you! It's only been what... just over a year? And, anyway, how could I forget. Trench Coat Kid!"

Maybe it would have been better if he *had* forgotten me, and the one unfortunate fashion choice I made when I was eleven.

“Mikey’s just gone to the shops,” Danny continues. “He’ll be back soon though, if you want to come in?”

“Sure,” I say. Maybe Danny might know something about why his car was at the scene. He steps aside to let me into a hallway painted a soft yellow with beech-coloured floorboards and a staircase that leads up.

Danny is wearing pyjama bottoms, and as he steps back he yawns – he’s obviously just woken up. “Do you want some tea? Coffee?” he says, as he leads the way into the living room.

“No, I’m good,” I say. The living room hasn’t changed much since the last time I was here – a couple of couches group around the fireplace, an old worn red rug that’s patterned in yellows and oranges. But instead of the large family portrait that used to hang over the mantelpiece, with Danny and Mikey and their mum and dad all smiling together, there’s now a mirror, with just enough scuffing on the frame to suggest it’s an antique.

Danny sits on one of the couches and looks at me expectantly. I sit opposite and lace my fingers together, leaving them settled in my lap.

“So, Danny, I don’t know if you heard. My uncle was just in a car accident...”

I trail off as his eyebrows go up and his mouth hangs open.

“Oh, no,” he says. “My car hit Dara Khatri?”

24

I stare at Danny. It's an odd choice of words – like his car has independently come to life and rammed a local cafe owner.

He must sense my confusion, because he hastily adds, "My car – well, mine and Mikey's – was stolen last night. I parked it outside like I always do, and the next thing I knew it was gone."

I remember what Mikey said: *Mum's really hoping that it's on its last legs, or that someone will steal it or something.* Is that a coincidence, or did Mikey know something like this was going to happen? Or maybe someone else in the bookshop overheard him? "So you reported it to the police?" I ask.

"Of course," he says. "And they just called to let me know they think it, er...mowed down your uncle. Well, they didn't tell me it was him. But that it had been used in a hit-and-run. I'm really sorry about that, by the way. I'm so, so sorry."

"You don't need to apologize," I say, feeling slightly baffled. Danny seems genuinely upset. "You weren't the one to run him over, were you?" It's very unlikely that he would have done – his car is too distinctive, and I know it was Monday behind the wheel... And I also know he can't be Monday, because he has an alibi for rat-gate: he was with Mikey. Plus, he's not on Aunt Sandra's list of suspects, and I know it's most likely that one of them is Monday. Aunt

Sandra was an expert; she'd have solved it if she'd just had more time on the case.

"No, of course I didn't run Mr Khatri over," he says. "But the thing is, the brakes stopped working properly last week. I mean, they'd occasionally jam, but for the most part, they were okay..."

"If your brakes jam once, that's enough," I point out. He waves a hand to dismiss me.

"It would have cost a fortune to get someone to come out and look at them - I was considering..." He grimaces. "I was considering speaking to Mikey about scrapping her. The cost of fixing the brakes would have been about triple what old Bertha was worth."

"You named your car Bertha?" This must have happened in the year I was away, because I definitely would have made a comment on it.

"People kept calling her the death-mobile," he says. "Even Mikey. And that was hurtful for her." He shrugs. "Mum didn't understand why I reported her missing last night - she said it saved me the effort of selling her for scrap. She thought it was a good thing..." He shakes his head. "I'm really sorry again, Kay."

He looks genuinely apologetic. "It's not your fault," I say. "I mean, next time just buy a better car."

"Won't find a better car than Bertha," he mumbles, as the front door opens.

"Hey, Danny, do you want to try this weird chocolate I bought?" Mikey calls from the hall, before sticking his head around the sitting-room door, trailing off when he spots me. "Kay," he says. "What are you doing here?"

I quickly explain to Mikey what's happened, and his eyes widen. "Why aren't you at the hospital?" he asks. "Danny will let you know if there's any updates on the car."

I hesitate, because I wasn't expecting him to...care. "I'm not at the hospital because Nikki's already there."

"And what about Angela and Lola Harchester?" he says. He almost takes up the door frame with how tall he is.

"I think they're fine too," I say. The tension in his shoulders relaxes and he shakes his head.

"That family's been through enough," he says. His eyes flicker to the display cabinet, and I glance behind me. The first thing I see is a photo of me, Mikey, Nikki, Sophie, Ivy and a bunch of other people in our class outside school - it must have been after an exam. Liam is standing on my other side, frowning at the camera. A shiver goes through me - I don't remember him being there.

Beside that photo, in prime place, and what I should have noticed earlier, is a photo of Mikey and Ivy and Danny, laughing. She's in the corner of the photo, looking at the camera with a small smile on her face, and Danny is looking at Mikey, who is holding up a football. Both the Kelvin brothers appear almost hysterical - Ivy, on the other hand, seems like she's just been told a particularly interesting secret.

I didn't know Ivy ever hung out with Mikey without the rest of us. It's stupid I never considered that. I would occasionally meet up with her alone, or with just her and Sophie. But I never thought about how Ivy might have had other pairings within the group. With Sophie, with Mikey. And that they might have had secrets between them. Maybe secrets powerful enough to be reason to murder her.

Mikey's eyes linger on the photo. He looks at his brother, and back to me - and smiles sadly. "Who'd have thought things would end like they did," he says.

Danny yawns again. I get to my feet - it's my cue to leave.

"Wait," says Danny. "Give me your number so I can tell you what the police say. I guess they'll find Bertha pretty

quickly.”

I reel off my number to him. Mikey stands by the living-room door, waiting to walk me out like he’s worried I’ll get lost traversing the three metres; he’s always been a bit like a mother hen.

As I head out I glance back at the photo in the display cabinet. Ivy is staring directly at me, and the small smile on her face now looks to me more like a smirk.

25

Liam doesn't have an alibi. The woman at Performance Hillingate is really chatty on the phone, and says he's been sick the last couple of days, and hasn't been to rehearsals. So, where *has* he been?

I'm back in the attic, slowly eating a sandwich as I flick through Aunt Sandra's notebook, wishing there was something else in it that could help me. There's a vase next to me in case Monday decides to break in again, but I'm fairly sure they'll leave me alone for the rest of Wednesday, planning for *treachery on Thursday*, whatever that means.

If only I could build up more of a backstory for Monday, try to figure out what exactly they want. Why they targeted Ivy, me and Nikki.

According to Aunt Sandra's notebook, there were only two notes sent to Ivy that her mum knew about. But Aunt Sandra also wrote: *there were probably more*. What if they're still in Ivy's old bedroom somewhere, and her mum never saw them?

Ivy's bedroom is so close to me right now. And obviously there's no one home – Peter Harchester will surely be at the hospital with his family. Plus, I know where they used to keep the spare key. Ivy requested for it to be kept under the mat at the kitchen door, because she sometimes forgot hers... It

couldn't hurt to take a quick look, see if I can find anything else about Ivy that might help explain who Monday is.

No – it's a stupid idea. I can't break into someone's house like *Monday*. Aunt Sandra would hate me doing that. She never would have snuck around like a thief.

But also...I'd be in and out so quickly. And what if there *are* more notes from Monday, or some other evidence about what they did to Ivy, mere metres away from me?

Before I can change my mind, I slip down the stairs, into Nikki's bedroom and quickly rifle through her drawers – she won't mind. I find a pair of black gloves and put them on – this way I won't leave any fingerprints, even though hopefully nobody will ever know someone broke in.

I hurry out of the front door and round to the front garden belonging to the Harchesters. I slip down the side of the house, to the gate at the back that leads to the garden, and undo the latch. My heart is hammering as I hurry to the kitchen door and crouch down to move the brown mat.

I'm right. The little gold key is still there, and it slides in easily, twisting the lock and opening the door. I'm inside the house, which is a mirror of Uncle Dara's. Maybe I'm going too far – maybe the events of today have stopped me thinking properly, and it's just catching up with me that Uncle Dara was in a car crash, and Ivy was murdered, that the people around me are in danger, and someone is genuinely threatening to kill me, and I'm panicking.

And now I'm in the kitchen – and Ivy is sitting at that table, rolling her eyes while she tries to tell her mum why she's stupid not to become a vegetarian. Then a few weeks later, why she's stupid to not eat more fish. And both times her mum kept on cooking, her back to her, humming quietly to herself.

I pad into the hallway, ignoring the dining room and living room and making for the stairs. They creak under me and I

wince, before remembering I'm alone in the house. My heart is beating so fast I feel dizzy, and even though I know it won't happen, I'm terrified that someone is going to walk through the front door and catch me.

Oh, sorry, I just got lost on the way home - I thought I was next door. The weak excuse won't cut it. *I'm disorientated from panic over what happened to my uncle earlier.* Yes, use Uncle Dara's accident as an excuse.

I'm an awful person.

I get to the landing and hesitate. Ivy's old bedroom was in the mirror position to where Nikki's room is now - they might have made it into a guest room or given it to Lola, but I think that's unlikely. It'd be grim, almost like replacing a daughter...

I push the door open, and peer inside.

My blood runs cold.

26

It's like Ivy is still living here.

The single bed is pushed up against the far wall, and the sheets are crumpled, like she's just got out. There are posters of a boy band she was obsessed with stuck to the walls, their eyes watching me as I gingerly step inside the room. The walls are painted deep green, which we all thought was really sophisticated at the time.

I open the wardrobe, and her clothes are still inside, hung up. There's the short skirt she would wear in the middle of winter, even when her legs turned a mottled red from the cold. There's the fluffy blue designer tank top.

It's like she's here with me, breathing down my neck.

Don't you miss me at all, Kay?

Of course I do, Ivy.

So why aren't you sad? Why are you so happy to rifle through a dead girl's things?

I take a step back from the wardrobe, shaking my head. I'm *not* happy to go through her stuff. I was sad when she died. Or was I? That time is so jumbled up with what was happening to Aunt Sandra – she'd told us about her diagnosis a week before Ivy died, but Nikki found out it was terminal a few hours before we headed to the river. That's why she was happy to come along with us and drink. She wouldn't

normally – but I think she wanted to blur out what she'd been told.

I start going through Ivy's desk, but I have to stop at the top drawer. It's got maths homework still waiting to be done lying at the top of the pile of papers.

This room is almost...like a shrine to her. Nothing has changed.

I don't like the fact that the bed looks like it was slept in.

I shake my head – I'm being stupid. There's no such thing as ghosts, and Ivy is *dead*. I went to her funeral.

Except she's not just dead. It wasn't a tragic accident. She was *murdered*.

It's like the walls are closing in on me, like I can still smell the floral perfume she loved, as if she's only just left the room...

I'm wasting time now. I'm here for clues, not to scare myself. I continue through the drawer, and stop when I come to a thick red book, which I pull out.

It's a photo album, a proper printed one. I flick it open and catch my breath – there's Ivy, standing right in the middle of me and Sophie. We look about nine or ten, in big puffy coats – there's snow all around us, and we're clutching mugs of what I remember to be hot chocolate, and there's the remnants of a snowman next to me, and we're all grinning wildly at the camera.

I remember that day.

We were off school because of the snow, and made a snowman in Ivy's back garden – well, Sophie and I did, Ivy just mucked around. Sophie and I got really into it, and we named the snowman Stewy. But then Sophie tripped, somehow, and knocked Stewy over. She was upset, even though it was no big deal. So Ivy made it into a game, chucking snowballs, seeing who could take Stewy all the way out. By the end of it we were all breathless and laughing at

our poor aim. And that was the moment that cemented Ivy as one of my best friends, because she had known exactly how to make things better.

Only later did I realize she could also figure out exactly what to say to make things worse too.

I turn the pages of the photo album, and pause. There's a photo of Ivy in school, in front of a whiteboard. She looks older here, thirteen or fourteen. I've got no idea who took the photo, but the date is written behind her – she's standing in front of the month and year, but the day is visible: *Monday*.

A shiver goes down my back. It's just a coincidence, though. I'm seeing Mondays everywhere.

I slow down as I turn through the photos. It's weird to remember that even though I've flicked through Ivy ageing in these photos, she won't ever get past sixteen.

I stop at a photo of Ivy with...Liam. They're laughing together, Ivy in shorts and Liam in a T-shirt and jeans. In the background are the school fields – it must have been a non-uniform day at school, though Ivy still wouldn't have been allowed to wear the shorts. But she's the one person who would have been able to get away with it.

Except this isn't adding up. Ivy said Liam was *stalking* her – why, then, are they in this photo together? Why would Ivy have kept this photo? And where was the rest of our group? I don't remember a day of school where Ivy wasn't there, leading the pack.

I get my phone out and snap a photo – I know I could probably just take the entire book, because Angela probably doesn't look at any of this stuff... But I can't. It would be like disturbing the shrine.

I flick through more photos, though nothing jumps out at me as odd – there are various snaps of our group on different occasions. Ivy has drawn silver hearts on the pages, which

makes me feel sort of strange. She always acted like she was above us all, but she's the one who made this album, and carefully doodled on each page. My stomach turns uncomfortably. This is the softer side to Ivy that I saw less and less as we got older; the side that kept me around and reminded me why we were friends in the first place.

Finally, I come to the second to last page of the book, a selfie where Ivy is laughing as she's hugging a mystery boy. He's wearing a teal-coloured jumper, and has his back to the camera. The top of his head is cut off in the image but there's enough to see his hair is dark. Ivy has drawn little hearts in the corner of the page, but these are a deep red, like blood. For a moment I consider the wild possibility that it *is* blood, before I see that the ink is glittering slightly.

I had no idea she was dating someone. She loved chatting about crushes with us when Mikey wasn't around. That's how she found out Sophie had a thing for James Cardroy – she asked and asked, needling until Sophie blurted it out and obviously regretted it afterwards. She smiled, and then helped them get together – and when the relationship crashed and burned a mere forty-eight hours after it started, she kissed James. *See*, she was basically saying, *I can get anyone I want. You can't. You can't have James, because I'm around.*

A spike of anger goes through me. For a moment I can't blame Monday for targeting Ivy – she probably had half the town hating her.

This boy can't be James, though. He wasn't anywhere near as tall. It *could* be Mikey, since he's always towered over us, but his hair is blond and this boy's hair is dark.

I turn to the final page, and there's a note stuck to it, the words written in block capitals in handwriting I know isn't Ivy's:

*WE'RE GOING TO PLAY A NEW GAME NEXT WEEK,
OR IT WILL ALL BE OVER.
CAN'T WAIT FOR MONDAY.*

And there's a date written in the corner. I get out my phone quickly, to look for the calendar.

It's dated a week before her death.

I take a photo, but before I can properly think about what this means, there's a noise downstairs. I freeze, straining my ears. I thought no one would be home yet, that they'd be at the hospital for a few more hours.

The noise comes again – a banging, like someone is knocking on the front door. Ivy's bedroom faces the back of the house – I hurry across to Lola's room, with its bright pink fairy wallpaper, and peer out of the front window.

It's a woman, holding what appears to be a bunch of leaflets. I can't tell who she is from the top of her head – but then she looks up.

At once I move away from the window, my heart pounding. She didn't see me, she couldn't have. I disappeared from view quickly – but I did catch a brief glimpse, enough for me to place her face. Kerry Richmond.

The knocking comes again, more insistent this time. Then, finally, there's silence. I wait another minute, crouching by the window in case she's still lingering. I glance out, but the street is empty.

My heart is pounding – it's time to leave. I've got what I came for – evidence of another note from Monday, though it doesn't tell me anything.

I go downstairs – there’s something sticking through the letter box, a leaflet. My heart rate settles. Kerry was leaving something on behalf of the Committee.

Carefully, I pull the leaflet through – *Your Town Needs YOU!* It’s a request for people to volunteer at the next Longrove market, on Saturday. I turn the leaflet over – someone has scribbled on the page: *Angela, I know you’ve said no in the past, but we would love for you to join the Committee!*

I drop the leaflet, so it looks like it’s just fallen through the letter box, and hurry out the back, locking the kitchen door and placing the key under the mat once more. The Committee has tried to persuade Angela to join them – but she’s said no. Good for her, they’re a bunch of twats anyway...

There’s a leaflet sticking out of Uncle Dara’s letter box too, not a note from Monday this time, an advertisement for the market this Saturday. They don’t want Uncle Dara to join the Committee, but they want his money nonetheless.

I tug it out of the letter box and crumple it up, chucking it forcefully in the bin outside.

This time, I hope someone *is* watching me.

28

I print off a photo of a teal-coloured jumper, and stick it on the board, writing “teal” beside it – I bet proper detectives never have to deal with a black-and-white printer. Ivy had a mysterious boyfriend – maybe that’s who she hung back to meet after everyone left her alone at the river. Why didn’t she tell us about him?

I’ve got a long list of suspects now: *Kerry Richmond, Topher Reed, John Reed, Liam Maldin, Mikey Kelvin, Sophie Darlington*. I can cross off Mikey because he has an alibi for Tuesday, but I need to properly investigate the others, go through them one by one and eliminate as many as possible. Hopefully Danny will be able to give me more information on the car soon – Nikki hasn’t responded to my message about going to his house, but she’s likely busy at the hospital. It’s just past midday; they haven’t been there long.

And I have another note from Monday to Ivy – *We’re going to play a new game next week, or it will all be over. Can’t wait for Monday* – dated a week before her death. But no further details beyond the fact Monday was closing in on Ivy. It’s handwritten, unlike the notes I’ve received, but it’s not like I can do an analysis on the writing. And besides, block capitals would disguise their writing anyway.

There’s a knock on the front door. I head downstairs, but hesitate – what if it’s something to do with Monday?

But the wreckage on Wednesday has taken place. Surely that's them done for the day?

I open the door to find Mikey standing outside. He's in fresh clothes, and his hair is slightly damp, like he's just got out of the shower. He's holding a tray covered in foil.

"Hey," he says. "Can I come in? I guess your uncle won't want to cook later, and we've got loads of lasagne left over from last night. Sorry it's not fresh..." He holds up the tray.

"Yeah, of course," I say, as he comes inside. I feel slightly baffled - it's almost like the past year hasn't happened, the way we've fallen back into being friends.

Mikey makes room in the fridge, then closes the door and turns to look at me, taking a deep breath. "You know, I wasn't expecting you to come back to town. I wasn't expecting to ever see you again, actually."

"Right," I say, wondering where he's going with this.

"I was angry at you," he says, speaking quickly, like he wants to hurry up and get this conversation over with. "For getting out of Longrove. For getting to leave it all behind. Leave us behind."

Surprise goes through me - for him to tell me this so plainly, to hear the hurt in his voice. I didn't realize he had cared so much.

"It's not like I had a choice," I point out. "My parents wanted to move."

He shakes his head. "It wasn't rational - I knew deep down you didn't have a choice. But I was still angry. Everywhere I went in this town I was reminded of Ivy. You got to get away and then you stopped messaging."

"Hang on," I say. "*I* didn't stop messaging."

"Well, you never started," he says. "We saw each other basically every day when you lived here, you never needed to. And then you left and you never even bothered to *try* to stay in touch."

"Neither did you," I say, although guilt is burning in my stomach. He actually looks sad, and, well...I don't massively remember that time. I was so caught up in Aunt Sandra's death, staying in touch was the last thing on my mind. He could have reached out, but he never did.

"I didn't want to disturb you after your aunt died," he says, his eyes flicking down to his hands. Like he can't look me in the eye. "I wanted to give you space - that's what I wanted when Ivy died. And everyone kept asking if I was all right and I just wanted to tell them I wasn't. And you were always quite closed off, you know? I couldn't tell what you were thinking half the time - and then you shut down completely."

I'm sifting through my memories, trying to line up what he's telling me with what I remember happening. Everything is slightly hazy, like there's a film laid over the top.

"If it helps, *I* didn't really know what I was thinking," I mutter, and there it is again, the grief, that rises up to swallow me.

"Do you remember that old notebook you used to carry around?" he says suddenly. "You'd write in it and never tell anyone what. Not even Ivy."

I blink at the abrupt change in subject. "That was when I was like...eleven," I say. "And it wasn't for long. I wasn't actually writing anything, I was just trying to copy Aunt Sandra."

"Ah, the great mystery is revealed," he says. "I always wondered." I see now that the question was classic Mikey. He had a gift for reading people, and now the subject has changed the grief can settle inside me again, a dull thrum instead of a roar.

He flashes a smile, his whole face lighting up, and my stomach swoops. He always had a cheerful face; he was always a bit like sunshine - and yet I remember how when he

smiled at me, it felt different compared to everyone else. Like I was special. But not in a bad way – not like when I noticed how me and Nikki were the only non-white kids in our class, how people would talk about how they could trace their ancestry back to this small corner of England for centuries. I didn't even know when Nani's birthday was – her passport just said 1st January, which apparently a lot of immigrants had in theirs. Dad's mum had passed away a year before I was born and I never even knew her name. Dad never talked about her.

Our family has a knack for shutting down.

"You know what *I* always wondered?" I ask, keen to keep the conversation lighter. "Why you joined the football team when you can't play to save your life."

His eyebrows draw together, like he's offended. "That's not true," he says. "I'm a valuable asset to the team."

"You have two left feet," I remind him. "I've seen you trip over a blade of grass. You once got red-carded for accidentally bringing someone down with you."

"Yeah, but the football team gets to finish classes early on a Wednesday," he says with a grin. "And it got a lot more pleasant after people like Topher Reed left school."

I raise my eyebrows. "*Topher*? But he's...so nice." Longgrove's golden boy, the boy every girl wanted to be with.

"Yeah, he can be," Mikey says, but he seems distracted. I follow his gaze – he's looking at a cake stand Uncle Dara's left on the kitchen counter, holding some of his world-famous fudge. I hold back a smile. Mikey *does* have good taste.

"Let's have some tea," I say. "And maybe some fudge. Now, Topher Reed..." I can't understand how he connects to Ivy, but he's on Aunt Sandra's list of suspects, alongside his father. There has to be a reason for that. "How do you mean the team got more pleasant when he left?"

“Oh, nothing dramatic,” says Mikey. He grabs some mugs and teabags as I boil the kettle. “I didn’t know him that well – I was one of the little ones in the football team, and only a substitute. But he’s intense. Had a really strong desire to win – I guess he wanted to...I don’t know, bring glory to the school or something.”

I snort – who ever cared about bringing glory to Longrove High? But then I remember – the son of the head teacher probably had quite a bit of interest in making the school look good. It would have given him brownie points with his dad.

“One time he tried to punch James Cardroy for not following the tactics we had planned,” he says, as he takes the cup of tea from me, and I hand him a plate with a big slab of fudge. “Thanks. It took like three other boys in the team to hold him back. Plus Mr Fisher in the background yelling at him to stop.”

“He did that in front of a teacher?” I raise my eyebrows. “And never got in trouble for it? How come I never heard about this?”

Mikey rolls his eyes. “Mr Reed would just bail him out of everything... And it never got released into the wider school gossip network, which I know you were very much tuned into.”

“I do love a gossip,” I mutter.

“Topher did apologize,” Mikey continues. “But no one ever went off what was planned again.”

“Fair point,” I say. “What’s he up to now, anyway? He looked...well? When I saw him the other day.”

“He’s at university. When did you see him?” Mikey looks confused, and I realize I’d made it sound like we intentionally met up.

“Just ran into him at the green. And also...at the graveyard,” I say. “I was, erm...visiting Ivy.” We’re back to a topic I don’t want to touch.

"I visit her too," Mikey says before I can think of a way to steer the conversation to something easier. "It's okay to speak about her, you know. She was an important part of our lives. But it's also okay if you're not ready for that."

He's doing it again. He's inside my head, knowing exactly what I'm thinking, just like he used to before I moved. The thought makes me feel slightly funny. Maybe I never properly appreciated how nice it is to have someone really notice you.

"Who else visits Ivy?" I say, because I'm *not* ready to unpack my feelings about her. But maybe I can get something helpful for the investigation.

He scrunches up his face. "I mean, her parents and sister obviously go quite a lot - they leave flowers. Sophie occasionally goes. Liam went a few times. I mean, I haven't seen him there - it's not like I've got a camera rigged up there or anything, but I heard him talking about it at school once. No idea why he'd go. It's not like he was *close* to Ivy."

"No," I mutter, my mind whirring - because I've got that photo of Liam and Ivy together, which suggests there *was* more to that relationship. But Ivy kept that a secret for some reason... Maybe Liam is the mysterious boy in teal. Except why would Ivy hide his face in that photo and show him clearly in the other one?

And another thought occurs to me, and I can't believe it only has now. Mikey has triggered the idea: *a camera rigged up*.

I know how to make sure Monday doesn't sneak back into my bedroom without me seeing exactly who they are.

29

Nikki messages to say Uncle Dara has been discharged from hospital and that they're heading home.

"I'll see you around," says Mikey, getting to his feet. "Don't want to intrude." He grabs our empty mugs and goes over to the sink and starts washing up. "Let me know if you need anything, or if your uncle does," he says.

I stare at him, for a second I wonder if he's *too* nice – if he has an ulterior motive, like he's scoping out the house or he's trying to get intel on me. Or maybe he really is just picking up where we left off friendship wise.

My phone buzzes with another message, from an unknown number. My stomach flips as for a wild moment I worry it's from Monday – but then I read the preview: Hey, it's Danny.

"What's my brother saying?" asks Mikey, reading the name upside down.

"I didn't expect the police to find the car so quickly..." I pick my phone up – Danny is one of those people who takes twenty messages to say what could have been one message, so my screen continues to light up.

Danny: Hey, it's Danny.

Danny: The police found our car.

Danny: It was abandoned in the fields near the road that goes to Gloringford.

Danny: I'm really glad to have Bertha back. I've messaged Mikey too.

Danny: ...

"For goodness' sake," I mutter, and I hit the call button as I see that he's continuing to type.

"You're *calling*?" says Mikey. "I hate having to speak on the phone."

I ignore him – Danny picks up on the fourth ring, probably in the middle of typing yet another sentence.

"At least put him on speaker," demands Mikey. I roll my eyes, but do as he asks – Danny would have told him everything later anyway, so it's not like I need to hide anything from him now.

"When did they find your car?" I ask, launching straight in.

"About ten minutes ago," he says. "It's pretty dented from the crash, and it looks like it was abandoned quite quickly afterwards."

"That's odd," I say. "You'd think the person who stole it would want to set it on fire or something – get rid of any fingerprints."

"Don't even say that," says Danny, sounding shocked.

"Yeah, don't say that," says Mikey.

I force myself not to roll my eyes.

"The police said it looked like Bertha had been taken for a joyride because of all the takeaway containers in the back, but that was just me," Danny adds.

"I *told* you to clean it," says Mikey.

"What, so our car thief could have a nicer experience?" says Danny. He hesitates. "The police did find something

weird, er...stuck to the windscreen, though. I think..." Danny breathes heavily, the noise whistling around the room. "I think someone's trying to threaten me."

"What do you mean?" I ask, glancing at Mikey. He looks as confused as I feel.

"I think I was deliberately targeted," says Danny. "It was a note on the windscreen."

"Saying what?" I breathe, my heart hammering.

"Well, it doesn't really make sense - it just says, 'It's going to get worse, dash, Monday'."

It's going to get worse - Monday.

It's not a message to Danny, it's to me.

30

I tell Mikey to hurry home, to make sure Danny is okay.

"If he's being threatened by someone...that's awful," I say, making my eyes as wide and concerned as possible as I push him out of the door. Danny has sent through a photo of Bertha that the police had shared and I want to examine it.

"I'll see you later!" he says, as I close the door behind him, resting my head against it. Is Monday even scared of the police, of being caught? It doesn't seem like it - they *wanted* the car to be found. They *wanted* me to get the message.

They really want me to work out who they are. But *why*? What's the point of this "game"? And how did they know the message would even get back to me at all? Or maybe they didn't, but they left the note anyway.

They don't care about the police knowing they exist - and they don't care about the fact I could march to the police station and let them know everything that had happened before, that I have notes matching the one on the car...

Because Monday is secure in the knowledge that they won't get caught. And that I want to protect my family.

I head into the kitchen and sit at the table as I open the photo Danny sent. It's slightly blurry, with the car lying half in a ditch. I zoom in on the windscreen, and there's the note

typed out, just like all the others, stuck into place with what looks like Blu Tack.

A key sounds in the front door, and I look up to see Uncle Dara walking through. Relief floods me at the sight of him. He seems greyer than before, and sinks into the chair opposite mine. I catch a glimpse of Nikki before she heads upstairs.

"Mikey's mum sent over lasagne for us," I say. I don't know how to speak about the accident, because I know it wasn't random - it happened because I came back to Longrove. It's my fault. Instead I move without thinking, and hug him from behind. For a moment he doesn't react - I don't think I've ever initiated a hug with him before. He pats my arm as I pull away.

"It's fine, I'm fine," he says, as I step back.

"So who do the police think did it?" I ask. "Do they have a lead? Grace said there was CCTV from the cafe."

"The driver was wearing a hood and sunglasses," says Uncle Dara. "And the CCTV footage was blurry - I only really have the cameras as a slight deterrent to...well, to the Committee, really, in case they ever crossed the line and tried any funny business. I never thought I might actually *need* it. Most people were in the cafes so didn't see exactly what happened..." He hesitates. "We won't tell your parents about the accident, hey? What about that? They'll just worry and cut their holiday short." He nibbles his bottom lip. "This is going to sound ridiculous - but the car definitely looked like it swerved on purpose... I've been thinking about enemies I might have and all I can come up with is the Committee. But you don't think they'd do anything this... dramatic, do you? Especially since Angela and Lola were in the car with me - it was my fault they were there, they needed to pick up a parcel from the post office and I wanted to buy another flamingo from the shop next door so I offered to take them. It's only open during the day, and Grace had

everything handled at the cafe so I thought it would be fine. But it's my fault...the flamingo..." He trails off, shaking his head. "I wanted to annoy the Committee - and look what happened."

"No," I say, as firmly as I can. Monday is coming for *me* and Nikki - this isn't to do with the cafe, with Uncle Dara himself - just that he is my uncle, that he is connected to me.

"I told John Reed he could go to hell when I quit working at the school," says Uncle Dara. "And he didn't like that." He buries his head in his hands, and if any small part of me was still considering telling him about Monday, it's gone now. It's an unsettling feeling - the sense that he can't protect me, even though he's an adult.

"The Committee want order and control," I say. "If Longrove earned a reputation for being unsafe then that would sort of go against their ideals." It's a point I haven't considered before - Mr Reed wants power, but he's *proud* of the town. Carrying out Monday's threats would tarnish that.

Uncle Dara sighs. "Longrove might earn a bit of a reputation for accidents but that wouldn't put anyone off coming to visit. And the Committee..." His throat bobs, and my blood runs cold at the fear in his eyes. "Mr Reed has got this town in a chokehold, there's no telling what he'd do to keep control. Our family, we threaten that control. Which means we're a threat to him."

31

I walk upstairs to check on Nikki. She's not in her bedroom – there's a creak above me, though – she's in the attic.

When I enter, she's on my bed, staring into space.

"We're not going to solve this," she says. "Monday is never going to go away. And Dad, he's all I've got. What if something happens to him? The doctor said his heart is already weak, and the stress... I know Monday says it's murder next week, but what if that's a false deadline? Today was a *hit-and-run*. And they're planning treachery tomorrow, fire on Friday, sabotage on Saturday, stabbing on Sunday – any of those could involve Dad."

Or you. But I don't raise the fact Nikki is probably in equal danger – it won't help. "Okay, first things first. What if we book your dad a nice spa stay or something over Saturday and Sunday? I've got money saved up from tutoring people. Somewhere out of town – that way, if we've figured things out by then, great, he can just relax for a bit. And if not, he's safely away." I can't handle losing my uncle as well as my aunt – never mind Nikki losing both parents.

"He won't take Saturday *and* Sunday off work," says Nikki, nibbling her bottom lip. "The weekend trade is the cafe's busiest time. And what if Monday follows him? Or knows where he's going?"

"Okay, we'll just book it for Sunday," I say. *Stabbing on Sunday. Murder on Monday.* The two worst threats – better he's out of the way for those. Mostly for Monday morning. Whatever happens, he should be out of town for that. "*I'm* Monday's focus, anyway. They're not going to leave town when I'm the one they're threatening. This way he won't be such an easy target."

"That's a good idea," says Nikki slowly. "We can split the cost, tell Dad it's an early birthday present and act like it's something we've had booked for months. I've got money saved from babysitting."

I nod and her shoulders slump, like a little bit of stress has left her.

She nibbles her bottom lip as she looks at me. "But in the meantime, Monday is running circles around us."

"Well, I've made some progress..." I say. "Ivy had a secret boyfriend, and I found another note from Monday to her in a photo album she had." I point to my board, where I've stuck up the photo of her note, alongside the jumper picture. "And Monday left a note on Danny's car, and Liam doesn't have an alibi for Tuesday or today – and he's lied to his dad about where he was as well."

"Wait, how do you know about Ivy's photo album?" Nikki frowns at me.

"I, er...had a quick look next door," I say.

"You *broke into* next door?" she gapes at me, but also looks impressed. "Your mum would kill you if she found out."

"Which she won't, because you won't tell her," I point out.

"Yeah, because then she would kill *me* for not stopping you," says Nikki. "On the bright side, if we tell her now, she'll murder you before Monday does."

"I'm glad we can joke about this," I say drily. "But more importantly, this is a game of cat and mouse, so we need to flip everything on its head." I speak firmly now. "We need to

become the cats. Monday's planning for treachery on Thursday - and we're not going to let them get away with it."

"And how are we going to do that?" says Nikki. "Start threatening people under the anonymous name Wednesday?"

"No," I say, trying to stay as patient as I can. "We're going to catch Monday in the act."

Monday – 6.21 p.m. – Nikki

Kay had left. Ivy wasn't happy about it. She chased after Kay, and their voices floated back to the riverside where Nikki, Sophie and Mikey were still sitting. Mikey was texting, and clearly not paying attention, but Sophie nibbled her bottom lip as they caught snatches of a one-sided argument. Pathetic was thrown about, something about how Ivy couldn't believe they were even friends.

Then Ivy came back, and blasted some music from her phone, and danced with Sophie, acting like nothing was wrong.

Nikki wasn't even sure why she was still here – except the beer she'd been drinking burned her throat and stomach and made her head feel fuzzy, and made her mum's news seem less real. She didn't want to go home yet. It would mean facing her parents and talking about everything again – if she did, she would burst into tears.

"Move your hips more!" laughed Ivy as she swayed, clutching the bottle of vodka she'd been sipping like it was water. Sophie did as she was told – but while Ivy looked natural, her body moving with the rhythm, Sophie looked stilted, like someone was pulling a string and making her jerk. "Come on, Nikki!" Ivy gestured at her, and Nikki felt a warm feeling in her chest – she knew Ivy only tolerated her because of Kay, but here she was, including her in the

group. Maybe she was really letting her in, maybe she sensed that everything in Nikki's life was falling apart and she needed to be distracted. "We'll send a video to Kay, show her what she's missing."

There it was - Ivy wanted to use her as a dig at Kay. Well, screw that. She wasn't going to be a pawn in one of Ivy's games - she was too tired, and the world was too wavy.

"I might head off," she said, and Ivy shook her head.

"I thought you were cool," she said. "One last drink for the road?" She held out her bottle. "And then maybe we should both do shots. Sophie! Although I haven't got any shot glasses, and I've probably done like, ten, already."

"Don't you think you've had enough?" said Sophie nervously, and Ivy stopped dancing, narrowing her eyes. Nikki knew she had poked the bear - now was definitely the right time to head off.

"You can't tell me what to do," said Ivy, pointing a wobbling finger at Sophie. "No one can tell me what to do. I tell people what to do." She took her phone out of her pocket. "I tell people what to do," she repeated. Her eyes drooped for a second, her voice slurring over the words. "I've got to make a call." She let go of the vodka, which rolled onto the soft ground, and turned on her heel and stumbled into the woods.

Nikki shrugged at Sophie. "Don't stay out too long," she said. "It's not summer yet, it'll be getting dark at eight and it'll be a nightmare to find your way back through the woods." See, look how smart she was - alcohol obviously helped her hone her survival instincts, and blunted everything else. Maybe she should take another swig of vodka, just to make sure it didn't wear off too quickly - the wind had a nip to it, and what if she sobered up on the walk home? She couldn't have that. She grabbed the vodka and took a big glug, and it burned and made her stomach twist - and she felt bile rising up in her throat, which she coughed

through. Maybe she should take the vodka away – look out for Ivy.

“Bye, Mikey,” she called over her shoulder, as she headed in the same direction Ivy had – back towards Longrove. Her bladder was feeling uncomfortably full – she might need to take a detour to a private tree. As she walked, she could hear snatches of Ivy’s conversation from somewhere nearby.

“That’s right – everyone’s so boring,” she was saying. “And you know I love you. I do, I really do. You know that. I want to see you. Tonight.”

Nikki didn’t think Ivy was capable of loving anyone except Lola, and that was because no one could help loving her adorable little sister. But there you go, the more you know.

She really needed to pee.

There was a nice tree.

She dropped the vodka, got herself sorted, and then kept walking until Ivy’s voice had disappeared into the distance. All the trees looked the same. Was she lost? No – of course she wasn’t. The woods weren’t that big, and all she needed to do was follow a stream – that was right, wasn’t it? She had read that once, online.

She stumbled, almost tripping into a tree. “Whoops,” she said to it. Maybe she shouldn’t have had that last bit of vodka – but it couldn’t be affecting her that quickly, could it? And she’d only drunk a bit of beer, and a glug of vodka an hour or so ago, when Kay was still around.

Kay. Basically her sister. Maybe she should text her. She missed her. She needed to tell her what she knew. But if she spoke those words aloud, they could never be unsaid. It would make it all too real.

Tears pricked in her eyes.

Wasn't the alcohol supposed to numb her to sadness? What was the point otherwise? The world was spinning too much now - maybe she should rest for a moment, wait for it to stop.

Against this tree was good.

A voice floated towards her, ghostly in the otherwise silence. "... cover it up. And then we'll get out of here." A man's voice, one she vaguely recognized. Or maybe she didn't. No - no, she did. She knew who that was...

"I knew you would," said another man's voice - this one sounded younger.

Her head lolled as she closed her eyes.

THURSDAY

Nikki and I present the spa voucher to Uncle Dara after breakfast. He frowns as his eyes skim over it.

"My birthday's not until next month," he says. "And this says I need to use this...*this* Sunday?"

"Well..." I start, not really sure what to say, but luckily Nikki jumps in.

"We bought it ages ago - before we even knew Kay would be staying this week. It was the cheapest date and between the two of us, that's what we could spring for." She speaks smoothly, though she glances at me like she's trying to work out if she's sounding believable. I nod, both to reassure her and because Uncle Dara is looking at me with narrowed eyes, like he knows I'm the weak link in terms of lying.

"I can't leave you two here on your own," he says. "Kay, for one thing, your parents would never allow it. The whole reason you're *here* is because they didn't want you staying on your own."

"And that's ridiculous," I point out. "I'm seventeen - I'll be eighteen in a few months. Plus, it's not like I'll be alone - Nikki will be here. I promise we won't go wild for the one evening you're away. We won't burn the house down or anything."

Get ready for a fire on Friday.

I can't even use normal sayings any more without Monday cropping up in my mind.

That gets a smile out of him. "But your mother is picking you up on Monday."

"She'll be here Monday afternoon," I say. "You'll be back in the morning."

"And Grace is fine managing the cafe while you're away," adds Nikki.

Uncle Dara looks down again at the voucher, and then he smiles. "Thanks for this," he says. "It's a lovely gift. And on that note..." He gets to his feet. "It's time for work." He's opening the cafe late today, but that's the extent of giving himself a break. Since summer is his busiest season, he basically works every day. It's only during the quieter months that the cafe closes, on Mondays and Wednesdays.

The moment he's out of the front door, Nikki turns to me. "What's the plan?" she asks. She isn't impressed by my camera idea - she thinks Monday will magically know all about it, and she also pointed out the last note wasn't even left at the house. I get the impression that the real issue is she doesn't think Monday will show up on camera - like they're some kind of ghost.

I pull out Aunt Sandra's notebook and drop it on the kitchen table. "We know Monday was targeting Ivy," I say, tapping the notebook. "And I think there might be a second reason why Monday chose to ram the car Uncle Dara was in. Angela Harchester and Lola Harchester were in that car too... If Monday had a vendetta against Ivy, they might also feel that way towards her family."

"That's sick," says Nikki. "Lola's only five."

"Exactly," I say. "So, if Ivy is a key part of this mystery - if she's *still* a key part of this mystery even a...a year later..." I stumble over my words. It's always hard to talk about her death aloud, but I force myself to press on. "We need to look

into her death more, see if Monday slipped up somewhere, because that's an avenue that might reveal their identity. So I want to go back to where it happened. Where Ivy died."

There's something on Nikki's face that I can't read as she stares at her mother's old notebook. Grief, maybe? Sadness? And it's mixed in with a flash of anger, gone the next second. "I don't want to go back there," she says. "What are we going to find? It was over a year ago. It's not like there would be any evidence left."

"I know, but we might be able to retrace her steps. Jog our memories." I haven't been back to the river since Ivy died - and I don't even remember that night massively well. I suspect Nikki might be able to tell me more, and I'm hoping being back there will help *her* tell me things she's forgotten.

"Fine," says Nikki as she gets to her feet. "But I think this will be a waste of time - and that's something we really don't have."

"Well, then, we'd better walk quickly," I say.

33

It only takes twenty minutes of walking to leave the main part of Longrove behind. It's ten a.m., a blowy, fresh morning, and I'm feeling optimistic - enough to push down the gnawing worry in my stomach about what *treachery on Thursday* means. I consider bringing it up with Nikki, but her face grows more pinched with stress the further into the woods we walk and I decide against it.

We walk beside the river, which gushes along, a torrent of clear water. There are a few dog walkers on the path, but they thin out as we keep going away from the town.

Further along, the river curves into a wood, away from the path which continues straight on into fields. Instead of following it, however, we turn to the woods. There's a big sign saying, *WARNING, PRIVATE PROPERTY*, which we ignore. The land belongs to the Cleverlys, a family who've lived in Longrove for generations, except now I think they're mostly dead. There are just a few really distant relatives left, who probably aren't even sure who actually owns the woods.

In the heart of the woods is the old Cleverly house. It was probably grand once, but it's stood empty for at least fifty years and has now fallen into disrepair. All the windows are smashed - about ten years ago it was a game for teenagers to blindfold themselves and lug tennis balls at the glass. Most accurate throw won, but people also got points for most

spectacular break – obviously, the game didn't last long, since there weren't that many windows. By the time we were old enough to play, all the targets had long been destroyed.

Mine and Nikki's footsteps are quiet, even in the silence. Neither of us talks as we pass the old house, which stands dilapidated. For a second I think I see movement in one of the windows, but it's gone in a blink. Nikki doesn't say anything, so I don't either. There wouldn't be anyone in it now, surely.

"Do people still use the old house for parties and things?" I say, as quietly as I can. It feels wrong to disturb the silence. The only sound is the river somewhere to our right, hidden behind trees and thick foliage.

"No," says Nikki shortly. She keeps looking around, like she's expecting someone to come chasing after us. Her jitteriness puts me on edge as well – I keep thinking I hear soft footsteps following behind. "After Ivy died, people started avoiding the woods."

The ground gets steeper and more uneven as we head upwards. There are rocks in a few places, which are helpful to make sure we don't slip down. They're a nightmare in winter, though, especially after it's rained. I hated coming this way any time it wasn't summer, but Ivy insisted – she liked being away from the gaze of the adults.

Finally, the ground levels out. To our left, the woods continue, eventually dipping back down again. And to our right is the ledge, overlooking the river.

Where Ivy died. Hit her head on the rocks at the edge of the river, cut it right open. She didn't have a chance.

"She was drunker than I'd ever seen her," says Nikki, obviously also thinking back to Ivy's last moments.

There's still no fencing by the river – but I guess this is private property. We're not supposed to be here.

I'm not tempted to go across and look down - I'm half worried the ledge will crumble if I do, and an irrational part of me is worried Ivy will still be down there, still sixteen, staring up at me with accusing eyes. "She got drunk really quickly, didn't she?"

"Yeah," says Nikki, staring at the ledge. Her face has gone pale. "And everyone else was drinking too. Apart from you."

"Why did you?" I ask. "You didn't even like alcohol - and your mum wouldn't have liked it."

Nikki lets out a low snort. "She wouldn't have cared."

"What do you mean?" I ask. "Of course she would have."

Nikki rolls her eyes. "Even after all this time," she mutters. "You don't see her." She doesn't expand on her statement, just edges closer to the ledge, so she's able to peer at the river below. "The day before, do you know what my mum said to me? That I'd never be as good as you. It wasn't a mean comment, just a fact to her. Because you were into the same stuff she was, and she loved that. Someone who looked up to her properly."

"She didn't say that," I say at once. "She would never... Aunt Sandra didn't have a cruel bone in her body..."

"I knew you'd defend her," said Nikki. She's got her back to me, and there's a note of acidity in her voice. "You defend her, and she defended you. Your own little club, with your own special rules."

"What did she need to defend me from?" I say, irritated. "Yeah, we had a bond because we like puzzles and things but it's not like she..." *Loved me more than you.* I don't finish the sentence. It's that ridiculous I don't even need to give it headspace. "I was close to Aunt Sandra because you know what my mum's like. She's always criticizing me, it's never *fun* with her. Aunt Sandra was never like that."

"No, she wasn't," says Nikki. "But she just never really paid attention to me at all. *Did you hear what Kay did? Did you hear Kay solved this puzzle?* I couldn't even tell if you *liked* doing them, or if it was just another way to worship her."

That stings, because it's partially true. I got into puzzles because I loved the way Aunt Sandra would light up explaining things to me.

"You know what she would say to me?" continues Nikki. It's like she's on a roll – like she's been waiting for the moment to tell me all this. "*Kay's really something special, don't you think?* Do you know what it's like to be an only child and still know that you're not your mum's favourite? I never resented you. I just...accepted it. Even though you were completely oblivious – and you still are now."

"I'm not..." I trail off. I think back to the times Nikki got spiky with me, and went off by herself. I put it down to her being like a cat and needing alone time – but what if she was actually *annoyed* by me? Or jealous?

"Mum told me about her terminal diagnosis before we came to the woods the night Ivy died," Nikki continues, like she hasn't heard me. "That's why I drank so much. But when she sat me down and said she had something important to say, she wanted to call you over as well. I had to beg her not to, because I wanted a moment alone, together. And then she told me the cancer was terminal. I wanted you to know, of course, but I couldn't believe she was going to hold off until you were with us. Like we were *equals*. She couldn't just let me and her have that one moment. And that's all I could think about – my mum was going to die and she didn't even love me best. I couldn't even properly process what was actually happening. I wanted to tell you about it, have a heart to heart, but you left early."

Guilt floods through me. I'd been so fed up with how Ivy was acting, determined to pressure me into drinking – had I

missed Nikki crying out for help?

"I kept drinking after you left," says Nikki. "And I ended up stumbling away. Ivy was on the phone to someone, telling them she loved them - I don't know, I wasn't properly listening. But I went into the woods, and curled up against a tree. I thought I heard voices near me - not Ivy's, men's voices - a man and a teenager, I think. The man sounded familiar... They were arguing, something about *covering it up*. But I was so drunk, and I just wanted to put it behind me because the police closed the case and told me I was unreliable..." She trails off, turning to me and shaking her head even as I'm perking up. For the moment I forget what she's just accused me of - being oblivious, being Aunt Sandra's favourite - because there's a possibility she heard something important and the police were wrong. Plus, there's the fact there were *other people in the woods*. Other people beyond our group of friends. I want to probe, I *need* to probe - the voices sounded familiar. A man and a teenager, or perhaps two teenage boys, or two men, and she misheard. But Nikki's looking at me like she's on the verge of tears, and I realize she needs comfort.

"It's not your fault for being drunk," I say awkwardly - is that the right thing to say? Especially since I want to focus on what she heard. "You couldn't have known you might hear something that could help piece together what happened to Ivy."

"No one would listen to me about what happened to Ivy *because* I was drunk," says Nikki. "I thought the man I heard might be Mr Reed... But I can't even be sure of that."

My mouth hangs open as excitement floods through me. "That might be why Aunt Sandra had his name in her notebook! He was at the scene - and maybe the other voice you heard was Topher—"

"Kay, didn't you hear me? I'm *unreliable*," she says. "I told the police I heard Ivy saying, 'I won't jump,' but I didn't see

her speaking to anyone. I told them I'd dropped the vodka – they couldn't find the bottle."

"The woods are big," I say. "And it was dark. And your *mum* believed you—"

"Why didn't she tell *me* that?" snaps Nikki, and there's such venom in her voice that I step back. "Why carry out that 'investigation'?" She puts air quotes around it. "She didn't find out anything, she didn't write anything helpful down – *the t report was interesting*, what does that mean? But what she could have done is *told* me she believed me – do you know what it's been like, on my own for the last year, thinking I'm the only person in the world who knew Ivy had been pushed? Living next door to her mum and dad and her little sister? And there are holes in my memory too." She swallows, her throat bobbing up and down. "I know you can black out from drinking but I didn't think I drank that much..."

"You probably lost track," I say, and I'm not sure whether I'm comforting her or if I'm insulting her.

"I drank two bottles of beer, from wherever Ivy got her stuff from," says Nikki. "And then a bit of Ivy's vodka – maybe two mouthfuls – I guess that could have done it..."

I flash back to Mum sitting me down when I was twelve and telling me to never leave a drink unattended in public, because someone might spike it. She wanted me to be prepared for reality. I told Aunt Sandra about that later and she clicked her tongue against her teeth and said I was too young for that sort of thing, and then we sat down and discussed one of her old murder cases.

But it's Mum who's helping me now. Maybe there was something else in the vodka. How else could Nikki have got so drunk so quickly?

"Who gave Ivy the vodka?" I ask carefully. "Did she bring it from home or..."

Nikki looks confused. "I mean, I never asked. Maybe she nicked it from her parents."

I think back – the vodka bottle got passed around, but I refused and I think Sophie and Mikey were having beers. At one point people got up and started playing a game of tag, and we left all our stuff behind. We weren't worried, because Longrove was safe and, anyway, there was no one around. But it was left for a while.

What if someone put something in her drink? "Who drank the vodka after I left?" I ask.

Nikki shakes her head. "I don't know. I did. Ivy did. Not sure about anyone else."

A breeze blows, and a shiver goes through me.

Nikki presses her lips together, back to staring at the river ledge. "You know, after you left town it was easier for me to hate you. It was easy to make you a villain when you were just keeping in touch over the phone and I could ignore your messages. But when me and Dad went to visit you in person...I couldn't keep that up. Even though my mum *always* compared me to you."

My stomach swoops. She *wasn't* bad at keeping in touch over text. She just didn't want to. There's anger in her voice now – directed at *me*. It's like she's been waiting to say all this. Shock spikes through me – this isn't Nikki. She keeps her feelings buried – she doesn't angrily spit words at me. And she doesn't believe any of this, does she? Does she hate me? Has she always?

"That's not true—" I begin.

"Why did she split all her stuff, then?" Nikki balls her hands into fists. "In her will. She split it all between you and me, like you were her second child."

"Because she loved us both?" I'm confused about where she's going with this – she left all her money to Uncle Dara

and Nikki. It was more sentimental stuff she split with me. Jewellery and books, and obviously her old notebooks.

Nikki laughs, but there's no humour in it. "But that suggests she loved us both *equally*. Except she should have loved me *more*. She should have loved me better. And you still don't get it. Of course you're like my sister – but you stole her attention when she was here, and now she's *gone*."

Tears prick in my eyes. Is that how she sees me? "I just got on with her. I could talk to her about...having dreams and stuff. My mum is overly practical, most of what I do is wrong in her eyes. She's not exactly a walk in the park to be around —"

"And mine's *dead*," yells Nikki suddenly. "You have a mum. You didn't lose what I lost, Kay."

It's like she's punched me in the stomach. It's like she's scraped her nails across my face and pulled at my hair. "It's not a competition," I say shakily.

"No, because even when Mum was alive, you'd *win*," screams Nikki. "The reason I got drunk that day was because of Mum and it was because of *you*."

And it's like she's blaming *me* that no one believed her about what happened to Ivy.

"I didn't know you hated me." Tears drip down my face and I wipe them away, embarrassed.

Nikki shakes her head. "I don't," she says. "But maybe we should do our own separate investigations into Monday. I can't be part of this puzzle with you. All it does is remind me how I always lost out on Mum's affections to you. Maybe we should go our own ways, maybe that's what's best for us."

And she heads off, and leaves me standing alone.

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I hate Nikki. I hate that she's accusing me of trying to get between her and her mum, that she doesn't understand the connection I had with Aunt Sandra. Sure, my mum loves me and she wants what's best for me, but she never *listens* to me like Aunt Sandra did. She never accepts that I might be right about things too.

I don't like the way Nikki has painted Aunt Sandra. She was perfect. Nikki is making her sound like...like my own mother.

That's not right at all. Aunt Sandra was special.

I move across to the river's edge and sit down to watch the water rushing below. Nikki can say what she wants, but Aunt Sandra was gentle and compassionate.

I press my knuckles to my eyes as my head starts to throb, because how do I know that? I didn't live with Aunt Sandra. Sure, I was round their house all the time but I wasn't there like Nikki was. And Aunt Sandra *could* be dismissive of Nikki, because she didn't share the same interests...

Would Aunt Sandra have dismissed me, if I told her I wasn't interested in listening to her stories about all her mysteries?

The river bubbles and breaks. It's particularly fast today.

"What are you doing here?" says someone behind me.

I almost leap out of my skin as I turn around – Mikey is standing watching me, looking confused. A small part of me starts to immediately question him, ask him what *he's* doing here. But most of me wants to wallow alone.

"Sitting," I say irritably, looking back at the water. Mikey doesn't reply, and I think he's going to carry on walking – but he sits down beside me and stares out over the river in silence too. "What are you doing?"

"Sitting," he replies, shooting me a look out of the corner of his eye. I resist the urge to snap at him that, actually, I don't want him sitting there. I would like to simmer for several minutes about how angry I am at Nikki, which will then turn into anger at myself, then wallowing, then I'll probably want to get myself a tub of ice cream and sob in a corner – the duality of woman and all. Mikey's voice breaks my thoughts again. "I come here, on occasion. To think."

"About Ivy?" I ask.

"No," he says. "And yes." He doesn't elaborate. "How's your uncle?"

"He's better," I say. Does Uncle Dara resent me as well? Nikki hid it so well – except I know she loves me too. Even though she's never said that aloud – we don't, in our family. We don't talk about emotional stuff, we don't say, *I love you*. We're all just supposed to know that it's true.

I can see Mikey looking at me out of the corner of his eye, like he's debating saying something else. "I come here because no one else does," he says. "It's nice to get away. Even now, we're still Ivy's friends to people in town. People can't look at us and not think of her. Which is okay – but I like having a break. And, hey, maybe we can get back to being friends again." He looks at me hopefully, and I roll my eyes and give him a gentle shove.

"We never stopped," I say.

He smiles properly, like I've just made him the happiest he's ever been.

We lapse into silence as I turn over everything else Nikki said – not the argument, I want to bury that deep somewhere and unpack it when I'm alone. But the other things she told me – that Ivy was on the phone, saying she loved someone, two men were in the woods at the same time as us. Nikki obviously doesn't trust her own memory. She basically glossed over everything she remembered, like she was ashamed to think back on that night. But *I* trust her, even if her memories are patchy.

"You don't happen to know if Ivy had a boyfriend she didn't tell us about, do you?" I ask Mikey, trying to keep my voice casual. Hopefully he'll think it's a random question, brought up by sitting in the place where she died. "Maybe James Cardroy?"

"Oh, definitely not him," says Mikey, without any indication he thinks the change in topic is odd. "She only kissed him because she knew Sophie liked him." He brings his knees to his chest as he looks out at the river, like he's feeling a chill and wants to hunch up. "I do think there was someone else, though. Someone she really liked..."

I flash back to that photo of her, with the mystery boy. The way her face was lit up, laughing as she peered around his body. Pure delight – yes, that boy was someone she really liked...

She did like Mikey. After all, they hung out a lot – she was willing to pretend to play football to keep him under her thumb. I shoot him another glance, and his eyes widen.

"It wasn't *me*," he says, and he seems genuinely offended. "Ivy once ruffled my hair and called me a baby chick. She had no interest in me. None at *all*." He's really trying to hammer the point home. "And stop thinking I'm protesting too much," he adds on, like he can read my mind. "I know you

well enough to know once you've got an idea in your head you're going to keep going with it. Nip that in the bud."

"Okay, fine," I say. I do believe him. I can't imagine him and Ivy together - the image doesn't make sense in my mind. "So do you know anything about this guy?"

Mikey shakes his head. "All I know is it was someone older." He scratches his chin. "You know what, I saw her hanging around with Topher Reed a few times."

I crinkle my nose, because that doesn't sound right to me either - Topher Reed was the school golden boy. He was heading off to university where he would meet lots of new girls who could all party and drink with him - what would he want with Ivy?

It's still a good lead though. Topher might *possibly* have been in the woods on the night of her murder, and he's on my list.

Except, why would he go after *me*? And Nikki? It's too big a question to ignore - I'm missing something important.

"I'm going to head back into town," I say, getting to my feet.

Mikey stands up as well. "I'll walk with you. You ruined my peace out here anyway."

Weirdly, he's helped me calm down after my argument with Nikki. "Did you see Nikki on your way here?" I ask.

Mikey shakes his head. "I did a loop around the old Cleverly house, though," he says. "That place got weird after people stopped going there to hang out, you know. It's got... odd vibes now. I swear I felt like there was someone inside, watching me. It sounds stupid, I know."

"No, I felt the same," I say. I had dismissed that feeling of being watched, and Nikki told me people don't come into the woods any more - but Mikey being here is proof she was wrong. I slow down, nibbling my bottom lip. My gut is telling

me we should check it out. “Maybe we should just take a quick look.”

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I expect Mikey to tell me no, but he seems quite game. Almost too game – I wonder if there’s an ulterior motive, like he’s luring me there to kill me. I get out my phone to tell Nikki, because even if she hates me, she’ll still avenge my death – and there’s no one else in Longrove I’d feel comfortable texting, which sends a pang of sadness through me. My message doesn’t send, though – my phone has no signal. The signal is really patchy in the woods, and I’m obviously in a dead spot.

The house looms ahead of us. It’s clear that at one point it would have been a nice place to live – it’s got lots of land, and there must have been at least six bedrooms, possibly more. It’s hard to tell from the state it’s in now.

But even if it *was* the most expensive house in Longrove, the location isn’t appealing to me – I can’t imagine being alone in these woods in the middle of the night. No one around, no one to help if anything went wrong.

The brick is that soft grey the Committee loves so much. In fact, everything about this house was probably done exactly to their regulation wishes. It must really pain them, the state it’s in now, a reminder that they don’t actually have any power.

It looks completely deserted. Different to how it felt earlier, as if there was an unseen pair of eyes on me. “I don’t

get the feeling anyone's watching me," I say quietly to Mikey. "Do you?"

He shakes his head. "I can't even say what it was before, but I just got the sense there was someone inside."

"Let's take a look," I say. "It was probably just someone from town."

"No one hangs out here any more, though," says Mikey.

"They might have started coming back," I say. "It's been a long time since...since Ivy." I stumble over saying her name aloud. "Besides, no one in town scares me." They're empty words – Monday is looming over me, but I haven't told Mikey about that yet.

The front door is half off its hinges. It swings open with just the lightest push from me.

Dust billows upwards as I step inside. The floor looks like compacted earth, like the outside has made its way in. I get out my phone torch and shine a light over it – I can see floorboards beneath the brown grime.

There's a staircase leading to the next floor...but above our heads there's a gaping hole in the ceiling, where it's partially fallen away. Even when I lived in Longrove people didn't go upstairs, because they knew the floorboards weren't stable. I guess they finally gave in.

I shine a light over the ground in case I've missed it, but there's no debris that you'd expect from the ceiling caving in. "Someone's been here," I say to Mikey. "To clear up where the floorboards fell in."

"Or an animal could have eaten them," says Mikey. "Like a woodpecker. Or a deer."

"Yes, the famous woodpeckers and deer of Longrove," I say.

"Well, if it was someone cleaning up, they didn't bother moving anything else." He frowns. "Was this place always

this grimy, or was I a lot more forgiving when we were younger?"

His eyes meet mine, and I remember a time about four years ago, when it was pouring with rain. We'd come to the woods and Sophie suggested we shelter in the Cleverly house. Ivy had raised the possibility of us all just going home. I think Angela was planning on baking a cake – but Sophie vetoed the idea.

"Come on, the rain will pass soon," she said, heading in the direction of the house. "I don't want to be cooped up at home."

"You can come hang out at mine," I said, because I understood why Sophie really wanted to prolong our wet afternoon.

Sophie's mouth twisted, and I could tell she knew why I was offering. She didn't talk about her home life much, but that didn't stop everyone from knowing that her mum had abandoned the family and her dad never wanted a kid – he'd said as much loudly at the hairdresser's several times, and gossip like that quickly spread around Longrove.

We spent the entire afternoon at the house, having a weirdly fun time playing cards in the former living room.

I head towards the living-room door now – it's fully intact, but currently shut. There are scrapes in the dirt, right where the door would swing open, like there's been someone going in and out.

There's a prickling feeling down the back of my neck – is there someone on the other side of the door? Is that who was watching us earlier?

I take a deep breath and look back at Mikey. His eyes are wide, but he nods at me. His hands ball into fists, and that almost makes me smile – I can't imagine him throwing a punch at anyone.

I pull the door open – it scrapes the floor exactly where the markings are – and step inside the room.

And take a step back, into Mikey, who must have immediately followed me in.

“What are you...” he starts.

There’s a tent in the middle of the room. And on the wall are photos of me, Mikey, Sophie, Nikki, Ivy.

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We both stare in silence at the photos of *us* - our old friendship group, the one that shattered the night that Ivy died. She's right in the middle, her photo raised slightly above ours.

"What the hell?" says Mikey, gaping at the photos. "Why..." He goes across and tries to take the photo of himself down, scraping his fingernails underneath to peel it away from the wall. But it's clearly not easy, and when he takes a step back he's made no difference. "Why are our photos on the wall?" His voice is shaky, and he doesn't even know about Monday yet. How does this link to everything? Mikey says something else, and I tune back in. "Maybe I should check the other rooms. See if there's anyone else here."

"Er, shouldn't we stick together?" I say. "Safety in numbers?" But he's already gone - he's got no survival instinct, he'd definitely be the first one to die in a horror film.

I'm about to follow him, but the flap of the tent moves slightly - it could just be the slight breeze from the glassless window. Or there could be someone inside.

Before I can think too much about what I'm doing I dodge forward and pull the flap back, my heart almost exploding out of my chest as I reveal—

Nothing.

The tent is empty.

I breathe out as I get to my feet - now that I've confirmed there's no one lurking with me I can acknowledge the truly scary thing. The photos on the wall of us.

The photo of me shows me standing in a garden and smiling, but there's a jagged edge where it's been ripped. And further down the wall is the other half - of Nikki. She's also standing in a garden, which I now recognize as Uncle Dara's.

Everyone else has got their own photos. I wonder if that means anything - that mine and Nikki's photos have been ripped. Though in Sophie's, there's someone walking just out of frame, so all I can see is the bottom of their jumper.

I try to take the photo of me down, like Mikey attempted, but it's been superglued to the wall. Not that I should remove it from the wall - whoever is living here would get suspicious.

Because surely *someone* is living here. The tent looks fairly new. It seems clean, no dust over it. Before I start examining properly, I get out my phone and snap the photos on the wall, and the tent - partially to make sure I don't disturb anything and partially because this needs to go on the murder board. I get a little flicker of pleasure at the thought - it's going to be properly full at this rate. Weird that in between the constant fear for my life I can almost enjoy some parts of this investigation - this is the thrill Aunt Sandra must have loved about mysteries.

Now that I've got my evidence, I can look at the tent more closely. Inside there's a dark-blue sleeping bag, and a camping lamp. There aren't any clothes, though there's a bristly toothbrush and toothpaste inside a little bag - nothing else, though. I wish they'd have left, like...lipstick or something, so I could match their shade. Or a picture of their favourite footballer. Why hasn't this mysterious person made it easier for me to figure out who they are?

"No one's here," says Mikey, as he comes back into the room and goes to his photo and tries once more to take it down.

"Leave it," I say, even though I tried to do the same thing. "We don't want whoever's here to know we've seen this. That'll alert them and then they might not come back."

"So?" he says, still trying to tug at his photo, which hardly looks like him at all – it's one where he's not smiling, looking moodily off to the side. "I hate this photo of me. It's one my mum put up on her social media, and she captioned it something like: *Finally got a photo of the one second Mikey isn't smiling!*"

He scowls at me, and I snort. "I could take a photo now and she'll be able to say she's got a collection of two pictures?"

The scowl deepens, which makes me properly grin. "We don't want to alert them because we want to figure out who's living here. We need them to come back." And then I can see who they are, and all this will be over. It could really be that simple.

He stops tugging on the photo. "But we're not going to stake this place out, are we? They might come back when we're not here."

For a moment I consider suggesting we *do* stake the place out – the person must have been here when we walked past earlier. They must have been the eyes we sensed watching us. But I'm also aware that it's Thursday, and Monday has threatened "treachery", which all in all doesn't even sound that bad, if I really think about it – a fire or a stabbing sounds a whole lot worse.

Even though I've already had enough treachery for today – Nikki ditching me in the woods, the fact that I'm supposed to *die* in four days not being enough for her to carry on investigating with me.

Or else...I ordered a pet camera online, to put up in my bedroom to catch Monday in the act. It's supposed to arrive today. Maybe I could hide it in the corner here instead.

Except that won't work, because it needs Wi-Fi, and this place doesn't even have phone signal. I turn back to the photo of Mikey on the wall, staring moodily into the distance. His hair is extra spiked up, like someone has ruffled it.

"Who took that photo?" I say, nodding at it.

He presses his lips together. "My grandmother."

"Why were you so annoyed? Is it because she'd ruffled your hair like a dog?"

He tilts his head at me, almost like disbelief. *Well done, me.* Spot on assessment, that's the work of a good detective.

"So are you going to tell me why you aren't more weirded out about the fact that someone has our photos up in this room?" he says. Oh - he's not impressed by my powers of deduction. He just doesn't know about Monday, and how this is obviously something to do with them.

Or is it? It might be that this place doesn't belong to Monday, and we've got some other stalker coming after us. Which is more terrifying, somehow.

"Let's look for more clues," I say, and Mikey frowns.

"Hang on, shouldn't we...tell someone? That someone's living here and has our photos glued to the wall? Shouldn't you be more concerned? Why aren't you?" He folds his arms.

"Because... Well..." I wonder if I've got anything to lose by telling him about Monday. Definitely not if he *is* Monday - I'll have discovered their identity and won the game, which means it will all be over. On the flip side...I simply don't believe it's him. He wouldn't have used his own car to ram Uncle Dara, and we've easily fallen back into our friendship as if nothing ever changed. He wouldn't have wanted to kill Ivy. I just don't see a motive. And I don't see any reason he would want to terrorize Nikki.

Plus...it looks like I've lost Nikki for now. A pang goes through me - surely she should be able to put aside everything else she feels and focus on solving this with me? Does she really hate me that much? Have I lost Aunt Sandra and her too?

No - I won't think like this. There's no point. There are more pressing issues.

"This is going to sound really weird," I begin. "But I need you to trust me - and believe that I'm telling the truth."

His eyebrows knit together. "Yeah, of course."

I take a deep breath, and fill him in on what's happened this week, making sure not to leave out anything - about Monday's notes, Liam telling me I shouldn't have come back to town, the rat, the car crash... But I can't seem to say *I think Ivy was murdered* aloud, not in front of him, in front of the photos of all of us together. "And Ivy got messages from Monday too," I say instead, and hope he picks up the meaning.

He blinks at me, and then sinks to the floor, and is silent for a solid minute, as horror dawns on his face. "No," he says. "No, Ivy couldn't have been murdered. I spent the past year going over that night and thinking about what I could have done differently - I should have taken the alcohol off her, I should have insisted on walking her home. But she was determined to stay, she wanted to be alone - and you couldn't argue with Ivy, that's what I kept telling myself. And then she fell. That's what happened. If she was killed by someone... It doesn't make it any less senseless, but it makes it a thousand times more awful." He runs a hand through his hair, and then sits up, like he's been shocked. "*It's going to get worse - Monday.* Danny thought he was being targeted by someone from the Committee who has it out for the death-mobile."

"Danny prefers Bertha," I say.

"Kerry on the Committee called the car ugly," says Mikey, ignoring me. "And said the noise from the engine was polluting Longrove. But that Monday message was meant for *you*."

"Yeah," I say. "Well, me and Nikki."

"No," he says. "*You*. You said the original message from Monday was addressed to you. Nikki's been targeted by Monday before, but Monday's after you this week. Why?"

"Well, you can't target me without Nikki being affected," I say with a shrug - but then I see what he's trying to get at. "Monday's not Nikki, there's no way. Uncle Dara got hurt. She wouldn't target her own dad."

"Yeah, but Monday's someone who's threatened *murder*," says Mikey. "They're not someone with morals."

"Even murderers have people they love," I say.

"Really profound," he says.

"So, you believe me?" I say, slightly surprised at how easy it's been to convince him. He obviously doesn't *want* what I've said to be true - but he hasn't questioned me. He raises his eyebrows.

"You're a rubbish liar," he says. "Always have been. And you've not got a bad bone in your body - if you think there's someone in this town who is calling themselves Monday with a vendetta against you and Nikki, then I believe you. And I know you're smart too - there's probably a good reason you haven't gone to the police, right?"

I flush at the praise because I'm not expecting it at all. I didn't realize he thought so highly of me. "Yeah, that's right," I say, trying not to show how much him saying that means to me - it's a bit pathetic, but considering how much Nikki's words have cut it's nice to think not everyone is secretly harbouring angry feelings towards me.

"That's why you wanted to chat to Danny earlier," he says. "You think...he has something to do with it?"

"No. But Monday used your car to ram my uncle – the wreckage on Wednesday bit," I say.

"Poor choice of car," says Mikey thoughtfully. "I mean... the brakes don't even work. Monday was risking their own life using that."

"Monday doesn't strike me as the kind of person who cares too much about their own life," I say. It's an interesting thought, one that hasn't occurred to me before. Monday is someone risking everything to threaten me – to *mess* with me. They've got a vendetta that burns deep: trespassing, threatening to murder, attempted murder. Could they be someone without much to lose?

"So, who do you think Monday could be, then?" asks Mikey.

I hesitate, and he's quick to pick up on it.

"Let me guess, me," he says. "And...the rest of that lot on the wall. Minus Ivy, obviously, because she's dead – although I guess you haven't considered the possibility of a supernatural angle. Longrove features in some really excellent ghost stories." He doesn't seem to be offended by the fact I think he might be a weirdo threatening to kill me. In fact, he seems almost...delighted.

"It's odd that this has made you so happy," I say.

"Yeah, well, it's nice that you thought of me," he says. "People tend to forget about me, you know? And I've definitely never been considered a murderer before. It makes me feel exciting. Anyway, let's look for more clues." He starts to examine the tent, and I'm so wrong-footed I don't tell him I've already looked there. *People tend to forget about me*. I feel like that comment was directed at me – that he wanted to say *you* instead of people. But what does that mean?

There's a weird feeling in my stomach as Mikey crouches down and crawls into the tent, like he's planning on moving

in. I let the moment pass as I ask, "What are you doing?"

"Seeing if I could fit inside," he says. He pokes his head out. "We might be able to eliminate someone really tall - but actually this tent is pretty spacious. I think someone's paid good money for it. Rules out Danny, at least, the boy is broke." He climbs out and I can't help feeling impressed. "And me. And you - you know, in case you've got a split personality and you're actually targeting yourself." I must look confused, because he says, "What? There's a book at the bookshop with that plot line. *The Other Me*. The title sort of spoiled the reveal."

"So far you've given me: 'you might be targeted by Ghost Ivy' or, 'you might be coming after yourself'." I roll my eyes - maybe it was a mistake involving Mikey... Although to be fair, at least he *has* theories.

"Okay, so what are your thoughts?" he asks.

"I don't know," I say. "Not much at the moment - but whoever is living in that tent could come back any minute." I look at my watch; 12.32 p.m. If they've nipped out for lunch they could be back soon. There are a few rooms on this floor - a smaller room which I guess was the dining room, another space with shelves that was probably a library, and the kitchen. "Let's have a proper look around."

The other rooms are completely empty, and the kitchen is exactly as I remember it. Half of the units are missing. That's another game the teenagers of Longrove played, although I never saw them doing it – smashing up the cabinets, ripping them out of the walls and taking them away and dumping them in each other's front gardens... Much to the chagrin of the Committee. Again, it can't have been a game that lasted particularly long, and I don't really get what was fun about it either.

All the floor tiles are cracked, and the wall tiles, which were once probably white, are a grimy grey. There's an upturned cardboard box in the centre, with a few chocolate wrappers on top – almost like a makeshift table.

"These could have been here a while," I say, wondering if I should sniff them, but deciding that won't help me figure out how old they are. Instead I take out my phone again and snap photos of the wrappers and the carrier bag, which is from the independent supermarket in town.

"Er, what are you doing?" asks Mikey.

"Taking pictures of the crime scene," I say. "This is all going on my board."

"You've got a murder board? A proper one? With bits of string and everything?" Mikey looks impressed, and I almost don't want to burst his bubble.

"I've got a whiteboard with marker pen and sticky tape," I concede.

"Well, we can conclude it's someone local," says Mikey with a nod at the carrier bag, as if this is an excellent piece of information.

"I always knew it was someone local," I say.

"You never know," he says. "It might have been someone from Hillingate or something. With a vendetta against people from Longrove, and they just arbitrarily chose you to target, not realizing you don't live here any more. I read something similar recently."

"Do you actually do any *work* at your job?" I say. "Or are you just reading weird mysteries all day."

"My knowledge is going to help us," he says. "You'll see." He starts rooting through the remaining cupboards - he's obviously taking his task of looking for more clues very seriously. A spider drops out of one of the cupboards and he leaps back.

I snort. "Very brave."

"I'm allergic to spider bites," he says.

"It's crawling up your back," I say, and he shrieks, trying his best to look over his own shoulder to assess the situation - and stops when he makes eye contact with me.

"Cruel," he says, straightening his T-shirt like he's trying to regain some dignity.

"I don't get why anyone would want to camp here," I say, as I scoop up the spider - it's only a little thing. Mikey flinches as I carry it across the kitchen to throw it outside through one of the broken windows. "It's gross."

"They might be desperate," says Mikey. "It's a place to stay out of the rain, at least. And it's secluded."

That doesn't tally with the version of Monday I have in my mind, a puppet master pulling all the strings. And there's really no evidence that it *is* Monday living here - except the

idea of two separate people stalking me seems too far-fetched.

In the distance there's the sound of an engine. I frown at Mikey. "Is that a car?"

"Yeah," he says, looking confused. We've never heard cars out here.

The sound of the engine comes nearer - and then it's cut off, and there's an unmistakable slamming of a car door. Someone's coming to the house.

Mikey grabs my wrist and pulls me into a cupboard that's just about big enough for both of us to stand in with a little bit of extra room - it must have been a pantry. He yanks the door closed, and if I crouch I can peer through the keyhole.

Something moves over my hand and I try not to flinch or speak. I feel Mikey tense, and let out a low hiss of breath - there must be another spider crawling over him.

I stand straight, so I'm looking at his chest. He's almost a head taller than me, a fun fact I didn't register before. It's hard to see his expression; the cupboard is too dark.

"Hello?" calls a low voice, a man's voice. I can hear Mikey's heart thumping loudly, matching the speed of my own. He grips my hand and squeezes, and I don't know if that's for his benefit or for mine. "Are you here?"

The man's voice is familiar, but I can't place it.

"I know you're here," he says.

I suck in a breath - it almost sounds like he's...talking to us. But he can't be - he can't know we're here.

"There's no need to hide," he says, his voice closer now. Mikey is gripping my hand so tightly it almost hurts - the man is in the kitchen.

Carefully, I crouch down and peer through the keyhole. I can see legs, a torso - a face.

My heart pounds - Mr Reed.

What's he doing here?

Mikey nudges me – he wants to look out too. I shift to give him space, and I know the second he sees Mr Reed because he gasps and straightens up. I elbow him to be quiet. He immediately elbows me back, but very gently. *That's my head teacher. This is bizarre.* I'm tempted to elbow him again – *I know, stay quiet* – but I know he bruises easily, and he also might gasp again, which would defeat the point.

I take over the keyhole again, as Mr Reed walks towards the overturned cardboard box and examines the wrappers and the carrier bag, then crosses the space to peer into the overgrown garden.

"You won't be in any trouble," Mr Reed says softly. I could believe him – his voice is gentle, like he's trying to coax a scared, small creature out of a hole. He almost sounds like the kind of person you could turn to if you had any problems; a teacher you could properly trust.

Then he turns and his mouth is set in a straight line and his eyes are dark. He's *furious*. He was expecting someone to be here, and they're not and the mask has slipped.

Mr Reed roots through the cupboards that are still left, just like we did, methodically opening and closing – he shows little care for closing the doors properly, slamming them back into place. I flinch every time the wood cracks into place – he's making his way closer to our pantry in the corner.

Like us, he doesn't find anything in the cupboards. But then he goes through the drawers as well. It's the third drawer he opens that he stops at, and the fury melts away – a satisfied smile plays on his lips, like he's found what he's looking for.

Slowly, he pulls the drawer open fully, then reaches into his pockets and pulls out gloves, which he slips on – finally he slides out the object that has made him look so delighted. A

knife, a great long one that seems to glimmer even in the darkness of the kitchen, although that's probably just my imagination playing tricks on me. It has a bright pink plastic handle, which he holds as he runs a finger over the blade, like he's testing out the sharpness. His eyes sweep over the room.

And through the keyhole, we make eye contact.

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I stand up straight, away from the keyhole – my legs feel weak as I wait for Mr Reed to open the door.

There's silence – for ten seconds, twenty, a minute...

I imagined the eye contact. Obviously – I'm standing in a dark cupboard staring through a keyhole. There's no way he could have seen me.

I risk peering through the keyhole again, but there's no one in the kitchen. Neither of us move, though, and as I stand up I can make out Mikey's face. He's looking at me questioningly. I shake my head, hoping he'll know I think it's too soon to speak and definitely too soon to leave the cupboard. Mr Reed might still be in the house.

Then there's the sound of an engine roaring to life, and tyres crunching over stones.

I take a deep breath, and open the cupboard door, pausing for a second.

"What are you doing?" says Mikey. "He's gone."

"He could be faking," I whisper back, straining my ears. Mikey shakes his head at me, and heads out of the kitchen before I can stop him. "Wait!" I say.

Mikey comes back. "He's gone. But why was he *here*?"

"I don't know," I say. "I know what you know. He was looking for someone – maybe the person who has been

camping here. And then he looked around the kitchen and went through the drawers and...and took out a huge knife." My voice shakes.

Concern flashes across Mikey's face, but he's obviously trying to hide his worry. "It's a kitchen," he says. "There's probably a knife that got left behind, or missed or something."

I start opening the drawers - they're all empty, either taken by the last Cleverly or else rooted through by people breaking into the house. "Why would a single giant knife have been left behind?" I don't understand how this fits with everything - Mr Reed is one of my suspects, he was potentially in the woods the night Ivy died, he has a grudge against my family. But he's not friendly with whoever is staying here, the person who has our photos up in the living room, so what does that mean? And why was he searching for them?

Frustration is starting to build in me - it just doesn't make sense. "At least we know it wasn't Mr Reed staying here." It wouldn't be any of the Committee - camping out in the Cleverlys' old house feels like something a teenager would do. Plus, the photos on the walls come from our social media. Mine is private, which means it would have to be someone I know who put my photo up, not a random adult. "And let's think about this logically - the person Mr Reed is most likely to have been looking for is Topher. His son. But why would Topher be camping here, and have photos of us up?" Is all of this a red herring? My main focus is on Monday - that's the ticking timebomb to deal with. There's no proof that it's *Monday* staying here, just a person who may or may not be obsessed with our old friendship group. "I need to speak to Topher anyway. Find out if he was Ivy's mysterious boyfriend." All I have at the moment is Mikey seeing him and Ivy speak a few times; we need more than that.

"I'll come with you," says Mikey at once.

"Why?" I ask.

"Because I'm invested now," says Mikey. "And Mr Reed might come home, and he's got a knife."

"Mr Reed's not going to stab me," I say. "He's a head teacher."

Mikey raises his eyebrows. "But you think he could also potentially be Monday. Anyway, before anything we need to get some lunch. Let's go to the Orange Flamingo."

"We don't have *time*," I say - it's Thursday, we're half a day away from *a fire on Friday*. Then my stomach gurgles, loudly. Mikey smiles smugly at me. "Fine," I say. "We can get sandwiches to go." Plus, it means I can check in on Uncle Dara, confirm he's all right and Monday hasn't pulled anything else weird. We still have no idea what *treachery on Thursday* is going to be. "Wait - I mean, *I* will get a sandwich to go, you're not coming with me. If anything happens to me, you can tell people, okay?"

"Or I can pre-empt your stabbing by being at your side," he says. "It'll be a lot more difficult for them to get both of us."

"Yes, I can use you as a human shield to get away," I say. He grins and suddenly I feel a sharp stab of regret that we weren't in contact for the past year - and, for the first time, sad that if I survive this week I'll be leaving Longrove again.

We start walking back through the woods.

"Do you remember how much Ivy loved these woods?" asks Mikey. "She'd have lived here if she could."

"Remember that summer when we were twelve and she decided we should have a meeting point? Just in case for some reason we decided we weren't going to walk together from town?" I smile at the memory - how earnest Ivy was. Just a normal pre-teen, excited by something a little bit dorky. "She chose that giant tree right in the centre of the woods."

"And then she made us stop going there the next year," says Mikey. "Said we'd outgrown it."

"I wonder if that tree's still there..." We're not far from it, and I did come into the woods to get some more perspective on Ivy. We went back to the place she died - maybe we should see the places she was happiest too.

"Let's go and take a quick look," says Mikey, reading my mind again, heading right onto one of the narrow paths that branches off the main one, away from the river and deeper into the trees. Nikki used to hate going off the main track - she was worried about getting lost. I was eager to explore, and happy to do it when I had other people with me. The woods seemed enormous at the time, but they feel smaller

now – we thought we were so far away from town but it's still there, only half an hour away.

The ground starts sloping upwards, getting steeper – Ivy's tree was at the top of this path.

"It used to feel a lot further," I say, as it looms ahead of us, standing where the paths split into two. One path goes higher, so steep it looks almost impossible to climb. The other slopes back around in a circle – I know this because Ivy suggested we go down it to see where it went. I think she was hoping for something surprising.

"What's that?" says Mikey, as he squints at the tree. "Is that a...carving?"

I follow his gaze – something has been etched into the wood.

I + K.

My heart beats faster. Ivy. No one else in town would bother coming all the way out here, to the woods; no one else would know what this tree meant to her. "Maybe that's the reason she wanted us to stop coming here," I say, as I run my fingers along the carving. It's deep, right into the bark, like it wasn't ever meant to disappear. "Ivy wanted to keep this as a secret meeting point for her and her mysterious boyfriend...K."

K.

Kay.

40

Mikey registers the same thing I do a moment later – his eyes widen.

“Why was Ivy carving my name into her tree?” I ask, running my hand over the bark again.

“Maybe she wasn’t,” says Mikey. “It’s not your whole name. Do we know anyone else whose name begins with K? Katie Lockford? Kyle Mustown?”

Katie was in our classes at school – I don’t remember a Kyle Mustown. “Kerry Richmond’s name also begins with a K,” I say. “The lady on the Committee who bought the rat...” I pause as Mikey raises his eyebrows at me. “Yeah, it’s unlikely Ivy was carving her initial.”

There’s the *K*, so clear – there’s no mistaking it. I circle the tree. Maybe there’s something that I’m missing, some other part of the puzzle. There’s a gap between the roots, and what looks to be a bit of plastic peeking out.

I tug at it, revealing it to be a sandwich bag, filthy with leaves and debris and general dirt. It’s obviously been lying beneath the tree for a while. Inside is what looks like a tin. I unzip the bag, and take the tin out. Something inside rattles, the exterior seemingly untouched.

“Is that one of those waterproof survival tins that people take camping?” asks Mikey.

I shrug – camping is not my thing. But as I stare at the tin, a shiver goes through me – the woods are silent, the only sound leaves rustling as a gentle breeze blows. We're completely alone out here – and yet my back suddenly feels exposed.

We've found a carving made by presumably Ivy – and now there's this tin. Could this be related to her? Is this somehow a clue?

But this feels too easy.

Has no one been here since she died? It's possible – there's no reason for them to have come here. The police wouldn't have searched the woods because they didn't think Ivy was murdered.

I try to prise the tin open but the lid fits too snugly on the base. I dig my nail into the crevice where the two parts of the tin meet and force as I hard as I can, working the lid off slowly. It finally pops off to reveal—

"An old phone?" I hold it up. There's a small crack on the tiny screen, but otherwise it looks to be in perfect condition.

Mikey frowns. "My mum used to have a phone like that," he says. "It's probably the most basic one you can get that still has room for a few apps."

I press the power button, but obviously nothing happens. "It's been buried under a tree for too long," I say.

"It might just need charging," says Mikey. "If the battery's not completely gone. I can try to find my mum's old charger. She doesn't throw anything out, it's probably somewhere in the attic."

I stare at it, wondering if it could have belonged to Ivy. Except she had a flashy one that her mum had bought secondhand but which had barely been used, so it was practically new.

My own phone buzzes, and I frown as I take it out – I must have signal again. My stomach flips at a message notification

from Nikki. Is she apologizing? Messaging to tell me she hates me? Replying to my message about Mikey?

Nikki: Come back to the house.

Nikki: Treachery on Thursday.

41

We're back at the house in record time, rushing through the door. I don't understand why Nikki couldn't just *tell* me what Monday's done - she hasn't responded to any of my ??? messages, and I burst into the living room wound up to yell at her for making me wait and stressing me out even more... Right after I have got my breath back, because it feels like I'm about three seconds away from collapsing.

But I stop when I see her sitting on an armchair, her face pale, her hands folded over her lap as she stares at an envelope and papers on the table.

"It had been posted through the letter box when I came back to the house," she says. "I don't want to talk about this one. I'm going to go and have a chat with Liam and find out more about Kerry Richmond. You do...whatever it is you're doing." She leaves the room, not acknowledging Mikey, who hasn't even broken a sweat.

The envelope is addressed to me - no postage, Monday must have dropped it off. I swear under my breath as I pick up the papers, and scan through them - and acid rises in my throat, because I don't understand what I'm reading.

"What is it?" says Mikey. "What do they say?"

I go back to the start of the first page, the words swirling before me. "A letter from Aunt Sandra to...the Committee, care of Mr Reed. Saying she would speak to Uncle Dara

about changing the paint of the cafe...and changing its name. And getting rid of the flamingos."

"Okay..." says Mikey, looking confused. "That's...not a big deal?" He doesn't understand what this means - why it feels just as bad as someone punching me in the stomach.

There's a note at the back.

Isn't it a shame that the person you looked up to was a coward? What a fun little bit of treachery. And there's more to come - all leading to the grand finale on

Monday

I drop the note and the letter and sit down. I know Mikey wants an explanation, but I don't have one to give. Aunt Sandra and Uncle Dara were so excited to open the cafe - they never cared what the Committee thought. Aunt Sandra called them *losers with no lives*. And yet she sent them this letter, behind Uncle Dara's back. She was willing to give in to them.

Mikey leaves the room. I don't ask him where he's going - I just go back to the letter. It's in Aunt Sandra's handwriting, it was definitely written by her.

"Here." Mikey returns, and he places a sandwich in front of me, and a packet of crisps, and a slice of cake.

"Thanks," I mutter, as I start to eat. "On Tuesday, Monday left a rat in my bed, to scare me. On Wednesday there was the car crash - to hurt Uncle Dara. And now on Thursday it's a note to...to destroy Aunt Sandra's memory."

"But it won't," says Mikey. "This note doesn't change who she was, and it definitely doesn't make her a coward."

"She always told us to stand up for what we believed in," I say. "And she never said anything about giving in to the

Committee to me and Nikki. Uncle Dara was determined to ignore them – she did this behind all our backs.”

“But the cafe’s colour stayed,” says Mikey. “And the name and the flamingos. She obviously changed her mind. Remember, Monday’s trying to get inside your head.”

“But *why?*” I burst out. They must have a grudge against our whole family – what could we have possibly done? Going after Uncle Dara, our memory of Aunt Sandra. But Nikki’s already got me questioning her, I didn’t need Monday to drive the knife in...

Because this letter shows I didn’t know Aunt Sandra as well as I thought. And maybe everything Nikki said was true.

I push the thought away; I’ve got an investigation to focus on. I can unpack everything later.

“This is a clue,” I mutter, holding up the pages. “How did Monday get this letter? It was sent to the Committee – to Mr Reed’s address, it’s got the postage paid. We’re looking for someone who would have been able to get access to it.” The most obvious person is Mr Reed. Or Topher, his son.

That’s where we have to investigate next.

42

Mr Reed's house is one of the biggest in Longrove. The hedge is carefully trimmed, each twig clipped into place, and next to the main electric gate is a little postbox that I guess all their mail goes into. There's a smaller gate for pedestrians - but it's locked. There's a little camera pointed at us. As head of the Committee, Mr Reed happily talks about how safe Longrove is - and then invests in home security anyway.

"They really don't want visitors, do they?" I say with a frown, as I buzz the intercom. We wait a few minutes, but no one comes, so I buzz again.

"Maybe no one's home," says Mikey.

I peer through a gap in the gate. There's a red sports car parked in the driveway. "That must be Topher's car," I say, because I can't imagine Mr Reed driving it. "Maybe he *is* home, and he's just not answering the door." I stand back to survey the gate. "I think we should try climbing."

Mikey stares at me. "If Topher isn't opening the door, he obviously doesn't want to see anyone. He probably won't want to answer our questions if we just pop up. And don't you think this much security indicates they don't want people dropping by?" He nods at the security camera. "Mr Reed will really love watching footage of us attempting to scale his fence."

Those are all valid, sensible points. Which I'm going to ignore, because if Topher *is* here, surely he'll speak to us. And if he isn't...maybe we'll get to have a look around. How likely is it that Mr Reed would watch back his security footage, anyway?

I pull at the little gate; it looks sturdy enough. "Give me a boost, would you?"

"How am I supposed to give you a boost?" says Mikey. "We're not acrobats."

The gate *does* look pretty high. "Maybe there's another way in." The house seems pretty impenetrable, but there's a little alleyway that runs alongside it, leading to some fields at the back. We head down and halfway along there's a tiny side gate opening into a large garden. The lawn looks like it's been freshly cut and is lined by flower beds with blooming roses.

This is a normal gate, that swings open - and there's no camera here.

"Why would they have so much security at the front of the house and then just let people walk in back here?" I ask.

"Probably because they don't think many people would walk in through the garden," says Mikey. "It doesn't look like this is a path many people use. These are fields you can get to from the main road in town, you wouldn't need to come down this alleyway."

I open the gate and slip inside. Mikey hesitates, before following.

The back of the house looms before us. "We can go around and knock on the front door now," I say. "In case Topher is home." I don't share my alternative plan of somehow breaking in, because I don't think Mikey will be on board.

Mikey doesn't reply - he looks nervously around, like he's expecting someone to jump out at us.

"What's wrong?" I say.

"It's just...if we get caught, Mr Reed might put me in detention in September," he says. "Or call the police or something. You're okay because you'll be gone on Monday."

For a moment I think he means I'll be *dead* on Monday, but he obviously means I'll be leaving Longrove. "We'll be fine," I say, brushing away his concern – and mine. I'm still pushing down that sick feeling of constant worry, mixed in with the confusion about who Aunt Sandra really was.

The fence looms to our right, a stark reminder that the Reeds do *not* want visitors.

We get round to the front drive, which looks like it's been freshly jet-washed, the stone slabs bright with not a single weed forcing their way through the cracks.

There's no other car besides the red sports car in the driveway. That's good. It means Mr Reed definitely isn't home. Although...that means he's been carrying a giant knife around Longrove for almost two hours.

"Mr Reed must get paid loads," I say as I ring the front doorbell. "I never really thought about it."

Mikey is looking around and rubbing his arms. "This place gives me the creeps. People say Mrs Reed's ghost is still haunting it."

When Mrs Reed died in that car crash, and no one in town wanted to discuss the accident beyond how sad it was, I asked Aunt Sandra if she had any theories for why Mr Reed had waited so long to report her missing. Aunt Sandra shrugged. "None of our business – no one has asked *me* to look into it, so of course I haven't." She sniffed. "As if I'm some sort of nosy housewife just wanting to stir the pot! Of course, I won't have anything to do with that family – even if I think it's obvious what the big secret is." She wouldn't say anything more, and it was the only time I ever thought that

she might be bluffing about knowing something. She loathed the whole Reed family.

Except apparently not enough, since she considered giving in to Mr Reed's demands about the cafe.

I press the doorbell again, bending my finger back at the joint with the pressure I use.

"He's definitely not home," says Mikey, but just as he's finished speaking the door creaks open and Topher Reed peers round, staring at us.

"Hi, Topher," I say with a smile. "Can we come in?"

43

Topher blinks at us, and then slams the door shut so quickly I have no time to react. I turn to Mikey, shocked.

"What was that about?" I ask. He shrugs, but if Topher thinks that being inhospitable is going to stop me wanting to talk to him, he needs to get his brain checked. I'm not going anywhere. I press the doorbell three more times, the peal clanging so loudly we can hear it outside.

"Er, maybe we should go," says Mikey. "He's obviously not going to be helpful."

"He'll get annoyed by me continuously ringing the doorbell," I reply. "And then he'll open the door and we'll be able to have a nice, civilized conversation—"

"What do you want," Topher spits, as he opens the door once more. I take a step back at the venom in his voice – this is a far cry from the nice guy in the park. It's almost like he's had a personality transplant.

"Just a quick chat," I say, trying to sound as soothing as possible. "Can we come in?"

"What's happened to your voice?" asks Mikey helpfully from behind me. He's the worst assistant detective ever, but I drop the tone.

"I'll be quick," I say. "But I'm prepared to wait as well. As long as it takes..." I want to be long gone before Mr Reed

comes back, but Topher doesn't know that. His eyes narrow.

"Fine," he says, and he steps aside.

"Is your dad home?" asks Mikey, clearly worried about the slim possibility Mr Reed left his car somewhere just to leap out at us and surprise us.

"No," says Topher. I look at him properly - he's got a scruffy shadow of a beard, and there are dark circles under his eyes. I can't believe it's only been two days since I saw him hanging out with his friends. He looks like he hasn't slept in weeks. "Wouldn't let you in if he was. He wouldn't like it."

"Why not?" I ask as Topher leads us through a hallway into a dim living room. The walls are a deep red - like blood. There are dark brown sofas pushed against the walls, with a dark-blue rug covering the oak floorboards. There's a framed photo of Topher on the mantelpiece. In the picture, he's standing between his parents, and they're all wearing various shades of blue and green. Apart from this, though, there's nothing to make the room seem home-like. No TV, no little knick-knacks, no mess. Like the outside, this also appears to be a showroom, for visitors who will likely never come.

Even though it's warm outside, the temperature feels like it's dropped ten degrees. There are two mugs on the table, one half full of tea and the other one empty. They're the only thing that suggests that someone actually lives here - otherwise I'd think Mr Reed was putting this whole place up for sale and the house was being prepped for that.

Topher sits down in an armchair and watches us. "He doesn't like visitors," he says after a pause. "Sorry - it puts me a bit on edge." He ruffles a hand through his hair and smiles, flashing his dimples, and my stomach flutters. Is that butterflies? He was rude a few moments ago - but this is back to the Topher I know. Well, sort of know...from a distance.

Mikey snorts and doesn't bother to keep it quiet.

Topher looks at him. "Mikey, right? You were on the football team. One of the best players, if I remember correctly."

Mikey beams, and I cover my own snort – everyone must know Mikey is never going to make it off the subs bench at an actual game. "Did you carry on playing at university?" he asks.

A strange expression flashes across Topher's face. "Of course. My dad loves telling everyone how great I am."

It sounds like only his dad is interested in football – and Topher's not. Much like me. Time to get this conversation back on track. "Well, actually, we wanted to talk to you about..." I trail off, realizing I should have come up with some sort of story for why I want to know about his relationship with Ivy. "Do you remember Ivy Harchester?"

Topher jumps slightly, then covers the movement with a cough. "Of course – you were visiting her grave on Monday," he says.

"I'm putting together an article for the local paper," I say. "Over a year on, we still remember, that sort of thing. It's actually why I'm back in town," I say. I feel like this is a good lie considering I've just made it up on the spot. *See, Mikey, I'm not a crap liar.* Mikey rolls his eyes – once more it's like he's read my mind.

"That's great," Topher says, though he looks confused. "Who commissioned you to write this article? Not that I think you couldn't," he adds quickly, like he's worried about offending me. "It's just...you don't even live here any more?"

"Which is why I had to come back for the week," I say, which doesn't answer his question, but I'm hoping he won't realize that. "And I wanted to talk to people who knew her."

He doesn't comment, waiting for me to go on.

"And, well...you knew Ivy." I feel a bit ridiculous now, but I'm in too deep to stop.

He looks between me and Mikey, his eyebrows knitting together. "I think you've got the wrong person. I didn't know her at all. I don't think I ever spoke to her."

I glance at Mikey, who looks baffled. Maybe he lied about seeing Topher speaking to Ivy - it *does* seem pretty far-fetched, because I can't think of any link between them.

"Oh, that's odd," I say, trying to get back onto a footing that I know. "I thought I saw you guys speaking at school every now and again."

"Near the bins at the back of the school," jumps in Mikey, obviously trying to prove he wasn't lying.

Topher's mouth opens slightly. He looks like he's going to say something, but decides against it. "I think you must have mistaken me for someone else," he says after a pause. But we all know that wouldn't be the case - there's no way we could mix someone else up with *Topher Reed*, who basically ruled the school. "We weren't allowed near the bins at school. Dad would have been really angry if I'd been caught there."

He seems to be very much under his father's thumb. "You know, I think back to the night Ivy died a lot," I say, trying a different angle. "We were in the woods by the river, just hanging out. And I left earlier than everyone else but I stumbled around for a bit - and I think I heard your voice, which is weird, isn't it?" I want to keep Nikki out of this anecdote, to protect her.

"Yeah," says Topher. "That is weird - I was home that night."

"Good memory you've got - how do you remember what you were doing that night specifically?" says Mikey. "It was over a year ago."

A warm feeling spreads in my chest. *Good question, Mikey.* He's really getting into this – but he looks too pleased with himself. *Tone it down. Topher is going to think we're weird.*

"How could I forget?" says Topher. "The news was everywhere the next day." It's a fair point. We don't really have any evidence nailing him to the woods that night. Nikki heard those two male voices, and Mr Reed and Topher are on my murder board as suspects, so it would be neat if it *had* been him out there. But we haven't got any real proof right now.

On the other hand, Monday's movements are much more recent. And they've been all over town. That might be an easier line of enquiry.

"You know, it's so strange being back in town," I say. "My uncle was in a car accident yesterday, did you hear?"

"Yeah, my dad was there," says Topher. "He told me. Sorry about that." He sounds genuinely sorry.

"Where were you when it happened?" I say. Topher raises his eyebrows – it's not a subtle question, he can work out that I suspect him of being behind the wheel.

"Asleep," he says. "I'm not a morning person." He's not pressing me on why I'd ask – is there a reason for that? Surely an innocent person would be getting annoyed or confused by my questions?

There's a noise from upstairs, a floorboard creaking. I look up at the ceiling.

"Is there anyone else home?" I ask with a frown. Mr Reed's out, Mrs Reed is, well, dead – and Topher said his dad doesn't like visitors.

"Just the cat," says Topher smoothly. "Look, I think you've come to the wrong place. I can't help you with your article. Or whatever else it is you're trying to find out."

There's the sound of an engine and Topher's entire body tenses as he looks out of the window. "Dad's back," he says. "You should go." Gone is the charmer - his voice is cold. We've overstayed our welcome.

"Er...okay," I say, getting to my feet. I'm heading towards the living-room door when Topher grabs my wrist.

"No," he says, dropping my arm like it's burned him. "You need to go out the back - I'm not supposed to have anyone here. No visitors, remember?" He says this loudly - too loudly considering we're next to him. There's another creak from upstairs as he pushes us into a small room lined with fancy bottles of alcohol, then out through the kitchen and into the garden. He points at the side gate we came through earlier. "Hurry!" he says and there's a slight urgency in his voice now, as I hear Mr Reed's voice calling out.

"Topher? Where are you? You better have put the chicken on for dinner or else I'll—"

Topher closes the door behind us.

I'm too baffled at what's just happened to move, but Mikey gives me a little shove. We hurry through the gate and along the public footpath, out towards the fields. "Let's go this way," I say, as I glance behind me once more at the house, silent and imposing, before it vanishes behind some trees. "I know we didn't get anything out of Topher, but I don't think that was a complete waste of time. That was definitely the loudest cat I ever heard - I don't think Topher was alone in that house."

"So what does that mean?" says Mikey.

"He's hiding something - or someone," I say. "And he easily could have been lying about his alibis. We can't rule him out of being Monday."

44

Mikey leaves me at the gate of Uncle Dara's house. "I'll find the charger for the phone," he says. "It'll be somewhere in our attic - give me half an hour...an hour max." He checks his watch and whistles. "It's already nearly two - the day's flown."

I'd half forgotten about the phone - Aunt Sandra's treachery on Thursday and our visit to Topher put everything else out of my mind. But it's still in my pocket, waiting to be switched on. "Thanks," I say. "Be as quick as you can."

I hesitate at the front door. Even though I don't want to, I need to speak to Nikki. We have to hash things out, talk about what Aunt Sandra's letter means. Talk about Aunt Sandra - and how I wish Nikki had just *told* me what she was feeling instead of keeping it buried inside. Although, am I one to talk? I did the same - literally just now, determined to put the investigation first. And in bigger ways too. I left Longrove and did my best to forget, about Aunt Sandra, about Ivy. About my old friends, including Mikey.

Just like my parents, who never mention Aunt Sandra if they can avoid it.

I unlock the front door and call out, but the house is empty. There is a package with my name on it by the front door, however - Nikki must have taken it in. My heart flutters - but this package has proper postage on it.

I unwrap it quickly – it's the pet cam I ordered. Finally, I can make some concrete progress. I hurry upstairs, first checking all the rooms in case there's anyone lurking. Then I head to the attic, and set up the camera, hiding it between two books and angling it towards the attic door. Within twenty minutes I've got twenty-four-hour surveillance of anyone walking into the room. The camera isn't as well hidden as I would like, but even if Monday notices it, it'll be too late – the feed automatically uploads.

It's a slight invasion of privacy for Uncle Dara, considering this is his house, but needs must – and it's only for a few days.

Where *is* Nikki? She said she was going out to talk to Liam and Kerry Richmond, but that was an hour ago.

Me: Did you get any info from Liam or Kerry?

I expect her to ignore me, so it's unsurprising when she doesn't respond straight away. Although she's never been good at checking her messages.

I sigh, and head downstairs to the kitchen and make some tea to sip while I'm waiting for Mikey.

The kettle has just boiled when my phone buzzes. Nikki's name flashes up on my screen.

Nikki: Liam told me he was at his theatre group on Wednesday.

I hover over the keyboard. *Thanks for not ignoring me.* But that sounds pretty pathetic, so I keep my response to the point.

Me: That's a lie.

Nikki: Yes, I know. And he also knows stuff about our old group. You, me, Ivy, Mikey and Sophie. Like the time we went to Hillingate and got stuck there and had to walk all the way home.

Me: How does he know that?

Nikki: He hasn't told me. I'm looking into Kerry Richmond at the moment, but she's involved in a lot of stuff around town. Runs a book club at Bright Books, takes a cooking class, has a knitting group. Not sure when she'd have the time to be Monday. I'll speak to Sophie after I'm done with Kerry.

I hover over the phone – should I say something about our conversation in the woods? Aunt Sandra's letter? Or maybe we need to speak in person. Right now I will focus on who is living in the Cleverly house, and their link to Mr Reed. Nikki is looking into Liam, so hopefully we'll get some more information about his place in this – and Sophie's too. She's fallen off my radar since Tuesday.

So far I've only been able to cross Mikey off my list of suspects. Every time we find out more information, it opens up new questions.

And in the meantime, I have the dead phone. It's *got* to be important. Someone hid it for a reason, and since it was buried under Ivy's tree, there's a strong chance it holds secrets about her. Maybe the boyfriend she kept hidden. Maybe even her killer.

Shrieks of faint laughter waft into the kitchen – Lola is playing in the garden next door. A spike of guilt goes through me. All I'm doing is worrying about myself. And, yes, I've got good reason, but Angela and Lola were in an accident too, and that must have been terrifying for both of them.

Maybe I should go and check on them. It's basically my fault that they were in the accident. Plus...I could gently

question Angela on whether she knew anything about a boy Ivy might have been seeing.

I grab my keys and head out of the front door, and over to the Harchesters'. Angela opens the door at once – she looks slightly frazzled, and there's white powder on her T-shirt.

"Oh, hello dear," she says, her face breaking into a smile. "Come in! I'm making a cake, but I don't have baking powder and I'm concerned it might come out flat, even if I mix the batter really hard."

I enter the house, trying to forget the fact that I broke in already. Angela leads me into the kitchen, which is a mess of ingredients.

"Have a seat," she says. Anyone else would ask what brings me here, but there's no expectation with Angela – sometimes I'd come round and Ivy wouldn't be home, and she would just let me wait with her. Mum stopped me doing that; she said Angela would get sick of me. She tried it again with Aunt Sandra, but I knew that would never be true.

"I wanted to see how you were after yesterday," I say. "I know Uncle Dara is okay, but you must have been shaken up really badly."

Angela has gone back to stirring her mixture, which looks too thick to be cake batter. She stops and sighs, and her shoulders hunch forward. "Honestly, Kay, I was. For Lola, more than anything. I can't lose another daughter."

The words hang in the air, and it's almost like Ivy's ghost has pulled up and sat down at the table with us.

Angela sighs as she turns to look at me, her eyes sad. "Lola doesn't really remember Ivy properly. She knows she has a sister, she knows what Ivy looks like...but one day, as long as we're lucky, she'll be older than her sister and..." She shakes her head. "I like seeing you about town again – and Nikki and Sophie and Mikey. It's like there are still pieces of

Ivy scattered about Longrove. Like a little bit of her lives on in all of you. It sounds silly.”

“Not at all,” I say quickly, because I understand what she means. Longrove used to be my home. When Aunt Sandra got ill, it felt familiar and safe. No matter how much it seemed like my world was crumbling around me, Longrove would continue to be the same. Except when she died, and it was the same even then, it felt like a betrayal – and I hated it, and was happy to leave. But now that I’m back, I’m remembering that this place was somewhere Aunt Sandra loved. “This place definitely holds memories. Aunt Sandra’s everywhere.”

Angela looks out into the garden, where Lola is attempting to dig up the grass with her fists. “I’m so very sad about the fact that Lola doesn’t remember Ivy.” She shakes her head. “Sorry, you’re not here to reminisce with me about Ivy. I just...my husband doesn’t like talking about her because it makes him sad, and Lola is...well, she’s five, and I don’t want to put that all on her, even when she’s older. Sophie came a few times, after Ivy died, and we would just... chat about her. About that night, and it was nice for both of us. But then I knew it was unhealthy too, and I encouraged Sophie to try and move on... Except now I don’t get to speak about her at all.”

Ivy’s ghost has a fixed smile on its face. *How could you be worried about people forgetting me, Mum? I’m unforgettable.*

It’s something she actually said once, I can’t remember why. She also talked a lot about what she would do when she got out of Longrove, where she would go. She would hate the fact that she never left, that her body was buried here too, in this town she was so desperate to leave.

“It’s hard to find that happy medium,” I say, thinking about Aunt Sandra and how we mostly keep her out of conversations. “But Ivy...she had a lot of friends, who miss

her." I hesitate, because how do I make my next question seem natural? "And a boyfriend too, I think." There, I've made it a statement, as casual as I can, though it still seems pretty forced.

Angela shakes her head. "Ivy didn't have a boyfriend. Not one I knew about anyway - although she had a big crush on someone called Harold Digby?"

Harold Digby is a Z-list reality TV star and definitely not Ivy's secret boyfriend. "I see Ivy in Lola," I say, to change the subject slightly. "She looks just like her."

"She does," says Angela. "You know, at the time it seemed so senseless. A stupid accident... It didn't feel real - like a bad dream. I kept waking up and thinking Ivy would be in her bedroom, nice and safe, and she would tell me how silly I had been... And all I wanted was a reason *why*. I wanted someone to blame. Even if I had to blame myself - what could I have done differently to save her?" She takes a deep gulp of breath. "This is a heavy topic, isn't it? Would you like anything to drink?"

"No, I'm fine, thanks," I say. Lola has learned that grass is actually quite difficult to dig up with fists, and she has switched to the flower beds. I watch as she pulls up a writhing pink worm...which she immediately chucks back in, and then starts patting the soil down.

Lola looks up, like she's sensed me watching her. "Don't want it to get hurt!" she calls, getting to her feet and coming inside. Her hands are clammy with dirt. "I'm going to go play!" she announces, and attempts to run through the kitchen.

"Now, Lola, I need you to wash your hands," says Angela firmly, and that stops Lola in her tracks. She turns and pulls out a little stool from underneath the cupboards and steps onto it to reach the sink. When she turns the tap off, she reaches for the tea towel and dries her hands - very well-

trained, she must dig a lot in the garden. "Back straight now, sweetheart. Head up. Walk with *confidence*."

"Yes, Mummy," says Lola, and then she's off running again, head tilted to the ground like she's worried about tripping over.

Angela shakes her head. "She's always in her own little world. Doesn't have many friends at school. We need to work on building her up a bit. But in the meantime, she's going to be annoyed at me - I'll have to interrupt her playing. I need to pop to the shops to get some baking powder, I think, otherwise this cake is really not going to go anywhere. She's got into the habit of crying whenever I interrupt one of her games." She starts washing her own hands.

"I can watch her," I say. "I don't mind."

Angela smiles. "Oh, that would be so helpful, Kay," she says. "But only if you don't mind? I'll only be ten minutes."

"Of course!" I head upstairs after Lola.

"Thank you so much!" Angela calls as she heads out. I pause on the landing, and push down the guilt rising in me as I stare at Ivy's bedroom door. Angela doesn't know I went inside, that I disturbed the shrine to her.

Lola's bedroom door is open. I head inside, to find her with some dolls.

"What are you playing?" I ask, as I stand awkwardly by the door. I'm not entirely sure *how* to play with a five-year-old, and I feel weirdly self-conscious, even though Lola isn't looking at me at all.

"Spies," says Lola. "They're going to fight the bad guy." She points at a teddy bear currently watching the proceedings from the windowsill. "Do you miss Aunt Sandra?"

"What?" I say, staring at her.

"I heard you talking to Mummy. About Aunt Sandra. She used to live next door." She's currently making her dolls

whoosh through the air.

I blink at her. Do five-year-olds know about death? They must do – or has Angela told Lola that Ivy went to live on a farm or something?

“I bet you miss her.” Lola looks at me, clutching a doll in each hand. There’s something slightly unnerving about her now, the way her pale blue eyes are locked on me. “My sister died. Ivy. I miss her.”

Okay, so Angela didn’t go with *your sister moved to a farm*. Probably a good call. “Yeah,” I say softly. “Yeah, I miss her.”

“What was Aunt Sandra like?” Lola has turned back to playing with her dolls.

“She was...” I hesitate, because how do I explain who Aunt Sandra was? She was the person who always made sure there was a seat for me at her dinner table. She was the person who told me how clever I was, how I would go on to achieve so much and put everyone to shame. *She was the person who treated Nikki like a second-class daughter. She was the person whose interests were so important to her that if you didn’t share that interest then you were immediately less interesting. She was the person who betrayed Uncle Dara and wanted to give in to the Committee.* “She loved holding onto memories. Other people would take photos to remember special occasions, but she would collect objects. She kept a ribbon I won for a spelling contest, she kept a paper crown Nikki made for when she sang in the school choir – it was the only year Nikki did it, because she kept forgetting all the words.” I haven’t thought about her memory box in so long. It was where she stored all her most prized things, objects other people would consider junk. I make a mental note to go and take a look – maybe it’ll help me re-establish the natural order of things, make her a hero again.

“Here, you play too,” says Lola, thrusting some soft toys into my arms. “They’re hiding from evil teddy. We have to make sure they’re safe.”

I try to keep up with the storyline she weaves until I hear the front door open and Angela’s footsteps on the stairs. She peers into the room and smiles as I get to my feet.

“Thank you so much,” she says, as she leads the way back downstairs. “You’re a lifesaver, honestly.”

“No problem at all,” I say. “Let me know if you need any more babysitting while I’m here.” Maybe this will make up for how I broke into her house yesterday.

“Thanks, Kay,” she says, and I head back across to Uncle Dara’s house – it’s like I’ve stepped into the past, walking the route between Ivy’s house and mine, popping into Aunt Sandra’s on my way. Sadness gushes through me, because that past is a place I can’t go any more. Ivy’s gone, Aunt Sandra’s gone.

And all I can do now is try to find answers – get justice for Ivy, for her family that’s still grieving, for her sister who won’t ever know her.

45

Uncle Dara's house is still empty, and I pause at the top of the stairs. I know I should be focused on the investigation, but my mind is wrapped up with Aunt Sandra and wanting to have a look through her memory box. Is this why Monday used that letter - to throw me off the case? They must have known how much pain it would cause, which once more confirms my list of suspects is on the right lines. A stranger wouldn't know this specific information about me.

I enter Uncle Dara's room, and go across to where Aunt Sandra's dressing table still stands. Her hairbrush is lying sideways in front of the mirror, like she's going to come back and use it. Uncle Dara is similar, I guess, to the Harchesters - keeping little objects from people who've gone, almost as a way of tricking themselves into thinking their loved one could just be home at any moment. Or else it's too painful to pack those things away, an acknowledgement that belongings that were once so important to a person are now worth nothing to them.

I open the bottom drawer, and tears prick in my eyes - there's Aunt Sandra's memory box, waiting for me to open it. I thought I had done all my crying, accepted that she's gone. But, no, the grief comes crashing back just as hard as it did the day she died. Or maybe the grief never really goes away, and everything I do has a slight undercurrent of sadness, all

the time. Sometimes it rises up, like a tide, and washes over me – but it's always there, even when the tide's out.

There's Aunt Sandra's favourite ring that Uncle Dara won at an arcade – she wrapped all her costume jewellery in tissue to keep them looking newer for longer. Even so, the edges of the ring are blackening now.

And there's the locket which opens, and inside are pictures of me, Mum, Uncle Dara and Nikki. And there's Nikki's paper crown, and a piece of reflective plastic that might have broken off my first ever bike...

And there's a piece of paper with writing on it... *My writing.*

I love you, Aunt Sandra.

I don't even remember writing this – or maybe I do. I'd scribbled it in a notebook, for her to find later. And she'd found it and put it in her memory box.

The edges are jagged, and my heart starts beating faster – what notebook did I write this in? My hands are trembling as I turn the page over – it's headed: *Toxicology Report.*

The t report was interesting.

Is this what she was referring to? The t means *toxicology*?

Police are surprisingly willing to chat, but didn't give away as much as I'd hoped. Ivy had a mixture of drink and drugs in her system when she died.

I breathe out – Ivy was on drugs? That might explain how drunk she seemed, but she didn't take drugs. She would have told me, surely.

My phone bleeps. A message from Mikey. It's almost three p.m. and he's arrived when he said he would.

Mikey: At your door. Have the charger.

46

We go into the kitchen and plug the phone in. For a moment nothing happens, but then the screen lights up and shows zero per cent.

"The battery's not completely dead," says Mikey, his eyes flicking to the fridge – Uncle Dara will be home in an hour or so and he can join us for an early dinner. "That's a good sign." Nikki hasn't messaged again, so she must be busy investigating Liam...or avoiding coming home to speak to me.

I press the on button on the phone, and hope as hard as I can it won't have a password. The brand name of the phone flashes up on the screen, and then it goes black.

"It *is* dead," I say, dropping it in disgust.

"Just wait," says Mikey, leaning forward. I study him, his long blond eyelashes, his messy hair, his hopeful expression. He looks up, his blue eyes meeting mine, and my stomach swoops. I think back to times in class when I'd glance over and he would just be turning away, like he'd been staring. I guess I'm doing the same now, and I flush.

"So your boss at Bright Books, Kerry Richmond," I say, more to fill up the silence than anything. Mikey has always been my *friend*. Nothing more. "She bought a rat just before one ended up on my bed on Tuesday. What do you know about her?"

Mikey looks thoughtful. "She's okay, a bit of a micromanager. I can't really see her being Monday, she's constantly got plans. She's very busy."

Kerry definitely seems like a dead-end. I'm distracted, though, by the phone screen flickering on. Mikey was right - we're in. There's no password. Relief and anticipation sweep through me as I pick it up and go to a messaging app - there's only one thread, from an unsaved number.

*Unsaved number: Your skirt was way too short today.
Don't wear that to school again.*

Phone: You deleted this message.

The owner of the phone deleted their own message. "We can only see that they sent something, not what they said." I swear quietly - why can't this just be *easy*?

Unsaved number: Don't wear your hair up, it doesn't suit you. Wear it down.

Phone: You deleted this message.

Unsaved number: You're three minutes late. This isn't acceptable, Ivy.

"Ivy," breathes Mikey over my shoulder. I can feel him leaning forward - how close he is. My heart stutters. "This confirms it - it's her phone. She deleted her own messages."

"Yeah," I say, pushing past the odd moment. "It must be a...a burner phone or something. That she didn't want people to see. She must have been keeping it in that tree - and then obviously never got to go and collect it."

Phone: You deleted this message.

*Unsaved number: I love you. More than anything.
More than life itself.*

“That’s...intense,” says Mikey. I agree.

And, for the first time, a message sent from the phone that *isn’t* deleted:

Phone: I love you too.

Unsaved number: Cut your hair. It looks better short.

Phone: You deleted this message.

Phone: You deleted this message.

*Unsaved number: I don’t know why you were talking
to James Cardroy, but I never want to see that again.*

Unsaved number: This message was deleted.

Phone: It’s all a misunderstanding, honestly. I’m sorry.

Ivy, apologizing? This isn’t right – she never would have *apologized* to someone. That wasn’t in her.

And why is she letting this person talk to her this way? Telling her who to talk to. Telling her what length hair to have. These messages are *awful*.

Unsaved number: This message was deleted.

*Unsaved number: I love you so much. You’re the most
perfect girl in the world.*

Phone: I love you too.

On and on and on – a spiel of controlling messages, getting even harder to read... I hand the phone to Mikey, and he frowns as he scrolls.

“Why did she delete most of her replies but keep the ones she was sent?” I ask, scrolling back through the messages. “Why hide the phone? Why have a burner phone at all? I don’t get it. Why wouldn’t she have told us who she was with? Unless it was a really big secret...” Mikey meets my eyes, and for a second I know we’re thinking the same thing – Ivy was dating someone it would have been illegal for her to be with, like a teacher, or someone much older. The tone of the messages reads like an adult, not a teenager. I shudder, and to distract myself I look through the rest of the phone, but it’s empty.

“We could call this number,” I say. Excitement floods through me. “We can find out who she was talking to.” I withhold my number as I make the call, putting it on speaker, my heart hammering as silence crackles – then it starts ringing.

“Hello?” a soft Scottish woman’s voice floods the kitchen. “Edie speaking.”

Mikey looks as confused as I do.

“Hi,” I say. “Erm, I was wondering if I could speak to you about Ivy?” I don’t know what else to say – Edie obviously isn’t Ivy’s secret boyfriend.

“I’m sorry, I don’t know an Ivy. I think you might have the wrong number,” Edie replies, sounding confused.

“I don’t think so,” I say, because I typed the number out exactly. “Do you live in Longrove?” Maybe Ivy’s secret boyfriend sent his controlling messages from his technologically inept mother’s phone, who for some reason has never heard of Ivy.

“Oh no, my dear, I’m in Glasgow,” says Edie. “I’ve lived here all my life...”

“Thanks anyway – sorry to bother you.” I try not to feel too dejected as I hang up.

"The number must have been reassigned," Mikey ponders. "It's a dead end."

I sigh - it was worth a try. Half-heartedly, I scroll through the photos on my phone, back to the photo I took in Ivy's bedroom, of Ivy and her secret boyfriend, with his teal-coloured jumper. Something strikes me as familiar about it - I've seen this jumper somewhere else, somewhere recently... It's one of those things I must have only half registered. Has someone walked past me wearing this colour? Surely not - it's summer, it's not cold enough for a jumper.

So then where have I seen another teal jumper?

"I'm sure I've seen this jumper before," I say to Mikey, as I flick through the photos I've been taking for evidence.

I slow as I get to the photos of us that were up in the Cleverly house - there's me and Nikki, and Mikey looking moody... And Sophie, smiling at the camera. There's the person walking off in the picture with Sophie - and there's just their arm visible, wearing...

A teal jumper.

"Sophie knew Ivy's boyfriend," I say, my voice shaking with excitement. "They were in this photo of her from three years ago, the one someone put up in the Cleverly house." I show Mikey the photo, but he doesn't think it's as interesting as I do.

"Two people could have the same jumper," he says. "It might not be the same person. Besides, Longrove is a small town. It'd be weird if the teal-jumper owner was someone we *didn't* know."

I tap out of the app, and notice a new icon in the corner - a blue square. I think that's the pet camera I installed - it's a notification of movement. I must not have allowed pop-up notifications on my screen.

It takes a few more seconds for me to register what this means.

There's someone in the attic.

I stare at the notification, my blood running cold. When was it sent? It might not have been just now – there might have been someone in the house the entire time I’ve been back from Angela’s house.

Which means they’re still here now. I haven’t heard any movement from the attic.

“Monday’s *here*,” I whisper to Mikey.

“What?” he says.

My hands are shaking so much I can barely open the app that’s linked to the camera – and my heart almost stops. Yes, there’s someone waiting up there in a black hoodie, their back to the camera. They’re standing so still they could be a statue.

“We need to call the police,” I say. But even as I speak, I hear movement on the stairs – except the person on my phone screen remains frozen. There must be a lag on the app.

The front door crashes open, and I rush out of the kitchen, into the hallway, sprinting outside barefoot. The road is empty. There’s no one around – the person has completely vanished.

For a moment I wonder if I somehow imagined it – but my stomach is churning with fear. Someone was inside the house

with me, and I didn't know. Even before Mikey was there, because we would have seen someone climbing up onto the dining-room roof through the kitchen window.

"What's just happened?" Mikey asks, as I run back inside and to the garden, expecting Monday to have somehow smashed the lock on the garden shed and got the ladder out. But the lock is intact.

"How the *hell* did they get in?" I say, as I eye the tree hanging over the roof. I briefly considered that they had climbed up it before, but would that be possible in the time frame? "They must have climbed up when I was with Lola." I nibble my bottom lip as I think it through. "I came back and went straight into Uncle Dara's bedroom, and then we would have seen them when we were in the kitchen." Adrenaline is coursing through my body.

Someone was with me in the house.

They were just above, waiting, listening, and I had no idea. As silent as a ghost.

It had to be Monday – they were leaving something for me, that's why they were in the attic. I could have caught them, and figured this whole thing out. If I'd just been quicker, I could have confronted them.

At least I can find out what they left me.

My heart is still racing as I go upstairs to the attic, my blood rushing in my ears – there's a note on the bed.

Things are heating up, aren't they? What a great Thursday – so much treachery. But since you haven't figured out who I am yet, it looks like we'll be meeting face to face on

Monday

I want to shred the note into a thousand tiny pieces, to show Monday that they can't keep me scared for long – but I force myself to smooth it out, and carefully stick it to my whiteboard, which remains untouched.

“We need to call the police,” says Mikey. “We just witnessed Monday breaking in.”

I ignore him. The pet cam is blinking at me from its corner, the red light flashing. I almost smile – what a great purchase it was. I can't believe it actually worked.

I can still watch the recording. We don't need the police – we're about to get our answers.

My hands tremble as I get out my phone and go back to the camera footage of my bedroom, back to where Monday stood silently for twenty minutes while I trotted around the house. A shiver goes down my back at how still they were. Back to the moment they realize I'm home, where they freeze by the door.

Back to them putting the note on my bed, their face still hidden by their hood.

And back to the moment they first enter the room, to the brief second their face is clear to see.

It's Sophie.

48

Monday is Sophie.

Monday is *Sophie*.

I sit down on my bed and stare at my whiteboard, at her face. Sophie. Who I've known since we started primary school.

Who murdered Ivy.

Mikey is skipping back on the recording to rewatch, and skipping back, and skipping back, like he thinks that will change who is on-screen. "This can't be right," he says.

"Sophie killed Ivy," I say. "And Sophie's Monday." If I repeat it enough it will sink in.

"I left with Sophie that night," says Mikey. "We walked back through the woods together."

"She must have doubled back," I say. "That's who Nikki heard pushing Ivy..." *Nikki*. She said she was going to question Sophie after she finished speaking to Liam – but she hasn't sent any messages updating me. Sophie isn't *dangerous*... Except she is. The girl I grew up with is the same person who killed Ivy and crashed into Uncle Dara and threatened to kill me.

Me: Nikki, come home. Sophie is Monday. Don't question her alone.

I wait for a reply, but nothing comes, so I try calling. It goes to voicemail.

"She might just be somewhere with no signal," says Mikey. He must see the worry on my face - but that fear for Nikki is quickly turning to the right emotion. Anger towards Sophie. What the *hell* is her problem? Why is she doing this? I feel like I've only answered half the question - I have the "who" but not the motive.

"Do you not speak to Sophie?" I ask Mikey. "Over the past year - surely you have, you must have hung out with her?" My words must come out sharply, because Mikey blinks at me a few times.

"No," he says. "There were five of us in that group. Well, mostly four, because Nikki came and went, and I was never that close to her. But after Ivy died and you left, Sophie and I didn't have that much in common. We both found new friends."

"Who are Sophie's new friends?" I ask.

Mikey shrugs. "Clara and that group. She sits with them at lunch - I don't know how close they are." He looks concerned, like he thinks he might have done something wrong in not being able to provide me the information I want. But maybe her motive doesn't matter at the moment. I'll get that out of her when I confront her.

Monday has gone from being a scary, omniscient figure to a teenage girl who used to be one of my best friends, and is actually a two-faced liar and a murderer. When she was here the other day, pretending to drop in while out for a run, she *had* broken into the house just before to leave the rat in my bedroom.

I scroll through my phone until I get to her name. My ears burn with anger as I stare at it. How *dare* she? How *could* she? Murdering Ivy and then acting like the death destroyed her. Ramming Uncle Dara. Threatening to murder me - what

is wrong with her? It's like she's two different people. The timid girl who followed a leader around, copying them in an attempt to please – and Monday.

I hit the call button and it immediately goes to voicemail. Should I message her now or will that make things worse? Except the anger flaming through me demands answers *right now*. My fingers shake as I type, *The game's up, Sophie. I know it was you*. I hit send, because this isn't enough. I want to face her and scream at her. I want her to feel the same terror I felt when Uncle Dara's car rammed into the lamp post.

In fact, I'm not even going to wait for a reply – if it's gone to voicemail because she's got her phone off, then she won't see my message... But I know where she lives.

Sophie's house is a mid-terrace with peeling paint, an overgrown hedge, weeds growing in the cracks of the concrete of the driveway and an overflowing bin. It stands out against the other neat houses on her road.

I hesitate as we walk up the driveway, because I've only been inside once, and it was a deeply uncomfortable experience. We were about eight – and it was before Ivy moved to town. Sophie had asked if I wanted to come and play after school, and Mum had said yes, and we were in her little bedroom making paper clothes to dress up her dolls with. There was screaming downstairs, and I froze – Sophie's mum was yelling, and there was the sound of breaking plates.

Sophie's eyes were shiny with tears, and even at eight I could tell this was something sensitive. I carried on playing, like the noises weren't happening, and Sophie joined in. When it was time to go home, Sophie got to her feet.

"Mum said I had to be home today," she said. "In case she needed anything. But I didn't want to be here alone."

There was a pause, and an unspoken *thank you* from her. I never mentioned that visit again, but I also always made sure that Sophie knew she was welcome to come to my house, or Aunt Sandra's, any time.

And her mum left the house, her dad. Her.

My heart pangs at the memory – how did things get so twisted between us? How can Sophie hate me so much?

I knock on the front door, and there's the sound of scuffling on the other side, like someone is having to open a lot of locks.

Chris Darlington opens the door. His grey hair is thinner since the last time I saw him, his face more lined.

"What do you want?" he barks. "Have you seen Sophie?"

I frown, not understanding. "I'm here to see Sophie."

"Oh, don't waste my time," he says, anger lacing his voice. "Sophie isn't here. I haven't seen her since Monday."

Monday – 7.03 p.m. – Sophie

“Why is everyone so boring?” said Ivy. She was sitting on the ledge overlooking the river, her knees hunched underneath her chin. “This is supposed to be fun. We’re sixteen – we should be out here for hours. Rebelling. Enjoying life.”

Except there wasn’t anything rebellious about sitting beside the river for a few hours. This was private property, though Sophie had never seen the owners around telling anyone off for being on it.

And...this was boring. But anything was better than the alternative.

Plus, Ivy seemed to recognize that – she didn’t sound like her usual self, perky and confident and everything Sophie wasn’t. She sounded...dejected. Which made Sophie worry – she didn’t know what to say to make her friend feel better.

Mikey had gone off to pee, and it was just her and Ivy for the moment. Sophie almost felt guilty – she couldn’t hold a conversation that would keep Ivy excited. She didn’t know how to cheer her up.

“Maybe it’s okay not to have a wild night?” she tried. “We live in Longrove. Maybe it’s just okay to...hang out. Have a quiet one.”

"I don't want quiet," said Ivy. "I want a big life. I want people to shriek my name when they see me, to line up for hours just for a glimpse of me. I'm going to get out of this town and be a star. Be a someone."

Why? Sophie wanted to ask. Why would you want people to see you? Wasn't it better to be invisible?

"You don't think I can, do you?" said Ivy, and her tone had changed. Sophie recognized the shift - from vulnerable to barbed.

"Of course I do," she said. Because Ivy had been confiding in her, she had been sharing her inner thoughts. Why had she ruined it?

"I'm not like you," said Ivy. "I'm not afraid."

"I'm not afraid," said Sophie at once, even though it was a lie. Of course she was afraid - but Ivy never was, and that was why she wished more than anything she had been born Ivy Harchester instead of plain Sophie Darlington. Ivy would yell back at her dad. Ivy wouldn't tolerate the anger.

"Yes, you are," said Ivy. "How's your mum, by the way? Didn't want you, did she? That's why she left."

Why was Ivy bringing this up? Everyone knew that talking about Sophie's family was off-limits. "She visits," said Sophie. And her visits were magical - she told Sophie it wasn't her fault their family had fallen apart, but she and Sophie's dad were better off separated. Except Ivy was right - if her mum was so great, why hadn't she taken Sophie with her? Her dad constantly pointed out how much better he was, because he'd stayed instead of walking out. Her dad's brother, fifteen years his junior, seemed to be the only one who actually cared about her - but she couldn't speak to him about her dad. Her uncle would be on her father's side.

"No one wants you, Sophie," said Ivy. "Even your parents don't care about you." Hurt must have flashed across

Sophie's face, because there was genuine regret in Ivy's expression. "I didn't mean it. I never mean it. I'm just having a...a bad time."

"What's wrong?" said Sophie. Ivy was never vulnerable. For a moment Ivy was silent, her eyes full of sadness and Sophie wondered if she was going to open up. But she took a deep breath, and straightened her back.

"Nothing, really. My life is great, actually. You know, I was discussing you with James," she said. "James Cardroy - and we were talking about your life at home and how sad it is." It was as if the moment of vulnerability had never happened.

"Why were you talking about me to James?" said Sophie. Ivy knew how much she liked him - but she had kissed him anyway. It had been months ago. Sophie still hadn't forgotten about it.

Ivy smiled, and anger flared up in Sophie - anger like she had never felt before. She didn't want to be like Ivy. Ivy was poison.

"You want to go home?" Mikey came up behind them, making Sophie jump. "It's getting late."

"I'm not going anywhere," said Ivy.

"You can't stay here alone," said Mikey with a frown.

"Sophie will be here," said Ivy, with such certainty it set Sophie's teeth on edge.

No, I won't. "Actually, I need to leave too," said Sophie, getting to her feet.

"Well, in that case, you'd better come as well, Ivy," said Mikey. Ivy rolled her eyes. "I have other friends," she said, her tone cool. "And one is going to come and meet me in a bit. You guys go home, like the losers you are."

Sophie could tell from the way Mikey raised his eyebrows that he didn't believe her, but he didn't say anything. There was never any point in arguing with Ivy.

They started walking. "She'll come along in a bit," said Mikey. "I'll text her in maybe half an hour, when it's getting properly dark."

"She's stubborn," said Sophie, but she was only half listening. Had Ivy really told James about her home life? Used it as a bit of cheap gossip? The one topic she didn't even want her closest friends to discuss?

"I'll call her mum if I have to," said Mikey, though with less certainty. All their parents were happy as long as they were hanging out together. They would get Ivy into trouble if they told her mum she was out in the woods alone.

They lapsed into silence - Sophie had no idea what Mikey was thinking.

But she didn't want to go home. She wouldn't go home.

She had left because Ivy had told them to, but she didn't want to. And she was done with Ivy telling her what to do.

Her house was near the woods; Mikey would have to leave her. "I'll see you later," she said, and he waved goodbye as he trotted off along the quiet pavements.

Then she turned, and headed back into the woods.

FRIDAY

49

It's ten a.m. when I wake up, and half ten by the time I actually roll out of bed. Nikki is getting ready to head out; she's taking an art class in Hillingate that runs every Friday morning, and I had to convince her to go today. We have the recording of Sophie. It's all over.

When she got home yesterday, she kept asking *why*. Why would Sophie do this? She didn't seem relieved to have a name for Monday, just baffled. I didn't have an explanation for her.

"I walked all around Longrove looking for Sophie," Nikki said. "No one had any idea where she was. And I couldn't get any more information about Liam - he doesn't really have any friends for me to question."

"Liam doesn't matter now," I said. "Not when we've caught Sophie red-handed. We just need to speak to her, and question her."

The topic of Aunt Sandra still hangs between us, even this morning as Nikki waves goodbye to head to her art class, but neither of us bring it up. Maybe this is the solution; burying those feelings and letting time fix the hurt between us. And now our investigation is done, there's no real urgency to force us back together quicker.

Sophie's father reported her missing - but she's seventeen, and the police can't do much if she wants to leave

home. Apparently, though, he doesn't care about listening to her choices. He's also told...the Committee. Like they're an actual authority with power to force her back. It explains why Mr Reed was looking for her in the Cleverly house. Sophie's father was annoyed that Mr Reed found proof she was living there, like the knife with the pink handle, and that photo of Sophie on the wall – but didn't find her. She must have figured out someone was on her tail, and scarpered somewhere else.

I need to speak to the police about her. Sophie should face justice for what she's done. How will that even work, though? Do I just rock up to the police station and tell them to open a murder case for Ivy, something they considered an accident? Do I sit them down and walk them through the threats from Monday?

My phone bleeps with a message.

Mikey: Brunch at the cafe in fifteen?

I smile. This reminds me of old times – meeting up with each other at the drop of a hat. It's different in London. Chloe theoretically lives close to me but actually she's half an hour away on the bus because of all the traffic.

Speaking of, I have a message from her which I haven't answered.

Chloe: So, how's the week going. Are you okay?

The last conversation we had, I double-checked *she* was okay, that she hadn't received anything else from Monday besides the rat. She said she was fine.

I could tap out an *I'm fine* now. Another joke about how much Longrove sucks. But it's not true – I'm not *fine*. I'm not okay.

Me: I've got a lot to fill you in on.

Maybe when I see her, when I go back to London, I'll tell her everything. And this will all feel like a distant, terrible memory.

When I see her. When I leave.

Except that's not the happy thought it once was. I'll miss Mikey; we've picked up right where we left off. And I'll miss Nikki. I used to see her and Uncle Dara every day. When Aunt Sandra died, I lost that too.

The photo of Sophie on my whiteboard stares at me.

Monday. A murderer.

If she wanted to kill Ivy because she was jealous of her, or Ivy was rude to her, or she knew a secret about her...why would she also come after Nikki, and me? Why threaten to kill me?

And...where is she now?

Thinking it through, surely she was the one living in the Cleverly house? It had camping stuff, there were photos of all of us. But I don't understand why she would stick them up if she hated us. It couldn't have been a to-do list of people to torment, because she put herself up there as well.

Also...there wasn't any food at the old house, just a few wrappers. Has she really just been living off chocolate and crisps?

And *why*?

That's the question I keep coming back to - I don't understand what would possess her to run away from home the week I returned to Longrove, and mastermind all of this at the same time. What would make her go after Nikki for a year?

Why would she become Monday?

I bite my bottom lip, the obvious problem with my plan to speak to the police jumping out at me – there are still too many questions.

Mum and Dad have gone quiet. Today is their actual anniversary and their ship is out at sea without signal, otherwise I know they would have sent me an *are you being good for Uncle Dara* message. And I would have replied, same as always, *no*. I send them a *happy anniversary* message, and my fingers hover over the keyboard. There are so many other things to say, but I don't mention any of it. There's no point; they won't listen.

When I enter the cafe at eleven, there's a big group of tourists ordering full English breakfasts, and two groups of teenagers from a few years below me at Longrove High, so Uncle Dara is too busy to talk – but he smiles as he hands me a cheese and ham croissant and a cup of tea. I head to my usual booth, which happens to be the only one that's free. I'm there for a few minutes before Mikey arrives and places an order at the counter before sliding in opposite me.

"I was expecting to be here before you," he says, sounding disappointed. "I've ordered a full English," he continues.

"We need to find Sophie," I say, as I bite into my croissant. "Nikki couldn't find her yesterday, but she didn't know she was an actual missing person then. Surely someone's seen her around town. She's been wandering in and out of my house!"

Grace sets down Mikey's food, and he tucks in, and for a moment I think I've lost his attention. Then he swallows and his eyes light up. "Hey, what if Sophie's the one who was living in the old Cleverly house?"

"I never would have thought of that," I say.

"Does that mean Mr Reed was looking for her?" says Mikey, ignoring my sarcasm. "He was looking for the person staying inside the house."

"Yeah, I guess so," I say, as I brush crumbly pastry off my fingers. "But when Mr Reed walked into the Cleverly house, he said something like, *I know you're here*. How would he have known to go there? How would he have known she was there? And it's not like he *did* know - because the house was empty. You know, besides us. And what was with the knife?"

"I don't know," says Mikey. "I just don't know why she would...do any of this." He squirts some ketchup on his baked beans.

"What are you doing?" I ask in horror.

He pauses. "What?" he says. "I like it as tomatoey as possible."

"That's disgusting."

"I know, but it's so good..." He chews slowly. "The thing is...I can't believe Sophie would be Monday. For one thing, she always felt most comfortable following other people. I never saw her do things off her own initiative..."

"There's a first time for everything," I mutter. It sounds like he's defending her, and that annoys me - what she's done is indefensible.

He seems to pick up on my annoyance, because he adds, "Not that I'm trying to clear her name or anything. It just... makes me sad. Ivy's...gone. And you left town. And Nikki doesn't ever really want to speak to anyone. And now Sophie's apparently a murderer. If I'd walked her all the way home..."

"What?" I say. "You think Ivy would still be alive? You weren't going to watch Sophie all evening, were you?"

"I should have insisted Ivy go home," says Mikey. "Or I should have told her mum - but I didn't want her to get in trouble for being drunk. And I didn't want to argue with her,

and I was so caught up in my own stuff that night, and she'd annoyed me earlier and I was fed up."

"You can't blame yourself," I say, even though I know how easy it is to do.

Sophie was the first friend I made in primary school, who went along with the stupid games I made up at playtime when Nikki wanted to just sit in a corner and draw. She's the girl who latched onto people, but she never had any *malice* in her. She just wanted to be liked. And she picked the worst person to seek approval from - Ivy, who could take it all away with just a single look.

Maybe that's what caused her to snap. Maybe that's why she turned on us.

But all I can think about is being eight years old and how scared she was when her parents had that argument, sitting upstairs in her bedroom and pretending we couldn't hear. How she'd trusted me not to tell anyone, and of course I never did. She thought I was a friend then - what changed?

I finish my croissant and push the plate away. There's a second question that's starting to niggle at me - even though I've seen the clip of Sophie in my bedroom, placing the note from Monday, there are other loose ends. Including the toxicology report. "Did you know that Ivy had drugs in her system when she died?"

Mikey almost chokes on a tomato, and splutters a few times. It's so unattractive for a brief second that I can't help but snort - but then I stop myself. Because I've just realized his default state to me is...attractive.

"How did you find that out?" he asks.

"Aunt Sandra spoke to a police officer and made a few notes," I say. "But, yeah, she was on a mixture of alcohol and drugs. But was she *on* drugs, or was she drugged? And how would Sophie have drugged her? Where would she have got the drugs? Or Ivy, if she's the one who took them?" Surely,

none of these questions matter anyway – we just need to find Sophie, stop her doing whatever she’s planning next, and hand her over to the police.

My phone buzzes with a notification from my pet cam – *WARNING, SYSTEM FAILURE.*

I swipe through the previous notification – *movement.*

“I think there’s someone in the attic,” I say to Mikey, as I get to my feet. “I have to go check it out.”

He immediately gets up too, and we speed down the side roads until we reach Uncle Dara’s house. The front door is locked – I fumble with my keys as I open it, and bound upstairs. My heart is thumping, I’m out of breath and there’s a painful stitch in my side.

I enter the attic, Mikey at my heels, and the pet camera is lying smashed, with a new typed note beside it.

*I feel like leaving a camera to catch me is cheating.
Besides, I still don’t think you’ve done a very good job
of figuring out what’s going on – or why I think it’s so
important that you play this game.*

*It’s nice and warm today – hope you’re not too
nervous about your fire on Friday. We’re almost at*

Monday

PS Remember – if you go to the police, you’ll pay.

Mikey rereads the note as I look around the room. My board is still untouched. To really bug me, Monday could try wiping away some of my notes – which I haven’t even updated with the revelation about Sophie.

“How is Monday getting in here?” I say. *Are they climbing through Uncle Dara’s window via the tree?* The fact that they can get in and out of the house like a ghost still rattles me.

Maybe they have a key. Maybe this house isn’t safe.

Why am I thinking about Monday like I don’t know who they are? It’s obviously Sophie.

“Let’s see what the pet camera picked up,” says Mikey. “Even though it’s destroyed it should have recorded up to that point.”

I nod, scrolling through the pet cam app...

And there is Sophie, walking into my bedroom, wearing a blue T-shirt and shorts this time. She calmly walks right up to my camera and waves – and then starts smashing it. I catch sight of her face before the feed freezes. It’s determined and focused, and I’m shaking. How can she be so happy to show herself on camera? So at ease with breaking and entering?

“*Why, Sophie?*” mutters Mikey, staring at her on the screen. The big question we can’t answer.

We should go to the police – except I’ve literally just got a threat telling me not to.

I scroll down to Sophie’s number in my phone and try to ring, but I come up again with her voicemail. I’m about to leave an angry message before something stops me. Leaving her a message isn’t going to help – she knows I know, but that hasn’t stopped her...

And there’s one other thing which doesn’t make sense. “The whole point of Monday’s original message was that I needed to work out their identity before the week is up,” I breathe. “And yet here’s another note, which means Monday’s still playing. So either Monday has changed the rules. Or we haven’t figured out who they are.”

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I'm back at square one - Sophie could just be *working* for Monday, rather than actually *being* Monday. How does Monday have a henchman? Who *are* they? And why does Sophie not care about being found out?

Now Monday seems more omniscient than ever, and I'm just a bug they can easily crush. I feel small, helpless - scared.

It's *fire on Friday* today and I'm dreading what that means, and there're only three days left until the grand finale.

I have to figure out where the hell Sophie is, because she's got all the answers I need.

"I don't understand why Sophie would help Monday," I say to Mikey.

"Maybe she's being coerced," says Mikey. "I read a book where the main character's sister was forced to join the mafia because she'd stolen from the wrong person." He frowns. "It was a bit far-fetched, though, because it was set in France, for some reason. And the author thought Paris was an island."

That's a thought - not the poor geography in Mikey's book. But the coercion. Monday tried to blackmail Nikki into doing what they wanted, and now they're blackmailing me

into not going to the police. It makes me feel a little better – there’s a world where Sophie, my old friend, hasn’t turned on me and joined in on tormenting me out of choice.

But why would Sophie wave to the camera? Like she’s enjoying this?

“Let’s start looking,” I say.

Our first stop is the Cleverly house again, where we know Sophie must have been staying. It looks exactly like the last time we visited, though – even the wrappers are still where Mr Reed left them.

“It doesn’t look like Sophie’s been back,” says Mikey.

“Mr Reed took her knife. She might have seen that it was gone and figured she was rumbled,” I say. “Her massive knife she obviously had in preparation for a *stabbing on Sunday*.” My voice comes out slightly bitter – what *else* could she have had that knife for? “Maybe she’s hiding somewhere else in the woods.”

It takes over two hours to comb through the woods properly, and when we get back to the PRIVATE PROPERTY sign it’s just gone three p.m. I shake my head. “She’s obviously not here.”

“Let’s have a walk through town,” says Mikey. “She’s been going in and out of your house – maybe she’s staying somewhere nearby.”

It’s the only idea we’ve got, so I nod. We’re walking past the community library when my phone buzzes with a message. I get it out, frowning – it’s from a withheld number.

Hello, Kay,

You're not doing very well, are you? So close to the end and it seems you haven't solved anything. Well, let me give you the chance for an easy win: there are two important pieces of information waiting for you right now - one at the Orange Flamingo, and one at the old Cleverly house. You've got to pick one... And make sure it's the right choice, because otherwise there will be very terrible consequences.

*Love from your favourite friend,
Monday*

"We've just been to the Cleverly house," says Mikey, reading the message over my shoulder. "And the Orange Flamingo is packed with people - how could there be anything important there?"

"It closes at three on Fridays," I say. "It's *already* closed. We need to go." If Monday has left something important there, I need to get it away before Uncle Dara or anyone else sees. That's my family's cafe - I don't care about the Cleverly house.

My heart drops as I think about Nikki - I haven't updated her with the new information about how Sophie isn't Monday. It didn't even cross my mind to tell her we needed to keep investigating, and now I have no idea where she is.

This is what Aunt Sandra and I would do. Block Nikki out of puzzles.

Now is not the time for guilt, though. The cafe might be in trouble right now. I'm about to start walking when Mikey stops me.

"Wait - think about this," he says. "Monday said there would be terrible consequences if you pick wrong. And wouldn't they expect you to go to the Orange Flamingo?"

Maybe it's a bluff, and the Cleverly house is the right place to go."

"Monday has picked these places for a reason. The Cleverly house is something to do with Sophie, obviously," I say, as I type out a quick message to Nikki: *Where are you. Monday still at large.* "That's where she's been staying - maybe if we go there we'll find out why she's been so determined to come after me. But Monday picked the Orange Flamingo because they know how important it is to my family - that's why they sent me that letter from Aunt Sandra; they wanted to highlight the betrayal. Uncle Dara's worked so hard to keep it open." I don't care about Monday trying to double-bluff me - there's an anxious gnawing in my chest. I want to make sure that everything there is fine.

Mikey bites his bottom lip. I can tell he thinks I'm making the wrong decision.

"Why don't you go to the Cleverly house?" I say. "We can split up, hit them both - Monday doesn't know we're working together."

He hesitates, and I can tell he's considering it. Then he shakes his head. "What if there's something bad waiting at the cafe? Safety in numbers." He's repeating back what I said to him in the Cleverly house when we found the tent.

"Okay, fine, we'll stick together," I say, snappier than I intend. I'm too on edge to be grateful that he's coming with me.

Plus, *fire on Friday*. If Monday is bluffing about providing information and planning on setting fire to the cafe, at least I can stop them.

"I just think it's odd," says Mikey. "Why would Monday want to help you? They obviously don't like you very much - why would they give you clues? Isn't the whole point the fact that they *want* to murder you?"

I hesitate, because he's right.

“And do we even know this message is from Monday?” Mikey presses. “They’ve always left notes for you. Why would they suddenly switch to text?”

“Are you saying it’s someone else who knows about Monday and is pretending to be them, and wants to hurt me by acting like they’ve got some special clue?” I ask, keeping my voice deadpan. “Because I must have done something really bad to have such a huge list of enormous twats for enemies, don’t you think?”

“That’s a fair point,” says Mikey, nodding. “I just think one of us should be more cautious, you know? Self-preservation instincts and all.”

“Excellent contribution to the team,” I say. “Before we go to the cafe, though, let me check to see if Uncle Dara’s there – he might have hung around after work and seen something suspicious.”

I message Uncle Dara.

Me: Are you still at the cafe?

He replies almost immediately.

Uncle Dara: No. Grace is driving me to Hillingate to go shopping since my car’s been written off. I might be back late – the traffic’s going to be a nightmare at this time of day. Why?

Me: Can you pick me up some instant noodles, please? Uncle Dara: Of course.

Instant noodles are the first thing I can think of that he won’t already have in the cafe or at home. I don’t particularly like them, but I guess I’ll have to eat them now since he’s buying them for me. But that rules out him seeing

anything suspicious in or around the cafe, because if he had he would have mentioned.

Next, I message Nikki another *where are you???* but it doesn't go through, and I see now that neither did my first message. She must have her phone switched off. Her class should have finished hours ago - where could she be? I've got a bad feeling - but maybe it's better that she's not around, because that means both her and Uncle Dara are far away from whatever Monday has done to the cafe.

Get ready for a fire on Friday.

Images flash in my head, of flames licking up all Uncle Dara's hard work. We're fifteen minutes from the cafe - we should move fast, because fire could spread quickly.

I don't know how I've convinced myself that Monday is setting fire to the cafe - but before I know it, I'm running.

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When we get to the Orange Flamingo, I'm relieved to see it's not ablaze with flames. I hunch over, taking deep gasps of breath; there's a stitch in my side. I've allowed Monday to get inside my head, and this is the result.

Mikey, who is a lot fitter than me, looks up at the building. "So, how are we going to get in?" he asks. "Hasn't your uncle locked up?"

I want to regain some semblance that I know what I'm doing after my sprint down the high street, shoving past tourists wandering towards the Old Guy. "If there's no way inside then it'll really defeat the point of Monday asking us to come here, won't it?" I say as confidently as I can. "Let's take a look at the back entrance."

We go down the alleyway that runs along the chemist a few buildings down, and to the back of the shops. The concrete is cracked here, and all the shops, including Uncle Dara's, look slightly run-down behind their pristine fronts. "The Committee should take a look at this side," I say. "Then they'd stop worrying so much about the front of Uncle Dara's shop being orange."

"They only care about appearances," says Mikey as we walk - then he grabs my hand, yanking me back.

"What are you doing?" I ask. My hand has almost vanished in his, which is warm - I remember him saying he

always ran ever so slightly hot. It was why he could slope around in T-shirts long after everyone else had switched to jumpers when autumn came round.

He seems to become aware of the fact he's still holding my hand, drops it quickly, and flushes red. "That little window just above ground by the back door to the cafe, what's it for?"

I follow his gaze - he's looking at the window of the storage room, which is mostly underground... I can see what's caught his attention - there's a pale light filtering out. Someone's left the lights on, and it won't have been Uncle Dara. "That's the storage room. I bet that's where we're supposed to go to get our clue."

Mikey shakes his head - his eyes wide with concern. "I think there's someone in there. But I don't think they're moving."

The glass is frosted, so when I crouch down to look inside all I can see is a dark shape. Mikey's right, it looks like there's someone there, sitting in the middle of the storage room completely still. There's a weird swirling fog in my head - fear creeping over me, telling me we should run. This is very obviously a trap, but what other choice do we have but to stay and investigate?

The light is odd as well - it doesn't look like it's coming from the bulb in the middle of the room, but from a source placed in front of the person, so that their chair and the top of their head is a black silhouette against the orange light.

A shiver goes down me - maybe Monday has left some sort of life-sized doll. Well, if they have, I hope the doll's got their face on it, and their clue is actually: *This is who I am! Come and find me!* That would be great.

My legs are trembly, but I push aside my fear. "We've got to get inside and have a look," I say, hoping Mikey will ignore my shaking voice.

Mikey nibbles his bottom lip. "This is really weird, Kay," he says. "Maybe we should go and get someone."

The Blossom is shut now – but the chemist is still open, and the high street is close. There are people nearby for us to run to if we need. But if we go now, we might miss Monday's clue – or piss them off. Plus...this is the Orange Flamingo. My family's cafe. I have to make sure everything's okay myself. I feel like this is already another sign from Monday: *make sure you keep your mouth shut, or your family will get hurt*. We could tell the police that we think there's been a break-in – but I bet Monday's revenge would be swift. Another repeat of Uncle Dara's accident – or something worse. And it would be my fault. "If there actually is someone inside, we can definitely take them – there's two of us. Plus we can always run back out if it's too dangerous." It's more to convince myself than him – but Mikey nods.

"That's sound logic," he mutters, but he looks nervously around, like he's hoping someone will appear and take the decision away from him. "Okay, fine. Come on."

I try the back door, and it's open – Uncle Dara wouldn't have forgotten to lock up. This is for us.

We step into the kitchen, and everything looks normal, just like it does when the cafe is open. But I get an odd feeling. I don't like being here alone.

Well, not alone. There's someone – or something – in the storage room beneath us.

Mikey opens the door to the storage room and that weird orange light pools out. Another shiver goes down me.

I hesitate – I know I talked about rushing out if there looked to be danger, but we shouldn't both go down at the same time. The storage room is usually locked, but the key for the door hangs on a little wire outside it – Uncle Dara needs to work on his security system. And the key is currently missing.

"I'll go first," I say. "You wait here." I switch the torch on my phone on, because there's something about the orange light that I don't trust - it's too dull, I might miss something.

Mikey looks like he's about to protest, but I'm already going down the stairs. The orange light looks to be coming from a camping lamp that's been set in front of a chair.

And the person in the chair is—

Liam. He's been tied up, with a rag in his mouth, and he's blindfolded too.

I almost trip over myself as I hurry down the stairs, my heart in my mouth. What the hell?

My hands tremble as I attempt to take his blindfold off, digging into the knot to try and pull it out. It won't budge - panic clouds my vision as I force myself to take a deep breath. The knot isn't actually complicated, it's a simple tie - I unpick it and the blindfold falls off.

Liam's eyes go wide as he looks at me, then at his wrists. They're tightly bound, and as I flash my light over them, I see that the ropes are digging into his skin.

"What's going on?" says Mikey, coming down the stairs behind me.

I ignore him, my hands shaking as I once more struggle to undo the knot that's keeping the rag over Liam's mouth - he's saying something, but his words are muffled.

"Give me a second," I say. "I've almost got it..."

The rag tumbles free.

"I'm sorry," Liam croaks, and the door slams shut behind us.

At once I run to the top of the stairs and push the door – but it won't budge. It's been locked. There must have been someone waiting in the cafe, probably the office, to trap us inside. Why didn't we think to check the entire place first?

"How did you get in here?" asks Mikey to Liam. "Who did this to you?"

I stop trying to force the door open and go back down the stairs – Liam can tell us what's going on.

"I was walking through the graveyard and someone hit me on the back of the head," says Liam. "The next thing I knew, I was here and I was tied up and someone was telling me not to worry, that I was bait and that you'd be here soon..."

"Someone knocked you out?" says Mikey, and he looks back at me. I use my phone torch to properly see his scared expression.

But I don't feel scared. For some reason my mind is clear, like all the pressure of the situation is helping me focus. "Someone hit you on the back of the head once and you lost consciousness until the moment you were in here, and you seem absolutely fine now?" I say. "That was a very lucky hit..."

"I don't know for sure that's what happened," says Liam quickly, as his eyes dart around – he's looking anywhere but

at me. Mikey continues to work on untying him from the ropes. "One minute I was walking through the park and the next thing..."

"You said graveyard before," I say. He's a bad liar - how is he an actor?

"Park, graveyard, same thing," says Liam. "Are you any closer to getting these ropes off?" He shifts, trying to look at Mikey, like he thinks that'll stop me questioning him.

"I don't believe you," I say, folding my arms. "This isn't a film - your story is completely unrealistic. Mikey, stop helping him."

Mikey looks back at me, confused. "What, why?"

"Yeah, why?" says Liam, his voice rising in pitch. "You're supposed to let me go now..."

"Am I?" I say, shining the torch light straight at him. He squints at its bright light, and it probably hurts his eyes, but I don't care. I'm tired of Monday always being the one in control. "Who told you I'm supposed to let you go? Who put you here? Or better yet, why did you agree to be tied up?" It's a guess, but it makes the most sense - there's no other way I can imagine Liam being knocked out and then waking up at the exact right time he needed to, and otherwise appearing fine and not in need of medical attention. His dad's a doctor, he should know this.

Liam smiles - and it's not a nice smile. "I'm supposed to tell you that it's Friday," he says.

I wait, expecting him to say more. His smile widens before he does.

"And I'm supposed to tell you that there's a fire on Friday." He tilts his head as he looks at me.

Get ready for a fire on Friday...

All at once I'm running back to the door, which is still locked - but the knob is hot. How is it already hot? A fire wouldn't spread that quickly...

I'm banging on it – Monday can't actually be burning down Uncle Dara's cafe. There's no way.

"Call the fire brigade!" I yell as I spin around. Mikey is staring up at me. "Call it, now!" I'm getting out my own phone, my hands shaking – but I don't have any signal. Of course, no signal in the storage room, because Longrove's got patchy signal at the best of times, let alone when we're underground. That means Liam and Mikey won't have signal either. "Monday's set fire to the cafe," I say, trying to keep as calm as possible – apart from the fact that the cafe's on fire.

"What about the sprinklers?" says Mikey. "The fire alarm?"

"Monday probably disabled them," I say.

"Get me out of these," says Liam, and he starts fighting at his ropes. Mikey immediately goes back to trying to help him, and as he undoes the last knot Liam bursts out of the chair and runs up the stairs. For a wild moment I think he's going to attack me, but then he pushes past me and starts hammering at the door.

"Let us out!" he screams, shoving it with his shoulder. It doesn't budge. While Liam tries getting through the door with sheer willpower, I hurry back down the stairs to where Mikey is standing – or rooted to the spot would be a better way to describe it. His face is pale, all the blood gone – he's in shock.

"We can climb out through the window," I say to Mikey. "Find the boxes with the tins and help me to stack them."

Me giving him an order seems to help – he nods, his face grim. "We can try, but there's no way I'm getting out of that, and I don't think you will either."

He's right – the window is way too small. "We might get signal, though," I say. "Or if we break it, we might be able to call for help – someone from one of the other shops might

hear." How quickly would someone notice there's a fire in the cafe? Before or after it's too late to help us?

I root around the shelves of teabags, trying to find the heavy boxes and doing my best to ignore Liam pounding on the door.

"Let us out!" he says. "Let us out! There's smoke. There's *smoke*."

He's right, flashing his light downwards to reveal little tendrils of smoke creeping through the gap at the bottom of the door.

"We're going to die, aren't we?" he says, backing away from the door. "We're going to die - this wasn't supposed to happen, this wasn't..." He's babbling now, and it's getting on my nerves.

"No, we're not," I snap, trying my best not to lose my temper as I focus back on the boxes. We've made a small tower, which nearly reaches up to the window. I climb up, and it wobbles precariously beneath me.

"Maybe I should climb," says Mikey. "I'm taller, I might be able to reach a higher point and get more signal."

I've already got my phone out, holding it by the window - but nothing. Panic spurts through me - there's definitely no chance of us climbing out of it either.

"Any luck?" says Mikey.

"No," I say as calmly as I can. Monday is one step ahead of us. "We're going to have to try and smash it." I climb down again, and grab a tin of tomatoes. "If we throw it really hard then the glass might break..." The glass looks pretty solid, but it's our best option.

"Help!" Liam suddenly appears at my shoulder and shrieks. "We're in here, help!"

There's no one outside to hear him, but he doesn't let details like that weigh him down. "Help!"

“Move out of the way,” I say to Mikey, as I lob a tin at the window, as hard as I can. It bounces off without so much as a crack and smashes into the boxes we’ve got stacked underneath. “You keep trying,” I say to Mikey, as I run back to the door at the top of the staircase – Monday can’t be planning on burning us all alive. My murder was meant to be on Monday – not today.

There’s more smoke billowing in through the gap between the door and the floor, but now there’s a note that’s been pushed under.

I grab it, using my phone light to read what it says.

Ask Liam why he helped me. If he tells you, I’ll let you go. Good luck and see you on

Monday

"Liam," I say, almost tripping down the stairs in my haste to give him the note. "You need to...you need to tell us why you helped Monday." I want to be angry with him, but it's not the time - we need to do as Monday says, and once we're out of here alive we'll deal with whatever comes next.

"I don't understand what the note means," says Liam, his voice high-pitched.

"If you don't tell us, we're going to die," I say, and it costs everything in me not to scream at him.

"I..." He swallows. "I didn't know Monday was coming after you. Not until...you arrived. They targeted me a few times before, got me kicked out of the drama club at school. I knew they weren't someone you mess with."

"Get to the point," says Mikey harshly. His eyes are flickering back to the door and the smoke still filling the room.

"Monday had dirt on me," says Liam. "It was stupid stuff - that I'd made up having a girlfriend in my acting class. Gemma and I *were* really close, we were practically dating, but I knew it would scare her if that got out..."

I need to get away from him before I start throwing stuff at him to get him to talk faster - this is obviously a panic response. He's shutting down, like he doesn't want to

acknowledge that we're all close to dying. And this secret is stupid. Maybe he doesn't realize everyone already knows he's a massive liar. No one would have been surprised to find out he had a fake girlfriend.

But I know getting impatient won't help us - instead I go back up the stairs, to the door. The smoke is still pouring in, and the air is getting thicker with it. I touch the knob again, to see if it's got any hotter - and stop.

It's cold.

That's not possible. The fire is blazing just outside. It should be burning my hand at this point - it's metal, it'd be conducting heat, and it was definitely hot before...

"Okay, so Monday knew you made up a girlfriend," says Mikey, trying to nudge Liam along. "Keep going."

I turn slowly. The knob is cold, and, yes, there's smoke coming underneath the door...but it could be fake - from an ice machine or something. Mikey was right before - the fire alarm hasn't gone off, and neither have the sprinklers. I might have overestimated Monday and their ability to mess with wires.

And that might mean that we're not in any danger. Monday has managed to simulate a fire, but the cafe isn't going to burn down. They're just messing with us.

"I thought Monday had left me alone," continues Liam. He's visibly shaking in the light Mikey is holding up - I could stop him being scared, right now.

But then he wouldn't tell us what he knows.

"But on Monday I got a message from them, for the first time in months. Because *you* were back in town, Kay." There's a hint of blame in Liam's voice now; I get why he was so hostile when he saw me. He thinks if I hadn't come for a visit, Monday would have continued leaving him alone. "They had...they had some very bad dirt on...on me... They asked me to..." He trails off, like he's too ashamed to say it.

He wasn't home on Wednesday – and he wasn't at the theatre class he should have been at. "You're the one who rammed Uncle Dara's car," I say slowly.

His mouth opens in shock, and for a moment it looks like he's going to protest. But then his shoulders slump. "Monday said if I did that they would leave me alone..."

"You used my car?" says Mikey. "It was you who almost killed Kay's uncle and Angela and Lola Harchester?"

"No," says Liam quickly. "I mean...yes. I wasn't trying to kill anyone. Monday's instructions were to lightly ram the car – but the brakes got stuck..."

Danny and Mikey's car shouldn't even have been on the road. "Did Monday tell you to use that car?" I say, and this is important because we need to know exactly who we're dealing with – we need to know how far they're willing to go. Did *Monday* know how dangerous it was?

"Yes," says Liam.

"There's a chance Monday didn't know about the brakes," says Mikey, looking at me. But I shake my head – Monday would have known, because things like that don't get past Monday.

"And what did Monday threaten you with?" I ask. "And be quick – the smoke's still coming in." I wish I could let Mikey know that we're okay, but there's no way without alerting Liam. Is it wrong to piggyback on Monday's reign of terror? If they're going to try to threaten to kill me, I think I should at least get something out of it. "What was so terrible that you tried to almost kill my uncle, a five-year-old and a mum who's already lost one daughter?"

Liam looks at me properly now, his eyes dark with something I can't read. He clamps his mouth closed – between burning to death in a fire, and telling the truth, it looks like he'd rather pick the former. Then he shakes his head – it's hatred in his expression, he doesn't want to tell

me this but knows he doesn't have a choice. "Monday knew about my dad," he says.

I frown at him, because this is really not what I was expecting. What did Monday know about Liam's lovely dad, the doctor who was so nice to me when he saw me? Who talked through all Aunt Sandra's medical stuff with us all?

"Richard Maldin?" says Mikey, who looks equally confused.

"He had a drinking problem," says Liam, looking at the ground. "Monday said if I didn't do what they said, they would make sure that got out. And everyone would *know*, and he wouldn't be allowed to be a doctor any more. Monday said the last thing I had to do for them was let them tie me up for you to find and then they'd leave me alone."

"So who tied you up? Was it Monday?" I ask. Blood beats in my ears – I'm seconds away from finding out who Monday is. Mikey shoots me an odd look – I guess my lack of concern for the fact we're supposed to be in a life-or-death situation seems strange.

"I don't know," says Liam. "It was dark. And they made me turn around and then blindfolded me first, before they tied me up."

"Did you get a sense of their height or..." I press.

"Hang on, why's the fact that your dad was an alcoholic a big secret?" asks Mikey.

I look at him, slightly irritated, because we should be focused on trying to figure out who Monday is – except...he's a surgeon. "He operated on people while he was drunk?" I gasp.

Liam swallows.

"You need to say yes or no," I say. "For Monday."

"Yes," Liam whispers.

"And people...died?"

"They might have died anyway," says Liam, and his nostrils flare.

I can't reconcile Richard the doctor with the person Liam is describing – someone who would put the lives of his own patients at risk.

"That's why he stepped aside on Aunt Sandra's case," I say. "Not because he was too close to her, because he didn't trust himself while he was drunk."

"He's not a bad person," presses Liam. "And he's sober now."

"Tell that to the family members of people he *did* work on," I say in disgust. I turn back to the door, and there's another note that's been slipped underneath.

Well done to Liam for telling the truth. Count to sixty and then you can go. If you try to leave earlier, you will be punished.

Monday

I read it aloud, but I can't even look at Liam.

"Hang on, Monday wants us to leave through the fire?" says Mikey.

"There is no fire," I say wearily. I'm suddenly really tired – I just want to curl up and go to sleep. "Monday faked it."

"Wait, what?" says Liam, leaping to his feet. "You mean to say we were never in any danger?" He charges at me, his eyes two black holes of hatred, and I flinch back. Mikey grabs his arm, yanking him backwards.

"What do you think you're doing?" Mikey says, shock rippling across his face. He drops Liam's arm, shaking his head.

"I'm getting the hell out of here," snaps Liam.

"It's not been sixty seconds yet," I say, blocking the door. I don't like Liam, in fact I'm pretty sure I now despise him, but I can't let him piss off Monday. Besides, I owe him that much, considering I let him think he was about to die in a fire that didn't actually exist.

He snarls at me. "You judge me from your high horse, Kay, but you'll be gone on Monday. I don't care what you think of me - you don't matter in this town."

"Hey, don't be so rude," says Mikey at once, but I shake my head at him to stop. I don't really care about being insulted by Liam - but while I have him here I might as well question him more.

"You were friends with Ivy, weren't you?" I say. I figure I'll go with the direct approach - maybe it'll shock him into revealing something.

He blinks at me. "No. Ivy hated me, remember?"

"Then why did she keep a photo of you together looking like you were absolute best friends?" I say, folding my arms. "In her special photobook."

Liam gasps, his mouth slightly open. "She...did?"

"Yeah," I say. From his reaction, this information clearly means something to him. "I think Monday has something to do with Ivy - that Monday might have killed Ivy, for some reason, and come after her friends. And that's why they've come after you."

"Monday knew I was friends with Ivy?" Liam is blinking rapidly - I get the impression he's trying not to cry. It looks like I've hit the right spot - I almost feel smug. "We were. I used to hang around at the graveyard, to get away. People are nasty to me, they always thought I was strange. That's why I like acting, I get to be someone else." *Get to the point, Liam*, I want to say, but I bite my tongue. "Sometimes Ivy would be at the graveyard too. At first we didn't say anything to each other, but then we started chatting. She said she

wanted to be alone, but couldn't be bothered to walk all the way to the woods. Then we started planning to meet at the same time... Be alone, together, you know? Things were different out there - we could just...be ourselves. Ivy spoke about how she felt a lot of pressure, how she wanted to be the best at everything. She talked about you all. Mikey was lovely and happy, and Sophie was a mouse she wanted to look after, Nikki was cool, you were kind for putting up with all her rubbish..."

I exchange a look with Mikey. Ivy never said anything like that to our faces. Something burns in the back of my throat; sadness, that Ivy didn't think she could share this sweet side of herself with us.

"We kept meeting up..." Liam pauses. "And then *he* came along."

"Who?" I say, leaning forward. Ivy's secret boyfriend, the controlling loser who sent those messages to Ivy's burner phone, the teal jumper - we're about to learn his identity.

"Kit," he says bitterly.

It's slightly anticlimactic - who the hell is Kit? I rake through my memories of names at school.

"Who's that?" asks Mikey. Obviously, he also doesn't know Kit.

"Ivy never showed me a photo," says Liam. "She never told me anything about him, just that she was in love with him. And then one day she turned up and said she couldn't meet me any more. And I knew it was because of him, but she didn't say that. Next thing I know, she's going around telling everyone at school I've been stalking her."

"And you never denied it?" I ask.

Liam smiles sadly. "I knew why she did it - she couldn't be friends with me, so she needed to torpedo it. Ivy never did anything by halves."

He's right – that's true. But *Kit* – as far as I know, when Ivy was alive there was no boy in Longrove called Kit.

"It's been way longer than sixty seconds, hasn't it?" Liam says. He seems to have calmed down, now that we've got this last secret out of him – I think he's happier, knowing that even if Ivy completely destroyed their friendship publicly, she didn't mean it.

I check my phone, then try the knob. The door swings open easily, to reveal the kitchen – which is intact, and empty.

Monday is long gone.

"That was a pretty rubbish thing you did. You know that, don't you?" says Mikey. He's insisted on walking me back to Uncle Dara's house, but he's acting really grumpy about it. "Making us both think we were going to die - just like Monday."

I ignore the jibe, even though it's true. "If I'd told you the truth, Liam would have heard too - and I needed to know his secrets. But now I'm guessing Monday's also got some dirt on Sophie, which is why she was in my bedroom planting those messages. Monday's targeting all of us...except for you." I say the words lightly, because I don't want him to think I'm accusing him of being Monday.

He stops on the pavement and turns to face me. "You're not turning this around on me - I was in the room with you, which proves I had nothing to do with it. And you behaved just as badly as Monday in there."

I take a deep breath. "Is this not a good thing? I saw through Monday's plan - they're not infallible. They're not omniscient. They made a mistake."

"But it's not like you found out anything they didn't want you to know," says Mikey. "They *wanted* Liam to tell us about his dad."

"Yeah, but they wanted us to all be fearing for our lives," I say. "Take away the fear and all of a sudden Monday's just a

normal teenager running around and pretending to set fire to things. Yeah, they've got their ear to the ground and know a weird amount about everyone in town, but it's a small town. They're probably really good at overhearing things. My point is, they're not something to be frightened of."

"Hmm," says Mikey. He doesn't seem convinced.

We carry on walking, and there's now a bounce in my step. Monday managed to lock us in the storeroom, but I finally came out on top, because I figured out their plan.

"Now if we could only figure out who *Kit* is," I say. "He's obviously the *K* Ivy carved into the tree in the woods."

"I'm sure there aren't any Kits in Longrove," says Mikey.

I nibble my lip as I try to think. "Kit might be a nickname," I say. "Ivy liked giving nicknames, right? So Kit could be a nickname for...Kitopher. *Christopher* - Topher Reed." I start speaking quickly in excitement.

"She could have given him a different nickname to everyone else," says Mikey. "She would have liked that. But is that enough evidence?"

There's something nagging me, one final bit of proof. That teal jumper. I saw it in a photo with Sophie, but only the arm... Expect I think I might have actually *seen* Topher wearing it. When, though? Not this week...

Or maybe *another* photo. "When we went to Topher's house," I say slowly. "There was a framed photo on the mantelpiece. I noticed it because it was the only photo in the room. And him, his mum and dad were all wearing blue and green... But I think Topher's jumper was actually *teal*." It's obviously his favourite jumper - and it links him with Sophie, with Ivy. As Ivy's secret boyfriend.

I think back to the horrible, controlling messages we saw. Topher's been completely charming to us, to me - apart from those few moments where the mask has slipped. I could see him being something more sinister - wanting to keep their

relationship a secret in order to control her. This way he kept her under his thumb.

"Ivy loved secrets," I say. "She probably thought Kit... Topher wanting to keep their relationship under wraps was romantic. And maybe she wanted to break up with him - so he killed her?"

"But why would he come after all of us as Monday?" says Mikey.

"I don't know..." I say.

"I can believe it of Topher," says Mikey. "He always had something of a nasty streak about him."

We turn down the corner to Uncle Dara's road. "We should go back to his house. Now," I say. "Confront him with what we know..."

But the door to Uncle Dara's house flings open, and Nikki rushes out, like she's been waiting for me. She's staring at me with her mouth open.

"What's wrong?" I say. She's looking at me like she's seen a ghost.

"I didn't know whether I should call you or message you or... But I thought it'd be better to tell you in person." She takes a deep breath, and I'm getting a bad feeling in the pit of my stomach. "The Cleverly house in the woods burned down," she says. "Topher Reed was inside. He didn't make it out."

Fire on Friday.

It wasn't the fake fire at the cafe. It was a fire at the old house.

My stomach turns – I feel sick. Monday gave me a choice between going to the cafe and going to the Cleverly house.

You've got to pick one – and make sure it's the right one, because otherwise there will be very terrible consequences.

But maybe there was never a right answer.

Nikki goes from looking at me to looking at Mikey, like she wants an explanation as to why we're together. I open my mouth, but my tongue feels swollen. I need to sit down – I push past her and go to the sitting room, collapsing on the sofa and putting my head in my hands.

Someone sits beside me, Mikey. He pats my back awkwardly, like he's trying to burp me or something – the gesture makes me smile. Enough to take my head out of my hands.

"Topher wasn't Monday," I say. We made that breakthrough about him dating Ivy, but he didn't kill her and he wasn't the person after us. He's dead.

He's *dead*.

I didn't outsmart Monday in the cafe, not once – because they were playing a different game.

Monday has murdered again.

Nikki has followed us into the living room, and Mikey looks up at her.

"I don't get it," he says. "Why was Topher at the Cleverly house? How do you know he didn't get out?"

Nikki taps on her phone, and wordlessly hands it over. There's a shaky video playing - a house engulfed in smoke and flames, and I can almost feel the heat through the screen. There're a few firefighters spraying water at the flames, but it doesn't seem to be doing much.

The video pans to reveal multiple people I guess are from Longrove watching - I think I spot Charlie from my old history class, though the image is grainy - and it sweeps back to the house.

"Someone who lives near the woods noticed the smoke and called the fire brigade," says Nikki. "A bunch of people went to watch - they thought it was an empty house burning down, a bit of entertainment."

"But Topher..." I say, because the more I think about this, the more it doesn't make sense to me. "How do you *know*?"

"The firefighters noticed, when they were spraying water through all the open windows," says Nikki. "He was near the back door...lying on the ground." She takes her phone back and clicks on another video. "Grace sent me these, from someone who was there."

The second video shows the house at a different stage. There's still black smoke pouring away, but the small flickers of flames look more under control. And then a low mutter of shock goes through the crowd. One of the firefighters is using a fireman's lift to carry a body - the footage is grainy, but I can see a flopping hand—

"Topher Reed," someone says, and the video cuts off.

I feel numb as I hand the phone back to Nikki, trying to get the image of the flopping hand out of my mind, trying to

not to think about what I've just seen. "Where were you all day?" I say, still replaying the moment the crowd realized they *weren't* just watching an empty house go up in flames. "I couldn't get through to you."

"I went to art class and then I went to the library and filled out a couple of applications for an art programme next summer," says Nikki. "I thought the investigation was done - you told me it was Sophie. You said you'd question her and I wanted to, I don't know, clear my head. Think about the future. My phone doesn't get signal in Hillingate Library, and when I left I didn't bother checking my messages. Then Grace called to let me know what had happened. Where have *you* been?"

She could blame me, for getting it wrong about Sophie. For saying it was okay to relax when it wasn't. She could point out how crap a detective I am, how it's odd Aunt Sandra and I shared a bond over puzzles. But she doesn't.

I fill her in on my movements since we separated at the river.

Nikki presses her lips together - I can't tell what she's thinking. "Do you not think it's strange that Topher was killed a day after you went to visit him?"

"Hang on," says Mikey. "You don't think he was killed *because* we went to visit him?"

Or maybe he was killed because I didn't figure out Monday's identity in time. Because I made a mistake thinking it was all over. I don't say that aloud - there's nothing they can say that will ease my mind. This is my fault - because I'm nothing like Aunt Sandra. I'm a fraud.

"There was someone else in the house when we went to see Topher," I say, trying to keep my voice measured so they don't know what I'm thinking. "Upstairs, I'm sure of it - he lied and said it was a cat, but it definitely wasn't. Maybe it was Monday up there." I rub my forehead, trying to get

everything straight in my mind. "There's something else that's bothering me. Monday would have been the one at the old house, setting it on fire, murdering Topher, right? In line with the threat. I doubt they would have let someone else do their dirty work. So, who was at the Orange Flamingo with us?"

I meet Mikey's eyes, because there's one person I can think of: Sophie. There was a camping lamp at the cafe, just like at the Cleverly house, the place it's likely she was staying. I don't want to jump to another wrong conclusion, but it makes sense. We know she's helping Monday, so she could have been one who blindfolded Liam and tied him to the chair and left him there, and pushed that note underneath the door and faked the fire.

The question is, where is she now?

Monday – 8.07 p.m. – Nikki

Nikki woke with a start. Her neck was aching, her tongue was sandpapery and her head was throbbing. Could she already have a hangover?

The tree she was leaning against was digging into her back, her lips were parched and when she tried to sit up the world swayed around her, like she was on a boat rocking on the sea. Vomit rose in the back of her throat and she leaned over and heaved. A watery mixture vaguely the colour of the pesto pasta she'd eaten for dinner trailed across the ground. She gagged, her stomach churned, but nothing else came up. Tears streamed in her eyes, and she couldn't tell whether it was from throwing up, being drunk, or being overly emotional. Maybe all three.

There was a strong breeze. Was it going to rain? It hadn't been forecast but that didn't mean anything. The weather predictions were always wrong.

She should go home, but somehow she couldn't get her legs to move. One more minute of resting against the tree, and then she would leave.

Voices floated towards her – a deep boy's voice and a girl, laughing.

Ivy?

The woods were otherwise silent, half lit in a soft dusk that meant the sun would be setting soon. She needed to go, walking back in the dark wouldn't be fun at all. No fun. No fun.

She heaved again. On the other hand, maybe she should just rest here until morning. Here was good. This was almost like a home. Somewhere to lean against, although the wood was really digging into her back.

She closed her eyes.

"Jump!" floated a voice and she sat up straight again, peering through the woods. Had she imagined it? Or was there someone telling her to jump? Off what?

"...won't do it."

Why were the words fading in and out? Was it the breeze or were the people speaking quietly only to suddenly yell? Or was it her hearing? Her head lolled again, like she had lost the ability to keep it straight up.

"You're a coward!" That was Ivy's voice - who was she speaking to? Maybe she was yelling at Nikki - that sounded right. She knew Nikki was still in the woods, too scared to go home, and she was screaming it into the night. Her head lolled again. "...won't jump!"

There was a moment of silence - what did Ivy mean, won't jump? Maybe a metaphorical jump? See, she wasn't even drunk, she still knew all the big words.

And she needed to leap into the unknown, a life without her mother. But that was an unthinkable place - she didn't want to go there. She wanted to hold onto the cliff, not letting go, because there was dark water raging below, crashing at the rocks. Except the cliff was crumbling, it had always been crumbling. And she was falling—

A scream pierced the air.

SATURDAY

56

I wake up at half seven. Though that's not entirely true; I barely slept.

Topher's face stares at me from my whiteboard. I've updated the board with his messages telling Ivy to cut her hair, that he loved her more than life itself, that she'd better never speak to James Cardroy again.

I've updated the board with his death.

From his face I've drawn black lines that connect him to Mr Reed and now Ivy and Monday. The flippant remark Nikki made when she first looked at my board comes back to me. *It looks like you've died. Like you're the victim.*

And I thought I was, because of the rat. But that was Tuesday, and now it's Saturday, and Monday has actually killed someone, whose face I stuck proudly on my board like that actually meant something. Topher was the golden boy of Longrove High, he was the boy everyone wished would love them.

He was the person texting Ivy those horribly controlling messages.

The black-and-white photo of Ivy and him in his jumper I know is teal is haunting now - it has to be him. Christopher. Topher. Kit. Dead. Both him and Ivy. He'll be buried in the same graveyard where I ran into him on Monday.

And Sophie, standing in her photo with Topher just off camera. Why would she want to help Monday?

Did I ever know *her* at all?

Sophie followed other people. She liked what they liked – but where Ivy was a mirror, reflecting people’s interests back on themselves to get closer to them, Sophie was a sponge. She absorbed other people’s interests, their likes would become her own...

If Sophie knew Ivy had dated Topher, had loved him...

The idea is an odd one – but could Sophie have loved him too? She no longer had Ivy to follow – she needed to make do with what she had. And if he behaved in the same controlling way towards her as he did with Ivy...

Then what? Topher couldn’t have been Monday, because he’s dead. And he couldn’t have been in cahoots with Monday either, because...he’s *dead*. Unless Monday turned on him?

If Sophie ran away from home – could he have been the one helping her? Because she wouldn’t have managed to stay hidden on her own, especially not once her hideout in the Cleverly house was found. He could have let her stay in his house – she could have been the noise I heard when we were there to question him...

But if Topher is an enemy of Monday, and Sophie was on his side, what does that mean? Maybe she’s been coerced into helping Monday, or maybe she’s truly on their side and they killed Topher together. There’s too much I don’t know.

Either way with Topher dead, there won’t be anyone to shelter her, or to look out for her. She’s on her own.

Now I just need to figure out if she wants me dead too.

We were friends, once. It’s the one thing I keep coming back to – we were sweet when we were kids, we used to leave each other notes in the community library, passing secret messages like we had something to hide. Stopping

because Ivy told us it was sad – the first sign of the outside world creeping in, and ruining things.

I wonder if she remembers that, if she ever thinks about those parts of our friendship that was just for us. She must – because I do.

Her phone is still off, probably so she can't be tracked. But maybe there's another way to contact her. I go down to Uncle Dara's office and check his drawers – there's some red ribbon in one of them, along with some stationery.

I get out a piece of paper and a pen, and stare at the blank page. There are so many things I could say: *How could you betray me? How could you break into my bedroom and wave, like this is all a game? Why did you do all this? I hate you.*

But instead I just write:

Let me help – Kay

When I go down for breakfast, I find a note from Uncle Dara saying that he's already gone across to the cafe to open up, so it's just me and Nikki. When he came home on Friday, he was completely shocked at what had happened to Topher.

"I just don't understand why he was at that old house," he said, dropping my packet of instant noodles on the kitchen table. "It wasn't structurally safe. And I don't understand how the fire started, or why he didn't run out – he was by the back door." He shook his head. "Sometimes I wonder if this town is cursed. It's awful for John – first his wife and now his son. It's so sad when a kid goes too soon. When anyone..." And with that he got choked up, and quickly left the kitchen. Nikki and I ate the noodles for dinner; there was plenty of food in the fridge, but neither of us felt like cooking.

I think part of the reason Uncle Dara left today without speaking to us is he wanted to get back to what he knows – working, to take his mind off things. That way he can't think about dying and death and the fact that Topher is gone for ever, just like Aunt Sandra, that life isn't fair and sometimes people who have years ahead of them have their lives cut too short.

And from the outside, Topher's death *is* baffling – because why was he at the Cleverly house? How did Monday lure him there? How does he fit into everything?

It couldn't have been a spur of the moment murder from Monday, because they gave me the option of going to the Cleverly house. They would have set it up – they were murdering him at the same time we were trapped in the basement of the Orange Flamingo.

Nikki comes into the kitchen – she looks terrible, like she hasn't slept.

"I think we should go back to the Cleverly house," I say as she puts the kettle on. "I know it's a long shot – any clues would have been burned up in the fire, and the police will probably tell us to leave. But I...I still think we should go." *I want to see it* – I want to see the place I had a choice about going to, but didn't. Maybe Topher's ghost will speak to me, or I'll get a brainwave and solve everything. Both options are equally impossible, but I'm itching to go.

Nikki turns around, and opens her mouth. Her eyes look puffy, like she's been crying, and for a moment she doesn't move. I'm waiting for her to speak – but then she just nods.

We're a team again, as long as we avoid talking about Aunt Sandra.

I message Mikey to tell him to meet us.

Mikey: Just woke up.

Mikey: I'll be there as quick as I can.

Nikki and I walk in silence, the air between us still awkward. I run over everything again. I suspected Topher of being Monday and now he's dead, so he obviously wasn't. He knew about the rat, though, on Tuesday – he gave me that hint it was coming. He was Ivy's secret boyfriend. He might have been in the woods the night she died. Sophie could possibly have been dating him, and been in the house when Mikey and I went to question Topher – but I have no

concrete evidence on that point, just the flash of teal jumper in Sophie's photo, that she put up herself.

"There are going to be police at the Cleverly house," says Nikki, breaking into my thoughts. "What are we going to say to them?"

"We'll just act like we're curious," I say. "Like the people who went to watch yesterday. It's morbid, but they've probably had loads of people coming up from town for a look."

"Do you think we should go to the police about Monday?" asks Nikki quickly. "I know I said we shouldn't go to them before but...Topher's *dead*."

I bite my lip – maybe we should. But what would we say? We don't have any actual information about who might have killed Topher. I don't even know how he links to Monday. And we can say we're being threatened – but would the police take us seriously? The story is far-fetched – I have proof, I have the video of Sophie breaking into my bedroom, I have the letters. But would they rush to action?

If the police take too long to mobilize, what then? Monday warned me not to say anything.

Plus...I'm *scared*.

"We need to find Sophie," I say. "Once we find her it'll all make sense. She'll be able to tell us who Monday is and this will be over. We can turn her over to the police and she can confirm everything that's happened. And she will, because the game will be up." It's a whisper of a hope – but I'm pinning everything on it. "And hopefully we can find her before *sabotage on Saturday*." My stomach churns – like Thursday's threat, this one is vague. It could mean anything. At least with a *stabbing on Sunday* we know exactly where we stand – watch out for knives.

Like the knife Mr Reed took from the Cleverly house.

We reach the community library. "One second," I say to Nikki. I feel for the false back, and it's still there – the panel comes away easily, and I slip the note inside. Luckily there's no one else around to see what I'm doing.

I pop the back into place, tie the red ribbon to the handle and take a step back. It seems a pretty pathetic effort to reach Sophie, but it's the most I can do at this point.

Nikki raises her eyebrows as we keep walking.

"I'll explain later," I say. I don't want to get Nikki's hopes up about me being able to contact Sophie before I even know if she's going to show up. When we get to the place where the road leads into the woods, I stop – there's a police car right by the PRIVATE PROPERTY sign.

"It's empty," says Nikki, and I nod – at least we won't have to sneak around it. But then what? What am I looking for at the burned-out house?

The air feels heavier as we get closer – the acrid smoke lingering.

And before I know it, the Cleverly house is in sight. There's tape roping it off, and two policemen standing in front, keeping guard.

The house is a blackened shell. Still standing, even now, a blot of darkness.

The policemen are in bright neon yellow jackets with hoods – I guess even if it rains they'll still have to wait out here. I wonder what exactly they're hanging around *for*. It's not like there will be any evidence at the crime scene – any fingerprints will be long gone. I squint at them. They look vaguely familiar. One is wearing glasses, the other has put what looks like an entire pot of gel in his hair.

Tony and Adam – the police officers who were outside the Orange Flamingo after the car accident. Mr Reed's former pupils, part of his fan club. Is it a coincidence that they're here, guarding the place where Mr Reed's son died?

“Hey, clear off!” says Tony. His tone is exasperated – I was right, they’ve probably had loads of curious people from Longrove trying to sneak a look at the building.

“We should go,” says Nikki, tugging at me – she’s right. If we’re not going to reveal everything to them, we should leave. But the second police officer, Adam, is squinting at us.

“Hang on,” he says. “You two!” His voice is excited. “Come here.”

“What...” Tony trails off as he gawps at us. I look at Nikki, weirded out. Why is Adam so delighted to see us? But it’s a good opportunity to get closer to the house, so I sidle forward.

“You’re the kids in the photos,” says Tony, his eyes flicking between me and Nikki. “We’ll need to take you in for questioning.”

For a moment panic swoops through me, before I force myself to calm down. “Sorry, what are you talking about?” Does he mean the photos in the living room? How the hell did they survive the fire?

“Here,” says Adam, as he turns on his heel and trots around the outside of the house, giving it a wide berth as if he’s worried something is going to tumble down and thwack him. We follow his wide path.

“Hey, do you reckon we should show them?” says Tony. “Shouldn’t we go into the station?”

“This is our find,” says Adam. “And we’ll need to question them either way.”

Not without a lawyer. Do they think we burned down the house? I have an alibi – I was with Mikey and Liam being threatened by a fake fire. They can corroborate my very bizarre story. Maybe we *should* have told the police about Monday from the beginning, because now it’ll seem even less believable.

We go around the corner of the house, and I gasp. Someone has taped photos of me and Nikki to the side of the charred house...and Mr Reed and Topher, and Sophie and Kerry Richmond and a dead rat...

It's the images from my murder board, blown up and slightly blurry – possibly a photo of a photo.

But they're arranged differently... I'm not in the centre, Topher is. And there's a giant X through his face, in red marker. The ink has bled, like it's been splashed by water.

"It rained during the night," mutters Nikki, staring at Topher's face.

There are a few big differences between my murder board and these photos. Uncle Dara has been left off, and Mikey, and Ivy. And someone has stuck a leaflet underneath Topher's face.

"It's a Committee leaflet," I whisper to Nikki. My heart is racing – what does this mean? "When was this put up? When the house was burned down?"

"No, in the middle of the night," says Adam.

"Didn't you have people posted?" I ask. Surely, if they have two police officers watching now, they would have been there last night too?

"Yes," says Adam. "Anderson and Gunryson. But it's difficult, you know, in the middle of the night in the woods. People get tired..."

"Did they fall asleep?" I raise my eyebrows. It's not particularly surprising – I doubt world-class police officers would be stationed in the Hillingate and Longrove area.

"Yeah," says Tony, and suddenly I understand how Aunt Sandra could have got the information about Ivy's toxicology report. If all the police on the force are this chatty, it's likely nothing ever stays secret. They seem to realize they've said too much, because they exchange a look and stand

straighter. Adam clears his throat. "We're here to stop this getting splashed all over social media."

"Anyway the top brass are taking over this case," says Adam. "And they'll be wanting to speak to you, most likely. All the people..." He nods at the wall, and I try to see it from their angle. They don't know anything about Monday, or the link to me and my murder board. Topher has been crossed off - would that suggest everyone else is a potential victim? And the Committee leaflet below - on an immediate glance, that's implying they had something to do with this, surely. "Is there any particular reason you would be on this wall? Has anyone been threatening you? Or is this a prank gone wrong?"

A prank gone wrong? The theory they have at the moment is someone has put our faces up on a burned-out house, at the scene of a death, as a *joke*?

Tony leans in, failing to hide his enthusiasm - they're both probably envisioning being able to go back to their superiors with some key information.

This is the moment I can tell them about Monday - but they obviously can't keep their mouths shut, and their current theory is ridiculous.

And what if this gets back to Monday? What's their game now?

Sabotage on Saturday.

They've obviously got something up their sleeve - but if this is sabotage for me, I can't imagine what it would be. Though, not everything they've done is directly targeted at me - Wednesday was a car crash for Uncle Dara and Angela and Lola, Friday was a fire...for Topher. Is this sabotage for the police? Messing with the crime scene, pointing them in the wrong direction?

The police are still looking at me expectantly. I open my mouth - then close it again. What if I'm walking into a trap?

Monday is doing *something* by putting my murder board up on the wall – they're messing with my head.

I can't risk them finding out I've told the police what's been going on. I have to solve this myself. Which means I really have to find Sophie.

We're walking back out of the woods when we run into Mikey, who is panting.

"Sorry!" he says. "I was halfway here when I realized I forgot my house keys and had to get back before Danny went off and locked me out. Why are you already walking back? What was at the house?"

I'm filling him in when there's a crackle of twigs from somewhere behind him - someone is coming through the woods towards us. A moment later Mr Reed emerges from the trees. He's wearing a black suit, like he's already dressed for his son's funeral. His hair is a mess, and there's a shadow of a beard on his face - he looks gaunt, completely different to the last time I saw him. Beside him is Kerry Richmond. She's wearing a lumpy cardigan over a moss-green T-shirt and looks at me like I've just climbed out of a sewer.

With them is Richard Maldin, who looks vaguely embarrassed, like he wasn't expecting us to see him in this company. I didn't know he was close to Mr Reed - I remember Aunt Sandra saying how she got over her rejection from the Committee because she realized people like Richard specifically *avoided* anything to do with them. Even Ivy's dad, Peter Harchester, who had joined briefly last

year, quit almost immediately, calling everyone who was involved in it ridiculous.

“What are you doing here?” Mr Reed says. His eyes are bloodshot and I catch a sour whiff of alcohol on him. “Coming to see the place my son died like it’s some kind of spectacle?” He sways as he talks, and I step back in alarm. This is not the put-together head teacher I know, or the formidable head of the Committee. This is the man who rooted around in the Cleverly house for a knife.

I think back to that wall of fancy alcohol in his house, locked away. Waiting for him to drink.

Kerry grabs his arm. “Calm down, John,” she says quietly. “You three – go home.”

I nod – all I want to do is get away from them. Especially Richard. He looks as kind as ever, but there’s something more sinister about him now. Is he sorry for what he did? Does he know all the names of the people he killed? Should he not be punished; should the families not know?

And why is he here with Mr Reed and Kerry Richmond?

“I’m really sorry for your loss, Mr Reed,” says Mikey as we go around them. I tense, expecting Mr Reed to scream at us – but he says nothing.

When I risk looking behind me, the three of them are standing on the path, silently watching us go.

“You know what I’ve been wondering,” says Nikki as we head back towards the community library. “Why haven’t you had anything from Monday, Mikey? Kay and I have both had notes – Sophie is involved somehow, and so was Liam. Topher was obviously targeted – it’s people who had a connection with Ivy. So, what about you?”

That’s a good question – but Monday left him, Uncle Dara and Ivy off the photos they put up at the Cleverly house. Does that mean anything? Is there a clue we’re missing?

"I don't know," says Mikey, shaking his head. "I've thought and thought about it, and I can't figure it out. Unless Monday for some reason thinks Ivy and I weren't particularly close?"

"But Ivy played football with you and your brother," I say with a frown. "I saw that photo in your house."

"Yeah, we were friends," says Mikey. "I...I don't know. It's almost unsettling, trying to work out why I'm *not* being targeted? What's different about me?"

That's an interesting observation. Topher was a boy, so it's not like Monday is only targeting girls. If we're going by age, Topher is the odd one out, not Mikey. He lives in the same part of town as Nikki, so it's not like Monday is going by geography.

The town hall looms ahead, and there's the community library... I slow down, blinking. My heart starts racing – the red ribbon is gone.

Which means that either someone has come along and untied it – though no one ever did that in all the time when we were little and leaving messages – or Sophie has emerged from wherever she's hiding, she's seen my message, and she's responded.

I almost trip over as I hurry up the grass, ignoring Mikey and Nikki making confused noises in the background. A part of me is terrified that somehow Monday has discovered our messaging system, that this will yet again be something which shows that they're always three steps ahead.

My hands are trembling as I open up the cabinet and feel for the false back. A piece of paper flutters out, and I grab it. *Please don't just be the message I left for Sophie.*

As I pull it out, I see it's unlined paper – the message I wrote was on lined. As I unfold it, Mikey and Nikki come up behind me, to read over my shoulder.

Meet me by Ivy at 8 p.m.

S

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I'm finally going to speak to Sophie. This is it – she can tell us everything she knows. Who Monday is, even. I don't care if it's a trap. She didn't say *come alone* like someone in a horror film would, so obviously Nikki and Mikey will be there too. And if she's going to bring Monday, that's even better. We can confront them both at the same time.

There's so much I need to ask Sophie. All those questions about *why* are still burning in my brain. Surely, she must have been coerced by Monday – if she hated me, if she was truly on Monday's side, she wouldn't want to meet me now.

Plus...if she *was* dating Topher, if he was her ally or if he was controlling her, it leads to the same outcome. He's dead now. She might not have anyone else left to turn to.

"What do we do until eight?" I ask Mikey and Nikki, once I've explained about the note system. "I wish she'd given an earlier time – I don't want to waste the day and I feel like she probably can give us some really key information."

"Well, we've got another big lead, don't we?" says Nikki stiffly, still not entirely at ease with me. "The more Monday does, the more leads they give, and Topher's death opens up a huge number of questions, right?"

I nod; she *is* right. That's an excellent point – Aunt Sandra would have been proud. I'm about to say as much when I stop myself. Nikki might not appreciate it. "From our list of

suspects, we can work out who doesn't have an alibi for the time of his death." I run through the list in my mind. I've stared at the whiteboard for so long it's practically burned onto the inside of my eyelids. The Committee - Mr Reed, Kerry Richmond and the rest of them... But surely we can rule them out? Mr Reed wouldn't kill his own son. I add a new name - Richard Maldin. Why was he in the woods with Mr Reed? We know Monday has dirt on him; maybe he's the person carrying out their work.

Mikey and Liam were with me, and I presume Sophie too if she's the one who set the fake fire. There's only one other person whose whereabouts was unknown...

I glance at Nikki, who is bouncing up and down on the balls of her feet, like she's got too much pent-up energy. It's a stupid thought, of course it is. Why would my cousin have killed Topher? Because that would mean she's Monday, and that would also mean she told Liam to try and murder her own father, who I know she loves more than anyone else.

Nikki's eyes meet mine; it's like she knows exactly what I'm thinking - there's a flash of hurt, gone the next second, and I know if I say this accusation aloud there won't be any way to come back from it. I've seen who Monday is, what they're capable of... I can't reconcile that with the person my cousin is.

I will not bring up the fact we don't have an alibi for her - I will trust her. There aren't many people left I can now.

As we wait for eight p.m., we consider asking Danny if he can put us in touch with any of Topher's friends - but as he's just died, we figure they probably won't want to talk to us. I do want to know more about who Topher was, but I wonder if speaking to the people who knew him will even elicit anything interesting. They might not have known who he

really was, hiding his controlling personality behind a golden boy facade.

The day drags and I become more certain that Monday has already carried out their “sabotage” threat. Mikey heads off for a shift at the bookshop, and makes us promise not to meet Sophie without him.

“Of course not, safety in numbers, remember?” I say, and he beams. I like the way his whole face lights up when he smiles. I know he smiles for everyone, but it always seems a little bit wider when he looks at me... My face burns red, although I know no one knows what I’m thinking. Why didn’t I see how great Mikey was a year ago, when I actually lived here? He was just my slightly dorky friend. Although that might have been Ivy’s doing, because I remember her using those exact words to describe him. But I listened, didn’t I? Ivy didn’t have the ability to control the way I thought about Mikey. I just gave her too much power.

Nikki and I sit in a corner booth in the Orange Flamingo, and Grace and Uncle Dara constantly check in on us, making sure our cups of tea stay topped up and we’ve got enough food. It reminds me of when we were little, and needed supervision – we would play in the little office in the back.

The atmosphere in the cafe is odd. The tourists have obviously heard about the fire, and there are a few hushed whispers about it. But to them it’s a bit of gossip, and conversations switch to other topics. I’m worried the police are going to follow up with us, ask more questions about why exactly our faces are on the side of the house, but they don’t walk through the door.

Nikki tries to draw a recreation of the side of the Cleverly house from memory, since we weren’t able to get a photo, while I alternate between listening to the mindless chatter of the tourists and scrolling through my phone.

We’re close – and getting closer – to a stabbing on Sunday, then my murder on Monday. And all I can think about is Mr

Reed in the woods, looking hollow and lost.

I open a chat with Mum and Dad. What would they say if I told them about the threats I'd received? They would come running to get me, and we would go back to London. They would probably report it to the police. But I don't think they would be able to actually protect me, which is a scary thought. They would be just as powerless as I am.

And what will they do if something actually happens to me?

I push the thought away.

Uncle Dara comes up to the table, beaming. "Come on, girls! Grace is going to look after the cafe for the rest of the afternoon, and we're going into Hillingate to have a mooch around the shops and a walk by the river!" He looks proud of himself, like he's giving us a proper treat and I don't have the heart to say otherwise. "The insurance company have sent a rental car for me to use."

Nikki hesitates, then nods. "As long as we're back by seven," she says. "We said we would go for dinner with Mikey."

I shoot her a smile – that's some quick thinking.

Uncle Dara looks pleased. "Ah, it's nice you're hanging out with your old friends again, Nikki."

I get the impression from our afternoon out that Uncle Dara is trying to make sure we're okay after what happened to Topher. Or maybe get us out of Longrove, away from the chatter.

"The whole town is in shock," he says. "Apparently, teenagers often hang around at the house?"

He thinks it was an accident and neither of us correct him. The police haven't released any information that says differently. It's nice to be out of Longrove, in the bustle of the

bigger neighbouring town. But even there, we can't escape what's happened. The fire and Topher's death dominates the local news.

And the clock keeps ticking down to eight p.m.

I almost can't stand the waiting. There's something ominous in the air. Everywhere we go in Hillingate I'm on edge. Strangers jostling against me become Monday's henchmen. Each corner I turn I flinch, expecting something to come lunging at me.

When we get home, Uncle Dara looks at us nervously.

"There's actually something I wanted to talk to you both about," he says. "My spa trip. I'm very grateful, of course, but with what's happened to Topher and my accident on Wednesday I don't think it's the right time for me to be leaving you..."

Nikki and I start speaking at the same time, panic in our voices. Of course he needs to go on this trip. It's non-refundable. We'll be fine.

We can't tell the truth. *We can't be worrying about you as well. It's better if you're out of town.*

A stabbing on Sunday is coming.

It works, though. He gives in with a sigh and starts packing for the trip, heading into the linen closet and pulling out a little bag. "Honestly, I should clear this closet out," he says, swinging his bag through the air. "It's covered in cobwebs, and the paint's gone from white to...well, grimy white. This whole house needs sprucing up."

Nikki lets out a small snort which suggests he's said this before.

"The thing you sent me says I can get to the spa at ten a.m.," he says. "And I suppose I had better make the most of every second." He's still reluctant, I can tell, but for a moment a much younger man shines through the wrinkles and the heavy bags under his eyes. I see the person he was

before Aunt Sandra died. He's about to go to his bedroom, but he pauses and looks back at us. "I just want to thank you girls again for this... It will really be nice."

Nikki's eyes are shiny - like she's on the verge of tears. There's a lump in my own throat. He doesn't know the only reason we booked this is to get him out of town, to make sure he's safe. He thinks we're purely doing it so he can have a bit of rest - and I feel guilty, because if Monday hadn't been in the picture neither of us would have thought to do this for him.

"Of course, Uncle Dara," I say softly, and he nods and goes into his bedroom. I turn to Nikki, who is taking a deep breath.

"I don't like lying to him," she says. "But at the same time...it's almost Monday. No matter what, this will soon be over."

60

We meet up with Mikey and sit on the green and scoff a dinner of cold pasta from the corner shop.

We're finished by 7.30 p.m.

"Ready?" says Mikey as he gets to his feet.

No, I want to say. But I stand anyway.

We walk together quickly. The sun is lower in the sky now, our shadows long. The streets of Longrove are quiet – the tourists are dispersed. There's a bit of a nip to the air though and the few people we pass have grim expressions on their face.

I'm glad for my jacket as we turn down the road that leads to the graveyard.

"I wonder why Sophie wanted to meet here?" says Nikki quietly, like she's worried about being overheard.

It becomes clear as we arrive at the iron gates. They're shut, and there's a giant padlock keeping them together. The sign next to the entrance, which I'd never read before, says that the graveyard closes at six p.m. This is probably one of the most secure places in Longrove.

I swear – how did we not know this? Of course...I've only ever visited once, for Ivy's grave.

"I've only ever come during the day," says Nikki, nibbling her lip as she looks at Mikey. "I didn't even realize it closes."

"Same," says Mikey, scratching his head.

Sophie obviously didn't want to be seen, and there's no chance of anyone coming across her here, but how the hell are we supposed to get inside?

We should have come earlier, and hidden when it was closing time – not that I think there will be any security patrolling the gravestones.

There are some rocks, quite big ones, near the fence further along. I wonder if we could climb onto them and then hop over the gate.

"I think that's our way in," I say, nodding to the rocks. There's no one around – the road leading to the graveyard is a quiet, tree-lined one, and like most places in Longrove there's no CCTV. Even though it's still daylight, no one will see us breaking in.

"I'm not scaling the fence," says Nikki. "We can't do that. What about...the dead people? And we'll be trespassing."

"The dead people won't say anything. They're dead," I say, as I examine the rock.

"I think it'll work," says Mikey.

"Of course you do. You'll just agree with anything she says," grumbles Nikki, but low, so only I hear. I shoot her a look and she sticks her tongue out, like she's five.

"We need to at least try," I say, as I climb onto the rock, and then put my foot on the metal that's running along the middle of the fence... And I lift myself over, careful to avoid the spikes at the top. I hang for a second; the ground looks much further down now. But there's nothing else for it. I drop down, bending my knees on impact. The shock goes through me and for a second I think I'm hurt, but then the pain passes and I stand up straight. Mikey and Nikki are staring at me through the gaps in the iron bars. "Come on, it's easy," I say.

Nikki follows first, and she manages it even quicker than I did.

Then Mikey tries, but when he gets to the top he stops. "I can't put my leg over!" he says. "I'm going to fall!"

"Try harder," I say.

"And while Kay's comment is helpful, might I suggest just going really slowly," says Nikki. "You're almost halfway there."

Boo. She's never this nice to me.

"I feel like we don't even need to know what Sophie wants," says Mikey, not budging. "It's really suspicious that she wants to meet us in a graveyard - it'd be a perfect place to hide our bodies, don't you think? She'd just need to shove us into an unmarked grave - there was a book I read once with that plot." But even as he's speaking he's lifting a shaking leg up, then the other, then suddenly he drops, collapsing to the ground in front of me.

"Are you okay?" I say, trying to help him up. He shakes me off, getting to his feet and brushing himself down.

"So, I've learned breaking into graveyards isn't one of my talents," he says. "And I'm okay with that. Only problem is, there aren't any rocks on this side."

"That's a great observation, Mikey," says Nikki, turning to me. "How the hell are we going to get out?"

They have a point, and it is a concern. The ground is completely flat, and the fence is high. "We can worry about that later," I say. "Let's go and speak to Sophie."

"She's late," says Nikki. It's 8.01 p.m. and we're standing by Ivy's grave. There's no sign of Sophie. "This could be a trap, couldn't it? Like, she could call the police on us - we're trespassing."

"They've got bigger things to worry about than us," I say, trying to brush her off. Plus, the police are the last people Sophie would want to see - we've got the video of her breaking into the house.

"It's not a trap," says a quiet voice behind us. We all spin around, as Sophie emerges from some trees. Her hair is lank and greasy, and there's a general air of grime about her that was missing on Tuesday. "You all came."

I stare at her. Now that she's in front of me, any notion of confronting her for betraying us is gone. Her eyes look empty, her cheeks hollow. She looks like someone's sucked all the life out of her.

"I didn't know who I could turn to - Topher's dead and..." Tears leak down her cheeks. "And I'm *relieved*."

There are a thousand questions running through my head - does she want sympathy from me?

"Did you kill Topher?" asks Nikki sharply, but I already know she didn't before she even shakes her head.

"You were at the Orange Flamingo with us on Friday, weren't you?" I say. "You're the one who locked me and Mikey and Liam inside. And you've been breaking into my bedroom and leaving the messages!"

Slowly, Sophie nods, and the tears come thick and fast. "I'm so ashamed," she whispers, and for some reason that's what makes me angry. I want her to be a villain, want her to tell me she would do everything again and she has no regrets - I want her to be someone I can hate. But she looks so lost and alone. I want to scream at her that she can't have it both ways. She can't do horrible things to me, and then just act really sorry and expect that everything will be okay.

"Why did you do it?" I say. "You'd better have a good reason - is it because Monday had some serious dirt on you, is that what it is? And that doesn't even matter. Who the hell *is* Monday? You've been working with them, you obviously know." My voice comes out harsher than I intend, but who cares - Sophie can give us all the answers. We're going to beat Monday, and a whole day ahead of time. We're so *close*.

Sophie blinks at me, and frustration builds in me, that she's being so slow, that she's not understanding the urgency of the situation. She's here, she obviously needs our help - unless *this* is the sabotage on Saturday, and I've missed something. Paranoia grows in me. Monday's not even sent a message and they're still messing with my head.

"I don't know what you're talking about," Sophie whispers, and I fight the urge to throw something at her. Mikey seems to understand how close I am to bubbling over, because he grabs my arm, like he's worried I'm physically going to tackle her.

"You can't act stupid!" I burst out. "I literally have a video of you breaking into my bedroom and waving at the camera and *smiling*."

Sophie's mouth opens and closes. "It didn't feel like breaking in...I had a key."

I knew it, I almost say, but I stop myself. I feel weirdly relieved – my random passing thought after Sophie smashed the pet camera was correct.

“Monday has a *key*?” gapes Nikki. “How the hell does Monday have a key?”

Sophie looks from me, to Nikki, to Mikey, and confusion knits across her face. There’s a sinking feeling in my stomach – she’s not supposed to look confused. She’s meant to have all the answers.

“What’s wrong?” I say.

Sophie swallows, and I can tell there are two parts of her fighting against each other – she wants to please us and answer my question. And she also doesn’t want to disappoint us, and knows that answering my question will lead to that. It’s weird how well I can read her. Maybe she hasn’t changed as much as I thought she had.

“I’m just...I’m sorry,” she says. “You keep talking about... Monday. And I don’t know what that means.”

I gape at her. Mikey is still gripping my arm, and he digs his fingers deeper, pinching slightly. I shoot him a look and he loosens up, shaking his head, his mouth open. He doesn’t understand either.

“What do you mean, you don’t know?” I say, trying to keep my voice from shaking. “You’ve been working for Monday. The anonymous person who is behind everything, who left me a bunch of notes. *You* left me notes from them.”

“No,” says Sophie. “No.” Her voice is louder now. “I mean, yes, I left notes for you. I never read them, though. And it’s only because *he* told me to.”

“Who?” Me and Nikki say together.

Sophie bites her bottom lip, and all the passion she had when she was defending herself a moment ago is gone. Her shoulders slump forward, and she looks around like she’s

worried about being overheard, even though we're obviously still alone. "Topher."

I blink at her.

"Topher is *dead*," I say, slightly too loudly considering we're in a graveyard and it's probably not the most sensitive thing to be shrieking. Especially since that happened just over twenty-four hours ago. "He's not Monday. Monday killed him."

"Maybe he *was* Monday," says Mikey. "If he told Sophie to leave you notes from Monday... It makes sense."

"Then who the hell did that display at the Cleverly house today?" I say. "And who killed him?"

Mikey obviously doesn't have any answers. "An accomplice?" he suggests, then grimaces like he wishes he hadn't said it.

"It feels like everyone in this town is Monday's accomplice," I say, feeling bitter. I look back at Sophie, the irritation returning at how confused she looks. "So, why'd you do it, huh? Why'd you break into my house and leave the notes? And why'd you smile at the camera?" It's a minor point, but it's rankled me – the glee she had for what she was doing. "And obviously Liam...and the fake fire on Friday. You made us think we were going to *die*."

"Topher told me to," she repeats.

"And you just did whatever Topher said?" I fold my arms.

She looks at the ground. "He said...he'd look after me. And he'd *leave* me if I didn't..."

So they *were* together. Props to me, I was right about this too. "How did your relationship even start?" I say. "*When* did it start."

"Ivy," says Sophie. "I was visiting her grave a few months ago, and he was there, visiting from university, and we started talking about...death. About his mum, about Ivy. And we met up again and again, whenever he was back, and we would talk every night, for hours, and he just...understood. Everything I was going through, he had gone through it too. He had loved Ivy, and lost her, just like me. And he'd lost his mum, and his dad barely cared about him - he understood what it was like for me and my relationship with my parents..."

Sure he did. I had thought he understood when he talked with me in the graveyard on Monday. Or maybe he had just told me what I thought I needed to hear.

"But didn't you feel...weird?" I say. "Dating Ivy's ex?"

Sophie shakes her head as she looks down on Ivy's grave. "We both loved her," she says quietly. "We bonded over it. Or, well...I spoke about how much I missed her, and he listened."

"But then how did that turn into..." I trail off, gesturing widely in a way I hope shows I mean *everything*.

"I left home on Monday, and I was staying in the old Cleverly house," said Sophie. "But then Topher told me Mr Reed had found my tent, so he hid me in his place instead and said I needed to do things for him, that otherwise our relationship would be one-sided and it was just me taking, taking, taking from him. He told me...to leave that note to you on Thursday, and that I should wave when I broke your camera, and he's the one who said I should be there on

Friday and tie up Liam and wait for a confession about his dad... He never told me what it was all for, I promise."

"And you're the one who put the rat on my bed on Tuesday?" I say.

"No," says Sophie, her eyebrows knotting together. "No, I just left the notes on Thursday."

So that might have actually been Monday then, leaving the rat. Which makes sense - a key wouldn't have helped, because they would have had to walk past me while I was downstairs. They probably *did* climb up through Uncle Dara's bedroom window, with the ladder. Or maybe it wasn't Monday, but Topher - but then how the hell does he fit into this? He can't be Monday, because he's dead and surely Monday's the one who killed him in line with their threat to me. Was *he* being forced by Monday in turn, or did he willingly help? "I still don't get *why* you did it?" I say, my voice turning to a croak. "Just because Topher asked?"

Sophie looks at me helplessly. "I didn't have anyone else. Just him. He's the only one who loved me. Ivy died, and you left, and Nikki stopped talking to everyone, and Mikey made new friends, and all I had was people I hang out with at lunch, but who never even speak to me outside school..."

I look at Mikey and Nikki. Their faces are full of guilt - and I don't know what to say. Topher was responsible for telling Sophie to leave those notes, either because he teamed up with Monday willingly and wanted to target me, for some reason, or because, like Sophie, he was forced to. But he's not Monday, because Monday killed him in the fire on Friday, and sabotaged the crime scene on Saturday.

And Sophie still did those things to hurt me. She's always been a follower - no matter who it hurt.

No, that's not fair. I know who Topher was. He was a bully, he was controlling. I've seen the messages he sent to Ivy. Sophie was vulnerable, and he exploited her, and I can

even see how. Grief makes you feel alone, because you *are* alone. When someone dies, everyone who loved them loses a different person, because everyone had a slightly different relationship with them. No one can quite understand that unique loss. You become an island, and grief becomes the sea battering against you.

But if someone comes along, tells you they know *exactly* how you feel, builds a bridge to your island, climbs aboard, promises to weather the storm with you... I can see how that could become intoxicating.

I could have fallen for that too.

Both things can be true – Sophie did bad things, but she’s not a bad person.

I shut everyone out when Aunt Sandra died. I left town and put all my bad memories in a box and I tried to move on. We both had unhealthy ways of coping with what we had lost, and that made it easier for Topher to come along and support her... Until he turned it around and wanted her to repay the favour.

“I’m sorry,” says Mikey. “I really am, Sophie. After Ivy died I thought you didn’t *want* to hang out with just me. And it looked like you had other friends too. But Topher didn’t love you.”

“He *did*,” says Sophie, and her voice cracks. “No one’s ever going to love me like him. He knew how horrible it was at home for me, with my dad and his new girlfriend who doesn’t want a kid in the way, and he knew how much happier I would be if I left. He’d been through similar too, with his dad.”

I shake my head, because how can she say she loves him and also be relieved he’s gone? I look at Mikey and Nikki, hoping they’ll know what to say. This feels above me. Maybe Topher really empathized with her – or maybe he just learned about the things that hurt her in order to use them

against her. Either way, he acted like she owed him a debt, which means he was a horrible person. But *she* can't see that, at least not yet.

"Were you happier after you left?" I say.

Sophie rubs her arms, like she's caught a chill. "Yes," she says. "I mean, it wasn't always nice being in the Cleverly house by myself..."

I remember the photos she put up - of us, of her friends, to remember a time when she was happier, when she wasn't alone. I don't know what to say to make things better between us. How did everything get so messed up?

"But you were happier before," I say. "When it was us and Ivy."

"Not always," says Sophie. "I mean the night she died... She was...she wasn't the nicest. And Mikey and I were supposed to go home, but I didn't because Dad was out with his girlfriend and I didn't want to go back and I couldn't tell anyone that because I was, I don't know, ashamed. So I ended up walking around the woods for a while, and sleeping in the Cleverly house. And then Ivy died and everything changed. And I'm...really sorry. Everything I do is wrong and..." She shakes her head and tears slide down her cheeks, and if there was any part of me that was still angry at her, it's gone now. I step forward, and hug her, and it's like the past week, the past *year*, didn't happen. Only it did, and I don't think a hug is enough - because this is my fault too. Just like with Mikey, I left town and tried to forget about Sophie, and even when I came back it never occurred to me to seek her out.

She grips me back, and we stand - and I know there are more questions to ask, because we *need* to solve this mystery. But for a moment we're not in a graveyard, standing by Ivy - we're Kay and Sophie, who were friends, good friends, and could be again.

I pull away, and Nikki gives Sophie an awkward wave. "Hugging's not really my thing," she says. "But I too am here for you."

"Where did you sleep last night?" says Mikey. "If you were staying at the Cleverly house, then at Topher's..."

"Here," says Sophie, spreading her arms out. "I camped underneath some trees with the really old graves that no one ever goes to."

"Aren't you scared you'll be hurt?" says Nikki. "There's a murderer about..."

Sophie is back to looking confused. "No, why would I be afraid? I know who killed Topher – the same person who killed Ivy."

I blink at her, my heart starting to hammer before I've even registered what she's said. This is exactly what I hoped would happen, that she would be able to tell me all the answers. I turn to Nikki and Mikey. They're both wearing identical expressions of shock. "You said you hadn't heard of Monday," I say to Sophie.

"No," says Sophie. "I don't know who that is. But I know who killed Topher and Ivy – the person who hated them both. Mr Reed."

I don't know why, but my body jerks when she says *Mr Reed*. Like I'm expecting it and I'm not – and I have a sense of deflation that I don't understand. I want to say *ah, of course*. He's on my list of suspects, of course it was him, I knew all along.

But I can't, because this doesn't make sense to me.

"Why would Mr Reed kill his own son?" I say.

Sophie nibbles her bottom lip. "Topher made me promise not to say..." But she looks at Mikey, at Nikki, at me – at Ivy's gravestone – and squares her shoulders as she takes a deep breath. "It's simple really. Mr Reed probably wouldn't have killed his own son. But Topher wasn't his son."

I blink at her, trying to work through what she's just told me. "I don't understand," I say.

"Mrs Reed had an affair," says Sophie. "And Topher wasn't Mr Reed's biological son. Who knows why he didn't just leave her - maybe it was all about keeping up appearances. Or Topher said they'd been trying for a kid for a while. Either way, Mr Reed sounded like...a bad father."

"That's why he waited so long before he reported Mrs Reed missing," says Nikki. "Because he didn't care."

Mrs Reed's accident, on a quiet stretch of road where her brakes failed and no one knew for twenty-four hours.

"How did Topher find out Mr Reed wasn't his dad?" I say.

"Routine blood test," says Sophie. "And Mrs Reed confessed, and that was that..."

I sit down, trying to take in what this means. So, Mr Reed is Monday? That would explain why Topher was involved in threatening us, and why he would have killed Topher. But why kill Ivy? And why target me and Nikki? Is this really to do with the Committee? Does he hate what our family represents that much?

"Why are you so certain Mr Reed killed Ivy?" I say. There's too much to think about - I want to focus on one

thing at a time. "And if you're so sure, why haven't you gone to the police?"

"I saw him in the woods the night Ivy died," says Sophie. "After I went back to the Cleverly house. Him and Topher walked past, and Mr Reed was holding a bottle - with a gold cap, just like the one Ivy had."

Nikki gasps, and there's relief on her face as she grips my arm. She was right - there were other people in the woods that night. A man and a teenage boy. She must have heard Mr Reed and Topher. They were saying something about *covering it up*.

Puzzle pieces fit together in my mind.

"Did Topher give Ivy the alcohol we drank that night?" I ask. "The vodka?"

"Yes," says Sophie. "Yes, he did. He took it from Mr Reed's collection - and the beers too."

And maybe he supplied something more. Ivy had drugs in her system when she died. What if he drugged the vodka? Nikki was *very* drunk that night too, considering how little alcohol she'd had - she was the only other person who drank from that bottle.

And then Topher and Mr Reed were talking about *covering it up* - it being Ivy's *murder*? Nikki said she dropped the vodka bottle but no one ever found it. She thought she was an unreliable witness - the vodka bottle vanished, she heard Ivy saying, "I won't jump," but didn't see her speaking to anyone. But maybe Mr Reed and Topher found the vodka and took it so it couldn't be tested for the drugs it was laced with.

"Ivy called someone that night," says Nikki slowly. "I heard her when I was leaning against a tree. She said she loved them and wanted to see them. I wasn't sure that's what I heard - but it was really true. Topher and Mr Reed were in the woods, and they wanted to cover it all up, and

Ivy...Ivy fought back and said she wouldn't jump and I...I really heard it..." She trails off, like she is contemplating what this means.

I turn my focus back to what we now know: Ivy was speaking to Topher. But he was already in the woods, and she didn't know.

"One thing that *still* doesn't make sense," says Mikey. "Is why would Mr Reed kill Ivy?"

"Because he was helping Topher," I say. "Maybe Topher wanted to cover up the fact that he'd given Ivy drugs, and it all went too far."

"If he wanted to help Topher then why would he kill him?" Mikey blinks. It's a fair point, one I don't really want to think about – everything else is falling into place. There are a few loose ends, yes, but otherwise it all fits in neatly.

But why create Monday? Why come after Nikki and me? Why threaten Liam? Mr Reed is apparently friends with Richard Maldin...

"No, he killed Ivy because she knew about the big Reed family secret, about Topher not being Mr Reed's son," says Sophie. "Topher told her – which was a mistake, of course. You know what Ivy was like with secrets."

We all look at each other. Yes, we all know what she was like with secrets. She'd hoard them like gold, waiting for the right moment to use them.

"Ivy wanted a better grade in maths, said she'd spill Mr Reed's secret if she didn't get what she wanted," continues Sophie. "And three days later..." She glances at Ivy's gravestone and a shiver goes through me.

"Topher was pretty liberal with letting people know he wasn't Mr Reed's biological son," I say. "Considering it *was* such a big secret. One that Mr Reed would be willing to kill for to stop it getting out."

Sophie's lips pinch together. "He told the people he loved," she says, and her voice is firm – she really believes what she's saying.

Except I don't think it's the right motive for Mr Reed, because, once more, *why Monday?* Why Nikki and me?

Sophie shifts from foot to foot, and for the first time I properly notice how tired she looks.

"You should come back to Uncle Dara's house," I say. "Get some food in you."

"We can't go to the police with this," says Nikki, and there's a look of frustration on her face. "Mr Reed has got them in his pocket, and we still don't have any physical evidence."

"We'll get it," I say firmly. "Tomorrow, we'll confront him. Before he kills again."

Monday – 8.09 p.m. – Nikki

For a moment she didn't move.

Maybe she hadn't heard a scream.

Maybe it was all in her head.

But she staggered to her feet, just in case.

She could run away. Right now. Because that scream had sounded terrified and she was drunk and she couldn't do anything anyway.

But she didn't. She headed back in the direction of the river ledge – in the direction of the noise.

Back to Ivy.

SUNDAY

Sophie shows us a gate on the other side of the graveyard, hidden behind some trees, where the lock is broken and hasn't yet been replaced. We stroll out easily.

Nikki and I say goodbye to Mikey, and promise to meet up with him first thing in the morning, and then sneak Sophie into the attic. Nikki finds some blankets and a spare pillow for her to sleep on the floor. Uncle Dara will be off in the morning; he won't know. I lie awake as the clock ticks, aware that Sophie is less than a metre away from me, and even after Monday is over, she's still got nowhere to go. I don't know how we're meant to help her.

I grab my phone, my eyes watering as I squint at the bright screen. If Aunt Sandra were here, I'd ask her what we should do. I can't put that on Uncle Dara, though, he's too fragile. I scroll to my last chat with Mum and Dad, about whether I'm helping Uncle Dara with the cooking. Anything except what's important. Why don't we talk about serious stuff? Why do we all bury our feelings deep down?

I check my phone – 2.30 a.m.

"Kay?" comes a soft voice. "Are you awake?"

"Yeah," I say. "How'd you know?"

"You wouldn't stop tossing and turning," Sophie replies.

I fold my arms as I lie on my back, staring up at the darkness. "Will you ever go home again?" I say.

"No," says Sophie. "It's not a home for me. I want something *better*. And I'll be eighteen soon, and I'll go to uni and I'll make my own way." She falls silent for a second, then, "Do you ever think about the night Ivy died?"

I sit up. She's a dark shape on the floor, cuddled in her blankets. "What kind of question is that? Of course I do."

"It's just...we never really talked about that night. I guess we were all in shock...and then everything happened with your aunt, and you left, and I got to the point where I was okay to speak about it - and I had no one to talk to." Sophie falls silent for a second. "That's part of the reason I was so happy when Topher started talking to me."

It sounds strange, but I almost understand. It's what I've just been thinking about - wanting someone to share all the bad stuff with, someone I wouldn't feel like I was burdening with all my sadness and pain. It should have been my parents. They're supposed to be wise and know what to do. Except Mum obviously lost her sister - anything I felt was secondary. Dad was never an emotional type, and his parents were the same: be grateful for opportunity, never complain.

So, I buried things just like they taught me.

"I always think about what I could have done differently," continues Sophie. "I replay things again and again in my head..." She falls silent for a second, and her breathing is so steady I wonder if she's somehow fallen asleep. "Do you miss Ivy?"

No. Yes. When she was alive, I sometimes hated her. And yet I wanted her approval so badly. I wanted her to like me, to think I was cool, because she seemed to know everything, she was self-assured and she was going to leave Longrove and go on and live a big life. I lived for those moments when her face would light up at something I had said, my heart

bursting with warmth – working for her approval meant when I got it, I *earned* it. And then she could take it all away with a sharp sentence, and the floor would crumble beneath me when she did.

“You know what I miss,” I say. “When you, me and Ivy used to have sleepovers. And we’d stay up late and watch films and eat popcorn and chocolate.” And read celebrity gossip and scroll through social media and judge everyone, and paint our nails, and everything was simple.

Sophie is silent, and I almost wish I hadn’t spoken. Maybe she’s still thinking about Ivy, maybe she’s thinking about how we’re having a sleepover right now, and it’s awkward and strange.

Instead, she says, “What was Mr Reed’s threat for Sunday?”

It feels wrong to hear his name instead of *Monday*.

“A stabbing,” I say. “A stabbing on Sunday.” But we’re going to be okay – we’ll be safe. Uncle Dara will be out of town, and me and Nikki and Sophie and Mikey are going to stick together, and we’re going to track Mr Reed down and end things once and for all.

“Why’d you go back to the woods?” Sophie asks suddenly. “The night Ivy died.”

A jolt goes through me, though I don’t know why. “What do you mean?” I say. “I didn’t go back. I went straight home.”

“But I saw you coming out of the woods,” says Sophie. “After Ivy fell...though I obviously didn’t know that’s what had happened.”

I frown. “I didn’t go back,” I say. “I went home.”

“I mean, it was dark, but it was definitely you. Going past the Cleverly house,” says Sophie. “Well...almost definitely.” She sounds less certain now.

I purse my lips. I went home... But Nikki was still in the woods when Ivy died. Could Sophie have mistaken me for

Nikki? We look similar, she would have been looking at a slight distance, from the Cleverly house.

Thinking of the Cleverly house reminds me of something else. "You had a knife, in the Cleverly house," I say. "In the kitchen, in a drawer."

Sophie snorts softly. "It was supposed to protect me."

"Wouldn't you have, I don't know, slept with it beside you?" I say. If I was going to keep a knife as protection, I wouldn't stick it in another room.

"I did," says Sophie. "I took it from my dad's house, his girlfriend has been slowly moving in a bunch of her stuff. And then I realized I couldn't use it and I thought I'd hide it away."

"You hid it in...the kitchen drawers," I say. Not a great hiding place, Sophie. "Mr Reed found it straight away. I don't really get why he took it - maybe he was being a responsible adult, maybe he wanted to use it for the *stabbing on Sunday* threat."

"I just felt safer knowing it was somewhere near, just in case," whispers Sophie. "I don't even really know what I was afraid *of*. But I just had a bad feeling..."

Me too. Because with what happened to Ivy and now Topher, there have been two murders in this town in two years, and everyone is happy to think they're accidents.

Because there's supposed to be a stabbing today, and my own murder tomorrow.

And we've only got one proper suspect now, Mr Reed, and if we're wrong...

I close my eyes. We can't be wrong, because we're almost out of time. It *has* to be him.

Nikki and I are up early – not that I ended up getting any sleep anyway – to see Uncle Dara off. Sophie's fast asleep when I slip out of the room, cocooned in her blankets on the floor, her hair spread on her white pillow. She looks young and vulnerable and peaceful, like she knows she's safe. Despite our conversation last night, despite her saying she took a knife with her to the Cleverly house because she was so afraid. And that makes me feel...sad. Because last night was a one-off, and if I'm not murdered on Monday, I'll still be leaving Longrove.

I let her sleep. There's no point waking her up, not until Uncle Dara's out of the house. Besides, she obviously needs to rest.

At 8 a.m. we give Uncle Dara one last hug and then wave bye as he gets into the taxi that will take him to the train station.

Sophie comes hurrying down the stairs the second he's gone, hovering at the bottom like she's unsure how to act around us.

"I think we should try to find evidence that'll take down Mr Reed," she says, her voice slightly shaking. "And I know where we can find it. At Longrove High."

I blink at her, waiting for her to expand – she...thinks we'll find evidence Mr Reed murdered Ivy and Topher at the high

school? “Er...why would Mr Reed keep evidence of his own wrongdoing there? And what evidence would there be? If he burned down the Cleverly house, there wouldn’t be anything linking him to it at the school anyway. Same with pushing Ivy.”

We head into the kitchen, where Nikki is making some tea for all of us.

“No,” says Sophie. “I don’t think there’s any concrete evidence of him killing Ivy – and same with Topher, though I can’t be sure. Obviously, we haven’t been able to investigate the crime scene and, like...do the investigations the police are.”

“Not that they’re doing much,” I mutter, and Nikki makes a noise of agreement.

“But that’s not the only way we can take him down,” says Sophie. “Topher said Mr Reed’s finances have been investigated before, because he’s in charge of all the money the Committee makes. Only he’d heard Mr Reed speaking to some dodgy financial advisor that they’d never find the proof, because *it was hidden in his office*. So, Topher searched his office because he wanted to have some leverage if he needed it. He was getting fed up of his dad. Topher didn’t like football, he didn’t even like the degree he picked – his dad said it was a good choice, and apparently his dad held a lot of stuff over his head. Drugs, for one thing. He was willing to turn Topher in if he didn’t listen to him. But there wasn’t anything at his home.”

“Hidden in his office at school,” I say, and I look at Nikki to gauge her reaction. Her face is scrunched up, and she doesn’t look particularly happy.

“How does this help us?” she says. “How does this prove Mr Reed is Monday? How does it explain why he’s been coming after us?”

"It doesn't," says Sophie. "But he'd get investigated, he'd be under the police's scrutiny - he'd be locked away."

"Would that all happen by...tomorrow?" I ask, but I already know the answer. No - but perhaps we could threaten him with it, stop him coming after us. It's desperate - but what else can we do?

He's running around Longrove with Sophie's knife, ready for a stabbing on Sunday. A knife that would surely implicate her, since her fingerprints would be all over it and his aren't, since he wore gloves when he took it from the drawer - a neat way to get rid of Topher and Sophie, two people involved in Monday's scheme. And Kerry Richmond bought the rat, for the thrill on Tuesday. I have no idea how he managed to convince her to do it. Maybe he didn't tell her the whole story, maybe he did and she was willing to do whatever the leader of the Committee wanted. Plus, he was a bystander for the wreckage on Wednesday, and he would have been sent Aunt Sandra's letter to the Committee, that we received on Thursday. And the fire on Friday killed the son he hated, and on Saturday he put his own face on the side of the house, alongside the Committee's leaflet - to taunt us, maybe, because the police aren't taking this seriously. He's been very careful to make sure there's been nothing to identify him as Monday.

But why target *me*? Why send Nikki notes? And why make this whole week a game? We're missing the crucial big clue that explains everything, that ties it all together.

We have the *who* but not the *why* - and we don't have time to dot every i and cross every t, because Monday is almost here. And *stabbing* today... That could mean any of us are on the line.

"Let's break into Longrove High," I say.

Mikey comes over about twenty minutes later. He and Sophie both protest over one major aspect of my school-breaking-in plan – that they should wait outside the school gates and keep watch, and alert us if they see anyone coming.

“We should come with you and station ourselves outside Mr Reed’s office,” says Mikey. “That makes more sense.”

“No, it doesn’t,” I say. “By the time you see someone coming, they’ll have seen *you* and it’ll be too late.” There’s only one road and a small footpath leading to Longrove High, which means it’ll be easy to spot anyone coming up them.

“Both of us don’t need to wait outside,” says Sophie. “Only one person needs to keep watch.” She glances at Mikey, but she’s too nice to say he should be the one left outside.

“No, we stay in pairs,” I say. “Stabbing on *Sunday*, remember?” There’s a second reason I don’t want to go inside with Sophie, though it feels unfair to say aloud. I’m sure she believes what she’s told me is true, and we had that nice moment last night, and she’s probably not going to stab me now – because she had a great opportunity already while I was asleep... But her source of information is Topher – who *wasn’t* a reliable source. It’s going to take more time before I fully trust her – we’re going to be walking into a new location, looking for evidence which may or may not even

help us. But I'm desperate, so here we are. If she stays outside, Mikey can keep an eye on her.

Nikki nods. "And we need to get moving, rather than just chatting about this." She shoots me a concerned look, obviously aware that with every passing second we inch closer to Monday.

We head out. Longrove has always been eerily empty on a Sunday morning – people lie in, the streets are quiet. Except I have a horrible feeling that I'm being watched.

Nikki, Ivy and I used to walk to school together, but as we traipse the familiar route, I can't remember that final journey in. I *do* remember my last day at school before I moved, though, sitting in the canteen with Sophie. I might as well have been alone because neither of us spoke. There wasn't that much fanfare about me going – me leaving would make no impact to the ecosystem of the school. But all the same, when I walked out, I thought to myself, *I'm never coming back here.*

Who'd have thought just over a year later I *would* be back, with the intent of breaking in?

"Are there any alarms or anything?" Nikki asks, as we turn down the road that leads to the imposing red-brick building, with the big gates that look like they should belong to a prison.

"Not that I've ever tried breaking in," says Mikey. "But no? There's a lot of windows that would be easy enough to climb through, once we get past the gate."

It's the gate that feels like the biggest barrier, a structure of black railings that circle the entire grounds. But as we approach, I see we don't need to worry about the first part of getting inside – the gate is simply on a latch.

"Do they not lock it at all?" I say. I know Longrove is supposed to be safe, but this is taking things to the next level

- surely there are computers and things inside that people might want to steal.

"I feel like they should," frowns Mikey and he drags Sophie over to examine the gate more closely. "Do you think it looks like it's been broken?"

"I don't know," says Sophie, scratching the back of her head. "It looks like a standard latch to me."

The back of my neck is still prickling, and I turn around to make sure no one is watching - but the road that leads to Longrove High is lined with trees, and otherwise empty.

At the end of the road I think there's movement, someone pulling back to hide behind a tree, but that could just be my imagination.

"Did you see that?" I mutter to Nikki, who is also frowning at the road behind us.

"See what?" she says. "I have a bad feeling about this." She lowers her voice, but Mikey and Sophie are too busy discussing the latch to listen anyway. "What if Sophie's been tricked? And the stabbing on Sunday...that doesn't fit with Mr Reed. He wants the town to look as good as possible, that's the point of the Committee. Burning down the Cleverly house would make sense, it was an eyesore - but the fact that Topher was inside turns it into something a *lot* more extreme. And a stabbing doesn't fit at all."

A shiver goes through me - how far would Mr Reed be willing to go to get rid of the Orange Flamingo? To get my family out of Longrove? Who else in town would go along with it? And would he be willing to...kill us to do it? If he could make the stabbing look like an accident?

"We'll see you soon," I say to Mikey as we join them. "If you see a missed call from me, something weird has happened and you should get out of here and phone the police."

He nods, and looks like he wants to say something but decides against it.

Nikki and I head inside the grounds, and up to the front door of the school.

"This feels a bit silly," says Nikki. "Surely we should, I don't know, try to find an open window or something that we can climb through? Not that I'm saying I'll be any good at it but wouldn't that make more sense than trying to stroll through the main entrance?"

She's right - there are cameras at the entrance. One of the few places in the school that has any surveillance.

I don't know what compels me to check the door anyway. It's a moss-green colour, exactly like it was when I was here, though the colour is chipped and it looks a bit grimier - no one has thought to give it a fresh coat of paint in the past year.

I can see the camera, pointed directly at me, and there's no telltale red blinking that means it's on.

Someone has shut the surveillance off.

And the front gate was open, so why not this door?

I try the handle and it swings open, nice and easy. No alarm peals - we walk straight in. From what I can see, the corridor inside is dark.

"Someone's already been here," I say quietly. I look at Nikki - her eyes are wide with fear. "This could be a trap."

"Let's just go," she says.

"If we're aware, we'll...be prepared." I nibble my bottom lip - is Mr Reed waiting for us somewhere inside? I grip my phone. Mikey is waiting for any hint that something has gone wrong. It'll take two seconds to call him.

"We can't walk into something we *know* is a trap," says Nikki. "And there's no other reason for everything to be open for us."

“Or maybe someone knows there’s something important inside,” says a voice behind us.

Nikki grips my hand as we twirl around. Terror shoots through me and blood rushes to my face. *A stabbing on Sunday.*

Liam is standing behind us. He's wearing an oversized dark grey T-shirt and grey joggers, and a black cap. It almost looks like he's rolled straight out of bed.

Nikki is still holding my hand, like it's helping her keep calm. My heart is racing and I feel weak.

"What are you doing here?" says Nikki, at the same time as I say, "You've been following us, haven't you?"

Liam shrugs. "I looked out of my window this morning and saw Mikey going past, so I followed him. He went into your house, and you, Nikki and Sophie came out with him. I thought that was odd - your old gang back together. I didn't realize you were all still friends, so I followed. I saw you were coming here, I came up the footpath. Mikey and Sophie were looking the other way..." He trails off as he looks up at the school. "You know, don't you?"

I see movement to my left - Nikki's opening her mouth, looking confused. I grip her hand tighter, to get her to keep quiet while I figure out how to play this. Maybe with unearned confidence, pretend I know exactly what he's talking about. "Yes," I say. "We know. Not everything...but

enough.” That’s vague enough that I won’t have made a mistake, and not *too* confident that it sounds unbelievable.

His eyes are narrowed – he’s not believing me. I was *too* vague.

It’s time to take a risk. “Mr Reed was always the most powerful man in Longrove,” I say in a low voice. If he’s not speaking about Mr Reed then I’ve screwed this up – but who *else* could he be talking about?

“How did you find out?” he says, folding his arms.

Two can play at this game. “How did *you*?” We’re at a standstill now, both unwilling to speak.

“Ivy,” he says at last. “Ivy knew everything. And she knew about Mr Reed.”

It’s still not clear what secret he’s talking about – the dodgy stuff with the Committee funds, or Topher being the result of an affair? “And Ivy told *you*?” I ask. Why would Ivy have cared about what the Committee were doing with their money? She loved secrets, but stuff that would benefit her. She wouldn’t have cared about their fundraisers and bake sales.

“I told you, Ivy and me were friends,” he says. “Closer friends than I think you realize.” He pulls out his phone. “I’ll prove it – I was the last person she called, before... She left me a voicemail.”

“And you kept it?” says Nikki. She drops my hand, rubbing her hands along her arms like she’s cold.

Liam sucks in his cheeks. “Yeah,” he says. “I saved it. It’s the last time I ever heard her voice...” He swallows like there’s a big lump in his throat. “Here.” He presses play, and I take a step back as Ivy’s voice blasts out of the speaker.

“Topher and me – it’s over. It’s over and he’s left me. He says I’m too young for him and I said I’m not, see, I’ll show you I’m not. And he said here, prove it and I took it and then he said I’m a mess, but I’m not, I swear, I’m not a

mess. I'm Ivy Harchester, I'm the one in charge, you know that, right? Topher didn't affect me at all. I deleted all my messages to him... I think..."

She pauses and lets out a small burp. Her words are slurred, confused.

"I buried the phone, and I'm never going to look at it again. He's nothing to me. I'm going to get out of Longrove and I'm going to make him regret the day he left me... I told him I'd tell everyone about the drugs, and how he'd given me some, and he said his dad would help him cover it up..."

I almost feel sick. It's a voice I thought I'd never hear again, but it doesn't sound like Ivy. She was never that open with me. And this explains the randomly deleted messages on the phone – the actions of a drugged, drunk person.

"So you thought Mr Reed killed Ivy this whole time?" says Nikki, her voice laced with anger. "You had this proof that he had a motive – both him and Topher, and you just sat on it?"

"Mr Reed is the most powerful man in town," Liam shoots back. "He knew about my dad. And my dad does his best to stay in Mr Reed's good books, but it's hard. Mr Reed always has his own agenda."

That explains why Richard was with Mr Reed in the woods yesterday. But more importantly, we have an explanation for why Topher is dead. Mr Reed helped him cover up the drugs, and there's physical proof of it – but Topher rooted through his files, he was getting fed up of his dad. His loyalty was waning. Maybe he even threatened to spill *all* their secrets.

It's all guesswork at the moment, but it makes some sort of sense. Except I still don't see a proper reason for Mr Reed to want to kill *me*. We don't have an explanation for *Monday*.

And there's a horrible feeling in the pit of my stomach as I look at the door of the school, swinging open. There might be answers waiting inside, or there might be a trap.

But the clock is ticking. I need to stop this. I need the truth.

I never realized it, but there's something incredibly sinister about a school without anyone inside. All the lights are off, and because it's just one big building, a lot of the corridors don't have natural light – it's just the classrooms that have windows. That means even though it's only late morning, it's basically like night inside.

As we're walking, I message Mikey: *Something weird is going on, be ready to phone the police if I say to.*

He replies instantly: *ok*

I type out a reply but don't send it: *phone police*. There's strong phone signal throughout the school – an anomaly in Longrove, much to many teachers' chagrin, but it works well for us now. No chance of getting trapped somewhere without being able to call for help.

Liam and Nikki switch on their phone torches to light the way. I'm wary of letting Liam come with us. He's been involved with Monday before, and I don't trust him. Plus, Ivy might have made up that story about him being a stalker, but Liam's reputation of being a liar was all his own work.

Fear is gnawing my chest – this is Mr Reed's home turf. All the corridors look the same, but every time we turn a corner, my heart jumps. I'm expecting something to come lurching out to grab us, and I'm poised to shove them and run as fast as I can – but there's nothing.

We walk quickly, our footsteps silent on the blue rubber flooring. Mr Reed's office is at the other side of the building. I only remember going to it a few times, largely to deliver messages from other teachers. It's not somewhere I was ever called to because I was in trouble – but Nikki would have been asked to go in, when she was suspended for cheating.

Because of Monday.

Mr Reed, playing the game.

"I don't trust him," mutters Nikki to me, her eyes fixed on Liam's back. He's edged ahead of us. She's not thinking about Mr Reed at all. "This is all too convenient."

Before I can reply, we're at Mr Reed's office, with his name across the frosted glass in gold letters.

Liam pushes the door open. Mr Reed's office is like a hotel suite; it has an outer area where his assistant would work at the desk in the corner, and where students wait if they're called to speak to him. Then there are two doors – one in each corner, leading to other rooms – one his formal office with his desk, where he works. And the second room is filled with filing cabinets. I only ever caught a glimpse of that room once, when I was handing over a note to his assistant and Mr Reed happened to be walking out. He glared at me as he locked the door, but I didn't think much of that – I knew he wasn't a fan of me.

I try the door now and...yes. It's open, even though Mr Reed definitely would have kept it locked. This is bordering on weird – it's like someone knows exactly where we'll be going.

I flash my phone torch around – there's a light pull dangling from the ceiling. A naked bulb flickers to life, but it doesn't do much to light up the space, which is small and lined with filing cabinets. Already the dull lighting is making

my eyes feel slightly funny - I want to be out of here as quickly as we can.

"Let's start searching," I say, pulling at one of the cabinets, but for the first time since we arrived...something's locked. "Well, that's great," I say, because what are we supposed to do now?

"Let's check them all," says Nikki. "He might have forgotten to lock one."

"I'll search the main room, then Mr Reed's little office area," says Liam, peering into the cabinet room. "There's not enough space in here."

Nikki stands up straight, her hand hovering over the handle of a cabinet. "I'm going to watch him," she says in a low voice. "Something is up."

I nod at her, as she stands casually by the doorway and pretends to be examining the cabinets as I start trying them. None of them open. There are alphabetical tabs on the outside - I guess these are files for students. I work my way around, pulling randomly, until I find a cabinet that's got an unmarked drawer. I pull at it, not expecting it to open...but it does.

There are papers inside, and I grab one. It's written in another language, with lots of numbers that don't mean anything to me.

"I think I've found something," I whisper to Nikki. She comes over to me and squints at the paper, shining her phone torch over it - the dull lighting really isn't helping.

"I think this is for Mr Reed's personal bank account. Look, that's his name in the corner," says Nikki. "Except it's a foreign bank - that's why the documents are in whatever language this is. Maybe it's a country that doesn't ask too many questions. And look: thirty thousand..."

"This might be proof that he's funnelling off money from the Committee's events," I say.

“Guys,” says Liam from the main room. His voice sounds odd. “Can you come here, please?”

Nikki lets out a low hiss of displeasure and I’m inclined to agree with her annoyance – of course Liam would interrupt us the moment we find something.

We head out into the main reception area, where Liam is standing and looking at the other door, the one that leads into the room where Mr Reed has his desk.

“What’s wrong?” I say, as he points at the frosted glass. There’s light from the outside window coming in through the glass, with a dark shape I assume is the chair and desk obscuring some of it.

“Does that not look like the top of someone’s head?” he whispers.

I squint at the top of the dark shape. It...*does* look rounded.

Like there’s someone sitting on the other side. Silently waiting – I assume for us. Why haven’t they moved? Why haven’t they said anything?

“What do we do?” says Liam, his voice full of panic. If he’s acting, he’s very good. And from what I saw of his skills in the cafe, he’s really not. Nikki is looking at me as well – they’re both waiting for me to make a decision.

I hesitate. The person knows we’re here; they will have heard us speaking. They probably know who we are as well. They’re waiting for us to come in and talk to them.

Blood roars in my ears. Could it be Monday? Will I finally get to face them?

But, no, surely Monday would have attacked us. They wouldn’t have just let us walk around, and they wouldn’t wait to speak to us, because it’s not the right day to reveal their identity. If this is a trap, it doesn’t make sense – we would easily just run out of the office.

I take a deep breath as I make a decision: we need to investigate. My heart is hammering as I make my way to the door and grasp the handle.

“Let’s just go,” says Liam, but the door is already swinging open.

I gasp, taking a step back and colliding with Nikki. A scream lodges in my throat and gets stuck, like a rock constricting my airway.

“What’s happened—” Nikki stops abruptly, and shrieks, and her scream lets loose the one in my throat.

Mr Reed is sitting at his desk, staring at us.

And there’s a knife lodged in his chest.

I close the door and stumble away – my legs feel shaky. I lean against a wall to support myself.

A stabbing on Sunday.

“I’m going to be sick,” says Nikki, clamping her hand over her mouth.

“We need to...to call the police,” says Liam, and he gets out his phone.

“Or call Mikey and Sophie and let them know,” says Nikki.

“No,” I say without thinking. “We need to get out of here.” They turn to look at me, confusion on their faces. I’m still trying to work it through myself, and a huge part of me is numb from shock. But I do know this: there is a dead body in the next room, and our fingerprints are all over this one.

And Mr Reed isn’t Monday.

There’s a small part of me that has processed the body in the next room and is screaming at the fact that Monday is *still out there* and this is the third person they’ve killed, and tomorrow is supposed to be *my* murder, and we still haven’t figured this out.

The rest of me is shrieking to run. Will the police buy that the school was unlocked, and we just walked in? Is Monday trying to set us up?

"No, Liam's right - we need to call the police," says Nikki. "There've been two murders this week already. Surely they can't also think of this as an accident. There's a knife in Mr Reed's chest." She grips me. "This could be the thing that gets them to see there's a real danger, Kay. And then you need to tell them you've been threatened too."

The tightening in my chest eases. At the start of the week I thought I would love playing detective, but I was wrong. Monday is running circles around us, and there's a horrible feeling in my stomach that they're closer to me than I think.

Except I could have solved this. I know I could. My murder board of evidence is full - I've got so many strands of information, an understanding of Monday's movements all week.

I take a deep breath. "Do we tell them why we were here?" What I mean is: *do we tell them everything?* Surely we'll be suspects - the real story sounds completely unbelievable.

Nikki hesitates - she's seeing things from my point of view.

"Maybe we shouldn't," says Liam, his phone still in his hand from where he was about to start ringing.

"You're the one who wanted to ring them in the first place," I snap at him. Why has he changed his mind?

"Look, I don't need the police to go digging," says Liam. He's still worried about his *bloody* father - maybe Richard Maldin *should* go to jail. Maybe *he's* the one behind everything. Mr Reed knew about his past, operating on patients while drunk, so maybe Mr Maldin decided to silence him. But why do all this now? "And I guess you don't, either."

That's a guess on his part, but it's true. Monday *has* threatened to hurt us if we tell anyone. Even if the police believe us, what can they do before tomorrow? We'd just make Monday angry. And, yeah, they're already threatening

to murder me, but it's not just me I need to think about. There's Nikki, Sophie, Mikey. Uncle Dara is safe for now, but he's back tomorrow.

I take a deep breath. I need to take control of this situation, make a decision. Because there's something about Mr Reed's body that seems strange. I don't want to go back in there for another look - but I don't need to. The image is burned into my mind.

The knife.

With its plastic pink handle - it's the knife Mr Reed took from the Cleverly house. *Sophie's* knife.

And there's something about that fact which is niggling at me.

Aunt Sandra always said to solve a murder, the biggest clues weren't the physical things - strands of hair left behind or muddy footprints. They were insights into the killer's mind.

Monday has left me an unintentional clue right there. The answer is just beyond my fingertips.

It's like Aunt Sandra is standing at my shoulder, helping me choose which path to take. "There's a window behind Mr Reed," I say. "We could have seen him from outside, sitting in his chair and found it odd and come in here to investigate. That would explain our fingerprints in here."

"Why would we have gone into the other room?" says Nikki. "Our fingerprints are all over the cabinets?"

"We thought the killer might be in there. We found it empty, but we still tried a few of the drawers in case the killer left something inside. We found all the drawers were locked but one - we'll highlight the papers about Mr Reed funnelling off Committee money but we'll pretend we don't know what they are. We were panicking - people do stupid things when they're panicking. And then we came to our senses and called the police." It's also close to the truth and

Aunt Sandra always said the best lies always are. Maybe I'm not a crap liar after all.

"But why were we even on the school grounds in the first place?" asks Nikki.

I grimace. That's a good point.

"Kay wanted a tour," says Liam, jumping in. "Nostalgia's sake. It's trespassing, but it's also...school grounds. It would have been harmless."

That works – it's not the best story, but it's good enough. We know Monday has murdered Mr Reed, following the lines of their threat of a stabbing on Sunday. We're not breaking the rules and telling the police about Monday. All we're doing is reporting a murder – which will just so happen to put the police on Monday's tail.

The first thing I do is message Mikey. *Go back to Nikki's house and wait outside. We'll be there as soon as we can.* Then I call 999. "Hello," I say to the operator. "Can I speak to the police, please? I've found a dead body."

Talking to the police turns out to be surprisingly easy. Adam and Tony don't show up - instead a bunch of people I've never seen before enter the school. They escort us out of the building and into the school grounds behind, away from the prying eyes of anyone who might be hovering at the front gates. They buy our story without too much questioning - or maybe they *do* have questions, but are saving them for later. These aren't Longgrove folk. These are police with proper experience of murder.

"Your faces were on the side of the house Topher Reed died in," says one, Inspector Rossof, as he looks at me and Nikki. It isn't a question.

Liam shifts back, like he's trying not to be noticed - coward.

"We'll be wanting to set up interviews with you about those photos," Inspector Rossof continues. "Perhaps tomorrow."

Tomorrow will be too late.

"We'd appreciate it if for now you could keep what's happened today quiet," says Inspector Merton, a sour-faced woman with sharp blue eyes. "Tell your parents, of course, but it won't be helpful to our investigation if this news spreads around the town fast."

“We know how it is in small towns,” says Inspector Rossof, and there’s a hint of a smirk on his face. Inspector Merton shoots him a look that says *how dare you show a hint of emotion*, and the smirk is gone. “Gossip won’t be productive. Mr Reed was a well-known man.”

I nod along, wanting to seem as cooperative as possible. “If that’s everything you want from us, we’ll be going now.”

They don’t say anything as we start to walk away, back through the school to the driveway – my thoughts spin in circles as I speed up. Mr Reed was our most likely suspect. Mr Reed is dead. Monday has murdered again.

Tomorrow it’s my turn.

And I have no idea who Monday could be. Are they someone on my murder board, who I have discounted or decided I trust? Like...Mikey or Sophie? Is Monday multiple people?

Maybe I should just get the hell out of town. Not back to London – hole up in a random hotel, somewhere Monday can’t find me. Or beg the police for protection, and hope they’ll set aside all their normal protocols and just *listen* to me.

We head out of the school gates, where there are more police milling about, their cars parked haphazardly on the road, and I’m starting to shake now – with panic, and fear.

Because Monday is coming.

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Liam leaves us on the way to Uncle Dara's house, and when we arrive back Mikey and Sophie are on the doorstep. We go into the kitchen and I let Nikki catch them up on what's happened, while I stare into space, and try to work out what the hell I'm going to do.

"I need the loo," I mutter, as Nikki gets to the part about finding Mr Reed. Mikey's eyes meet mine – they're filled with concern. But maybe he knows I need to be alone for a second, because he doesn't say anything as I leave, hurrying upstairs. Not to the bathroom, to the attic, where I sit on my bed and stare at my murder board, at Mr Reed in the corner and Topher. At Kerry Richmond, and Nikki, and Ivy, and Sophie and Mikey, and Liam and his father, at the dead rat.

I'm leaving.

Topher and Mr Reed are dead, Monday has followed through on their threats – I'm next.

Once the decision is made, I feel lighter. I get to my feet and grab my suitcase and start throwing stuff in.

"So, you're scarpering?"

I turn to find Nikki in the doorway. She doesn't look annoyed, just sad.

"What else can I do?" I say. "I'm not going to solve this – I'm not..." *I'm not like Aunt Sandra. I'm a disappointment.*

I'm a coward. I'm never going to live up to who she was.

"You should stay and figure this out," says Nikki. "Because if you run now, you're never going to be able to stop. If Monday can't find you tomorrow, you won't be any safer on Tuesday. At some point you'll need to come back to your real life – and Monday will be waiting."

"Nikki, my two main suspects are *dead*," I say. "There's no one left. I have no clue who is behind this, and I'm not risking my life on the chance that I suddenly have an epiphany and work things out—"

"I'd risk it," says Nikki quietly. "If it were me Monday had threatened – I'd bet on you to figure it out. I'd bet on you to save me."

I don't know what to say or feel. Where is this coming from? I'm still clutching a T-shirt I was about to chuck in my suitcase. I don't know what else to do with it, so in it goes. Running makes the most logical sense. Only, Nikki is right – I'll need to confront this eventually. There's no way Monday will simply stop.

And they know where I live. And Mum and Dad. And Uncle Dara and Nikki. And Chloe.

"Why?" I ask. "Why would you bet on me? I'm not...her."

"No," says Nikki, and her eyes are full of tears. "But you're a lot like her. You know what she would say."

I do – the same thing Nikki is saying right now. *Bet on yourself, Kay. Trust yourself.*

We look at each other, and I nod.

Mikey and Sophie and Nikki gather round my murder board, and we go through everything we know about Mr Reed's murder.

Mr Reed had reasons to hate Ivy and Topher, but none of us can work out why Monday might have wanted to kill him.

"The knife that was used to stab Mr Reed had a pink handle," I say. "It was the one we saw in the Cleverly house."

Sophie's mouth drops open, her eyes widening. "My knife?" she says. "But...that doesn't make sense. Mr Reed took it, how did he end up being stabbed by it?"

I shake my head. I have no idea. "It must have been Monday who left all the gates and things open," I say. "That's why we could walk into the school. But it looked like he'd been stabbed once. Wouldn't there, I don't know, have been more blood?" My memory is slightly fuzzy on this point, because we only saw the body briefly, enough to establish that he was dead. Maybe he *had* been stabbed more; maybe there were smears of blood we didn't see. "Monday would have had to overpower him," I say. "And Mr Reed looked like he was strong."

I keep circling back to Sophie's knife. Because the fact it was used is important – there's something I'm missing.

"Or maybe he was poisoned first or something," says Mikey, unaware of my thoughts. "To make it easier to...you know."

The obvious answer is usually the right one. That's what Aunt Sandra would have said.

The doorbell rings, making me jump. I get to my feet, and consider taking a weapon with me – a vase or something, out of Nikki's playbook. But instead Mikey and Nikki follow me down, with Sophie hovering behind.

"We'll tackle them together," says Mikey, looking determined. I hold back a snort – I can't imagine him in any sort of fight.

But when I open the door, Inspector Merton is standing on the doorstep.

"Hello again," says Inspector Merton, in a deadpan voice which suggests she's not actually happy to be seeing me twice in one day. "I was wondering if you know the whereabouts of Sophie Darlington."

"Er..." I say, glancing at Mikey. Should I pretend I don't know where Sophie is? Could this be related to her dad, and the fact she hasn't been home since last Monday?

"I'm here," says Sophie in a quiet voice, pushing past me.

Inspector Merton nods, but doesn't seem surprised. "Hello, Sophie. I'd like you to come along to the police station and answer a few questions about the death of Mr John Reed."

"What?" Nikki gasps, but it's Mikey who steps forward.

"Are you arresting her?" he says. "On what grounds?"

"I'm not arresting her," says Inspector Merton. "We would just like Sophie to help us with our enquiries. She should call an appropriate adult, though, just to sit in."

That's a precursor to them arresting her – why else would they want to speak to her? Are they basing this off the knife? How would they know it was Sophie's?

"She doesn't *have* an appropriate adult," says Mikey. "I'm going to phone my mum. She's a lawyer."

Sophie has gone pale, pressing her lips together as Mikey gets on the phone to his mum, moving into the kitchen so Inspector Merton doesn't hear. He's back a minute later. "My mum will be here in a few minutes," he says.

The inspector nods and goes to stand by her car.

Mikey turns to us. "Right," he says as calmly as possible. "I'm going to tell my mum everything when she gets here. She needs to know about Monday if she's going to help defend Sophie."

I nod, pushing down my panic at the thought of Monday finding out we've disobeyed their orders and told someone else about them.

"Hey," says Mikey, his voice softening. "It will be okay. Mum will convince the police to give you some protection or something."

"Yeah," I say. "That would be really, really great."

"But what do you mean *defend* me? The police just said they're bringing me in to help them," says Sophie. "They're not arresting me." She sounds desperate, clutching at straws to get out of the fact she's potentially in some serious trouble.

"Not yet," says Mikey. "But they could later on, once they have more evidence."

Sophie starts to breathe quicker, and tears well in her eyes. I'm about to step forward, give her a hug, but Nikki gets there first.

"It's okay," she says. "It'll be fine. This will all be over tomorrow..."

Mikey gestures at me to step away. "I'll come back as quickly as I can," he says. "And you should lock yourselves in the house. Or...I know you think Monday has a key - maybe you should hole up at my place."

"I'll be fine," I say. "The police are going to send bodyguards, remember?" I don't actually believe it, but it's

nice to think all the same.

"This isn't the time to be brave," says Mikey. "We don't know who Monday is and the clock is ticking..."

"I *know*," I say. "But I'm going to figure this out. Trust me. And I'm going to take Monday down." I don't know where this confidence is coming from. Maybe I'm being spurred on by Sophie's fear.

Trust yourself.

Or maybe Aunt Sandra is standing behind me, telling me I can do this – and I can see her when Nikki turns to look at me, and nods. Because Nikki believes in me too, and it's like a little part of Aunt Sandra is still here, in both of us.

"I trust you," says Mikey, and his blue eyes are earnest. I don't know where it comes from, but I find myself reaching forward and hugging him, and he stumbles slightly before gripping me back. I breathe in his familiar smell, of the same strawberry shower gel he's been using for the past six years, mixed with faint minty deodorant, and he's so safe and familiar I don't want to let go.

But I do, and when I stand back his cheeks are flushed – he's embarrassed.

"Okay, then," he says, and he's nervous now. "You just... look after yourself. And..." He looks like he wants to say something else, but then his mum's car pulls up and she gets out and he turns to wave at her.

I don't need him to say anything – I think I know what he wants to say. Because maybe I want to say it too. Maybe he's safe and familiar and just like being at home, and one of my best friends, and maybe I also really want to kiss him. And I can't believe this has only just hit me now, as I'm staring down the face of my own murder. I have so much to fight for. There are so many things I want to do.

But now is not the time to think about all that, because he's right. The clock is ticking, and we're going to figure out

who Monday is.

Nikki and I go around and lock all the doors and windows, including double-locking the front door with a bolt, so even if Monday uses the key they most likely have, they won't be able to get inside. We also barricade Uncle Dara's bedroom by pulling Nikki's chest of drawers in front of it. If Monday breaks in through his room, they won't be able to get out of it. The house is secured.

We eat a quick dinner, and then we call Uncle Dara, who says he's having an amazing time, and thanks us again. He says Grace has heard there's police swarming around the school, and asks if we know anything about it.

The news about Mr Reed hasn't yet spread, then. We both say we have no idea, but I suggest a gas leak or an unexploded World War Two bomb being discovered. Mikey would be proud of those suggestions. Uncle Dara seems satisfied, and hangs up.

And then, just in case Monday gets through all our locks, we each take a knife from the kitchen, and a vase too for extra backup. Then we trudge up to the attic, and we turn to the board and go through all the information we have.

"Aunt Sandra always used to say look at means, motive and opportunity," I say, folding my arms. "We know how Monday had the means and opportunity to carry out a lot of their actions this week - they used other people. They used

Liam for the car crash on Wednesday. And Topher, who used Sophie in turn to leave the notes for me. So, it comes down to motive.” And that’s what we were missing when I wanted to believe it was Mr Reed or Topher playing Monday. We need a really strong motive for someone to be doing all of this to work out who they could be.

I’m back to Ivy, staring at her smiling face. It all comes down to her. Someone hated her so much they killed her, and everyone else connected to her has been sucked into it – with the exception of Mr Reed, because he was an enemy of hers as well. I feel like if I could just understand his death, we might be able to figure out everything.

I can tell Nikki is getting fed up, so I eventually tell her to go to sleep. She grabs blankets and a pillow to sleep on the floor, and immediately starts snoring. It’s 11 p.m. now – Mikey has just sent me a text saying they’re still at the police station, and that it’s unlikely at this rate that his mum will convince anyone we need a police guard, but are we okay in the meantime? I feel his anxiety through the phone, and reply straight away to let him know we’re both fine. He sends a thumbs up, then tells me to let him know if anything changes.

Even though my eyes are getting heavy, I grab Aunt Sandra’s notebook and my phone torch, and read over things once more. Those initial names –

Sophie Darlington

Mikey Kelvin

Kay Gill

Nikki Khatri

The additional ones –

Christopher Reed

John Reed

Liam Maldin

Every single one of us has been affected this week. That can't be a coincidence.

Every single one of us was connected to Ivy. That can't be a coincidence either. We all, with the exception of Mr Reed, were her friends, people she loved.

I flick through Aunt Sandra's notebook, just like I have multiple times before – the action soothes me, helps me focus. *The most obvious answer is the right one.*

Means and opportunity is covered – it's just motive left.

What would drive someone to do all this? Who could have hated Ivy so much?

I sit up to properly look at my board. *Mr Reed* is the answer. He hated Ivy.

Except he's dead, so it wasn't him.

The most obvious answer is the right one.

My eyes are drawn to Richard Maldin. A man I thought was admirable, who was actually putting the lives of his patients at risk. Liam, who was probably one of Ivy's closest friends, though she told everyone that he stalked her.

Topher, the boyfriend she loved. Who gave her drugs the night she died, who treated her terribly.

Mr Reed, who covered that up, who would have been furious about her attempt to blackmail him into giving her a better grade.

Mikey, who was a good friend, who hasn't been targeted this week beyond his car being the one used on Wednesday.

Sophie, who shouldn't really have been involved, who was made to do things by Topher, because he didn't want to do the dirty work himself.

Me, and Nikki. Ivy's friends.

Nikki, the last person to see Ivy alive.

Who heard her being killed.

People connected to Ivy.

To *Ivy*.

Shock goes through me – what if we made a mistake? Right at the beginning of our investigation, what if we made an assumption which coloured the way we looked at things? Because there is a link between everyone who has been involved this week, and it's not just that we were all close to Ivy.

Aunt Sandra was right – it's the obvious answer. And the motive is simple. It's been staring at me all week. I just got it completely wrong.

Because why *this* week? Why wait until I returned to Longrove to put all this into action?

Why *me*?

The time on my phone shifts – 11.59 p.m. to 12 a.m.

There's a creak below, on the landing – it could be the sound of the house settling, a random noise. Or there could be someone else in the house, waiting below.

It's Monday morning.

And I know who Monday is.

MONDAY

I wake Nikki up. "It's Monday," I whisper, and she immediately sits up, rubbing her eyes. My mind is whirring as I look at her.

"What's wrong?" she asks nervously.

"This whole week, we've gone about things the wrong way - we went with the idea that Monday killed Ivy and then was trying to come after everyone else who was close to her. But that's what hasn't been right. Because it was so extreme. Could Monday have really hated Ivy so much they'd attack people just because they were friends with her?" I grab a whiteboard marker, and circle Ivy. "We assumed Monday came after Ivy because of the note I saw in her photo album, and the other notes Aunt Sandra mentioned, because of the fact that we thought *someone* killed Ivy." Because Nikki had heard Ivy in the woods, screaming - saying she wouldn't jump. But Nikki was also drugged, and she's said herself that her memory from that evening might not be reliable. "But Monday didn't kill Ivy."

There's another creak downstairs.

Monday is here.

"Monday *loved* Ivy," I say. "That's the key thing we got wrong this week. We were never going to get the right motive, because we were looking at things in completely the wrong way."

“So, who killed Ivy?” says Nikki.

I stare back at her, and take a deep breath. “No one. You heard wrong. You heard Ivy saying she wouldn’t jump – and then she fell. She was heavily drugged. Maybe she wasn’t even talking to anyone – did you ever even hear someone else there?” It’s a guess, but I’m speaking loudly now, because I know Monday is at the bottom of the stairs, listening. “All the people who have been involved this week had something in common. They all hurt Ivy,” I say. “Topher drugged her – I guess as another way to control her, I’m not sure – and Mr Reed helped cover it up. Liam stalked her – at least, that’s what everyone thought. Sophie wasn’t meant to be involved – she was a good friend to Ivy. But Topher pulled her into it, and that’s why the knife being hers was so odd.” That’s what I couldn’t grasp, the fact that Sophie was only initially involved in this because of Topher – Monday never contacted her directly. But then Monday dragged her in at the last second, by using her knife to stab Mr Reed.

“But Mikey and Sophie didn’t hurt Ivy,” says Nikki. “So your theory doesn’t make sense – Mikey’s technically been involved because of his car. And Sophie, she wasn’t meant to be part of all this... But then she was, because of the knife?”

“Okay, they didn’t hurt her,” I say. “But they *left* her that night, didn’t they? Mikey felt guilty about that – if he’d stayed, would she have died?”

“And you and me, Kay?” says Nikki. “We left Ivy too. Why’s our punishment so much greater than Mikey and Sophie? What could we have done to make someone hate us so much?”

I blink at her, because things are still coming together in my head and that part doesn’t yet make sense to me. “We were there at the end...” The answer is just out of my grasp. I put it to the side, concentrating on the easier puzzle pieces. “There’s something else that links all those people: Ivy knew their secrets. She wanted to wait until the right time to use

them. So there's only one person who would know all those secrets now."

I grab my vase from earlier, the knife too, and Nikki picks up hers, looking at me with terror in her eyes.

"Monday's here," she whispers, finally cottoning on to what's happening. I nod - she was so focused on me she didn't hear those creaks downstairs, of someone patiently waiting to have a conversation. At least, that's what I assume they're doing. Because this is it, now. This is the end.

Then I go down the stairs - and she's there, on the landing.

The one person Ivy would have told all her secrets to - the one person who would go to extreme lengths to punish all the people who hurt her.

Her mother.

Angela Harchester is standing at the top of the stairs leading to the ground floor, and she's clutching what looks like a watering can. She drops it and smiles at me, calm and collected, like we're meeting outside for a neighbourly chat over what time the bins should go out.

"You're Monday," I say, and my voice cracks. The woman whose house I used to go to all the time, whose daughter was one of my best friends...is the person who has been threatening me all week. Who killed Topher and Mr Reed.

Who is here to kill me now.

"Let's rush her," whispers Nikki behind me. She's standing close, and I can feel her quivering – her words are bold, but I know she's terrified, because I am too. Because I think I understand everything, but also nothing makes sense. I have all the facts, all the information, but how can any of it be true?

"Put the vases and the knives down, girls," says Angela with a snort.

"I figured out you were Monday," I say. "According to that threat you left me last week, that means I won. You can't kill me."

Angela smiles slightly. "Sweetie, I was always going to kill you – even if you solved my game immediately. If you had run,

I would have found you. I did struggle to follow through some of the elements of my threat. Tuesday was easy, Wednesday too. Thursday was a bit of a challenge – *treachery* is a very vague word, but it fit the alliteration so that's what I went with. I remembered that letter Sandra had sent to John Reed. Peter joined the Committee for a short while last year, because I was curious about what was involved and needed someone on the inside. He took a copy for me. Perfect for what I wanted to do – hurt you."

"Is Peter in on this too?" I ask. I'm not sure I even care, but she's blocking the stairs, and I need more time to think about what we should do.

"No," snorts Angela. "He's always been off in his own world – he got off lightly when Ivy died. He took her death more easily, and now as a reward he gets to live his life normally. Not like me, trying to work out how to make the days of the week fit my threat. Fire on Friday was a tricky one. I didn't realize Topher was getting Sophie to help him, and when I did, I made sure to keep her out of the way. She was always good to my Ivy. She worshipped her, as she should have. Saturday, again, *sabotage* is such a vague word. But I wanted to throw the police off, so when a bunch of people from town went to see what was going on at the house, I put some sleeping tablets in a couple of unattended water bottles and hoped for the best. When I went back, the two police on watch were fast asleep, and I could put up my little display for you, and confuse the detectives' investigation." She's speaking quickly, getting more animated as she does – like she's delighted to have a captive audience.

"How did you...know everything?" says Nikki.

Angela doesn't need to answer. "Ivy," I say. "She told you all her secrets. And if she didn't tell you, it was in the photo album." In her bedroom, the shrine to her. Which I thought was sad – but Angela has been pushed well beyond normal grief.

"You truly know it all, don't you, Kay?" says Angela. From anyone else her words might seem rude, but she seems genuinely impressed. "Go on. Tell me everything. And maybe...maybe things won't need to end badly tonight."

I can almost feel Nikki breathing down my neck. *Get this right, Kay.* Because she might look innocent, the neighbour Nikki grew up next to - but this is a woman who has murdered two people in the space of two days. She's dangerous.

My head is woolly with fear. "The first secret..." I say, my thoughts coming slowly. "She told you about Richard Maldin's drinking. Liam shared it with her, and she told you."

"Yes," says Angela softly. "And if Ivy had made it to hospital, he's the one who would have been called in to help. And he wouldn't have been able to, because he was a drunk." She half spits the last word. "But she never got to the hospital, so that was a light punishment for him - a little mental torture for his beloved son, not too much. And it worked out well, because of course *Liam* ruined the last few months of Ivy's life."

"He didn't," I say, even though I have no idea why I'm bothering to defend Liam. "He makes up stories, but he didn't stalk Ivy, Ivy just told people that—"

"You don't think I know that?" says Angela. Any kindness in her eyes is gone - she looks like who she is. A grown-up version of Ivy. Why did I never see that? If Ivy was cruel, cunning, manipulative, who did she learn that from? Ivy had moments where she was different, where she was nice - the moments we stuck around for. But who was she turning into? Who was shaping her? Her mother and father. A dad who barely paid attention, who I haven't seen once this week, and...Angela. Who *looks* sweet and kind, but is hiding something sinister underneath. "Ivy told me everything - but Liam abandoned Ivy when she needed him most. Just when she needed the strength to get away from Topher—"

"It wasn't Liam's job to help," I say. "His friend was in a horrible relationship. You're her *mother*. If you knew she was dating Topher and you didn't like it, you should have stopped her."

"She didn't tell me," snaps Angela. "It's the one thing she kept from me. She told me about Topher not being John's son, but I never thought to question where she heard that. She told me about John creaming off money from the Committee. But she never told me about Topher. I read *that* in her diary afterwards. That he took drugs, that she was in love with him, that she took drugs to impress him, that she suspected John knew about their relationship. So when the toxicology report came back and said she died with alcohol and drugs in her system I knew exactly who to blame. And I know exactly who would have covered it up, because there were no drugs found on Ivy's body, or in the woods. Topher and John protected themselves. It was John's fault, it was Topher's fault - both their faults that she died." Her eyes glimmer. "It was actually Topher who gave me the inspiration for Monday. He left Ivy a few notes. *Can't wait for Monday*," she quotes, her tongue clicking against her teeth. "A week before he gave her drugs, that led to her *death*."

"How did you kill them?" I say. "Topher and Mr Reed?"

Angela smiles slightly. "It's not like they suspected me of anything. On Friday, I asked Topher to meet me. I offered him a drink to make him sleep. Same with John Reed on Sunday. And then..." She shrugs, like taking people's lives is the easiest thing in the world. "John had come to see me in person on Friday - to discuss me joining the Committee."

I remember the leaflet left by Kerry Richmond in her door when I broke into her house.

"John told me about all the good the Committee does in the community - like attempting to track down Sophie after she ran away from home. Not that they managed to find her," Angela snorts quietly. "John even told me about the knife he

had taken – he said he was worried Sophie would use it on someone, so he kept it in his car. On Sunday, after I gave him the sleeping tablet, I used his car key and grabbed the knife from the boot. Of course, if it hadn't been there, I would have settled for my *own* knife – it was a spur-of-the-moment decision. Sophie was Ivy's friend, after all, I didn't want to involve her, but you had taken her in. I watched her walk into your house with you. I couldn't have that – I couldn't have you gaining allies." Angela shakes her head. "I used John's cabinet keys to make sure that the proof he'd been very dodgy with the Committee's money was readily available – it's important that his reputation is completely destroyed, I think. A man who cared about that more than holding his own child to account – Topher should have been punished a *year* ago for giving Ivy drugs. But that never happened. I had to take things into my own hands."

"How did you know we would go to the school on Sunday?" I ask. "We didn't even know."

"I didn't," says Angela. "I was going to call in an anonymous tip to the police – I had some photos I was going to give to you in the evening, with a nice message. Make you sweat all day, waiting for the stabbing. But then I saw Sophie being taken by the police outside your house, and I realized you already knew all about it. Everything had fallen into place."

"But you were in the car with Uncle Dara on Wednesday," I say. "You were with *Lola*. Your daughter. You put her in danger because you wanted to get at us."

Angela presses her lips together, irritated. "I didn't know the Kelvins' car had issues with the brakes. I didn't think it would do that much damage – I just wanted to get at Mikey in some small way. He could have stayed that night, stayed with my Ivy. It was only a little punishment, though, because I couldn't really blame him, could I?" She's speaking normally now, like this observation is supposed to be reasonable.

"What about the rats?" I say. "Kerry Richmond bought one – did she help you?"

Angela blinks at me. "Of course not. I bought them online."

Ah. The old-fashioned way.

"But why us?" says Nikki, as she comes down to stand on the step next to me, and grasps my hand. It's sweaty in mine, but I squeeze back. *We're going to be all right, Nikki.* That's what I want to say.

Except why does Angela Harchester have a watering can?

"Did you know your house and mine used to be one big house?" says Angela. "Like a lot of houses in Longrove, it was split into two. Only a door was overlooked. A single door..." She nods towards the linen closet. "Hidden at the back of that, blending in very well with the wall, actually. I could walk in and out of your house so easily – that's how I left the rat. Of course, no one else knew about that, but Sandra also gave me a front-door key years ago, in case of an emergency. I sent Topher a few anonymous messages as Monday, and made it clear I knew about the drugs he'd given Ivy. I sent him a photocopied page of Ivy's diary for proof. That's how I got him to follow my instructions. I gave *him* the front-door key to your house... He passed it to Sophie – but that wasn't my intention."

"Why us?" I ask again. Nikki is silent. I know how afraid she was of Monday, but she's not shaking now. It's like she's been waiting for this moment, and she's ready to stand with me and fight Angela if we need to – because Angela is currently blocking the stairs, our exit. It doesn't look like she's got a knife, just the can. "Why go after Nikki like a high-school bully, and then wait until I arrived this week to start this whole Monday thing?"

"Ivy died on a Monday," says Angela. "I thought it was fitting – Monday. The day you should dread. The worst day of

the week. I did stop for a while when Sandra died, out of respect, you see. But then I just...needed to keep going. Nikki couldn't have a pass because her mother died."

I clutch my knife and vase. How *dare* Angela bring up Aunt Sandra so callously?

"You wanted to punish everyone for failing Ivy, but you wanted to make sure our punishment was the worst. I just don't understand why," I say slowly. "No...you wanted to make sure *my* punishment was the worst. Because you think I did the worst possible thing to Ivy..."

What could be the worst possible thing for me to do?

And then it hits me.

She thinks I killed Ivy.

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It doesn't make sense to me - I *didn't* kill Ivy. I left everyone early, and I went home.

But what about Angela's actions this week make sense? This isn't a woman thinking logically. This is a woman who invented a game to torture anyone she thinks might have had a hand in hurting her daughter.

Nikki was torn up with anguish because she thought she heard Ivy being killed and got to her too late. She made the call, and told the police, and they said it was an accident. Angela would have known that.

But Angela said she spoke to Sophie about that night Ivy died - and Sophie must have told Angela she saw me coming out of the woods just after. Sophie mistook Nikki for me, because we look so similar. It wouldn't have made sense for *me* to be leaving the woods, especially since I'd told everyone I went home.

I wanted someone to blame.

That's what Angela had told me, when I spoke to her on Thursday.

And I'm the person she decided to blame. I'm supposedly the person who was with Ivy, the person Nikki heard Ivy yelling at, saying she wouldn't jump. Nikki was targeted

because she should have been quicker getting to Ivy after she fell.

I got targeted because I'm Ivy's killer.

But it's a stretch on Angela's part – what actual *proof* did she have it was me?

"I knew Nikki made the call to the police," says Angela, like she can read my mind. "She said she wasn't quick enough to get to Ivy to save her or see who she was with, but I don't think that's true. She could have got to her, if she wanted. And there's only one person she would have tried to protect. The person Sophie saw coming out of the woods when she really shouldn't have been there."

"Sophie was wrong," I say, even though I know it won't make any difference. Angela has made her mind up. "I was at home. Nikki and I just look alike... Nobody killed Ivy, it was an accident."

"Liar!" snaps Angela, and this is the first time she loses her cool. "Sandra was investigating, she obviously thought it was murder. She asked the police about the toxicology report."

"Yeah, she was investigating," I say, my voice croaking as I finally understand why Aunt Sandra was looking into Ivy's death. "But it was to help Nikki come to terms with what had happened. To make her see it wasn't her fault—"

"She suspected *you*," says Angela. "She wanted to figure out if you could have done it."

"Did she tell you that?" I breathe, and my heart feels like it's about to snap.

"No," says Angela. "But power of deduction, Kay. Power. Of. Deduction. You fled town like a coward after Ivy died. The guilt was clear!"

"But *why* would I have killed Ivy?" I say.

"You had an argument," says Angela. "You snapped, you pushed her – it's what you wanted all along. I know you were

jealous of my Ivy. My precious, perfect girl."

And I see that nothing I can say will convince her otherwise – she's taken several vague pieces of information and forced them into a puzzle that doesn't make any sense.

Because that's the thing about losing someone you love unexpectedly – you spend hours and hours turning it over in your head, what you could have done differently, how you could have made everything okay. Ivy's death was senseless, and Angela is trying to get back control.

But there are no answers. There is no revenge for her.

And she's not going to believe that.

"It took a while for me to build up the persona of Monday," says Angela. "A year, in fact, testing it out on Nikki – seeing what would work and what wouldn't. And when I heard you would be coming for a visit, I knew I had to set up this week as a puzzle for you – that was another way Topher inspired me. Another note he gave to Ivy: *Don't be boring, let's play a game next week. On Monday you should walk out of maths. On Tuesday you should wear tie-dye instead of your school uniform...* I used the same set up – but more deadly, of course. What an excellent way to punish you, and get at everyone else too."

Aunt Sandra had known about that note – she said Angela had told her about them.

"Of course, I couldn't plan for everything," Angela carries on. "There was a lot of improvising – but we got here, didn't we? To the end."

And she drops the watering can, and pulls out a lighter.

"You know, Friday at the Cleverly house was a bit of a test," she says. "Of how easy it is to start a fire."

Dark liquid drips from the spout of the can – it's not got water in it.

That's petrol.

And she smiles as she clicks a lighter, revealing the tiniest flame. Which she throws behind her.

“Happy Monday,” she says.

“Run!” I scream at Nikki, and we both barrel towards Angela. I’m holding my vase and my knife aloft, one in each hand, even though I’ve got no clue what I’m going to do with either. But Angela laughs as she moves aside to allow us to run down the stairs if we want... The stairs that are already burning. She must have spread petrol downstairs already.

Nikki drops her knife and vase as she attempts to run down anyway, using the sleeve of her top to cover her mouth – but I can already see that it’s hopeless. But there’s another exit – from Uncle Dara’s bedroom. I turn on my heel, back onto the landing – but Angela is leaning against the chest of drawers we’ve stuck in front of Uncle Dara’s door, flicking her lighter on and off. It’s a warning – *don’t come any closer*. She knows that’s our only chance of escape.

I take a deep breath, and nearly choke on smoke. Then I charge at her, with my knife—

In one clean swoop she’s knocked it out of my hand, gripping my wrist and holding the tiny flame from the lighter near my skin, so I can feel the heat.

“Not this way,” she says, dropping my arm.

I swallow as I take a step back. There’s no other way out except—

The linen closet. The door between Angela's house and ours.

"Feel free to try and leave that way," Angela says. I ignore the smirk on her face as I run inside, feeling for the door at the back. I grasp a knob protruding from the wall and try to turn – but she's locked it, of course she has.

She's waiting for me outside, her head tilted. "I told you," she says. "I told you I would murder you on Monday."

"*Me,*" I spit. "Not Nikki as well. And you're trapped too. How are you planning on getting out?" Out of the corner of my eye I can see Nikki slipping back up onto the attic stairs, looking at the chest of drawers. She just needs a bit of time to push them out of the way.

"I'm not," says Angela. The heat from the fire is rising, and it's already almost too much, scalding my skin. The air is thick with smoke, and I cover my mouth. It's the smoke that usually gets people, not the fire – what a fun fact to remember now. *And why am I thinking about fun facts?*

My heart is racing, my eyes are stinging, and Angela is watching me like there's nothing wrong at all – and I want to scream at her, ask her *why*, but I know there's no point. I've tried reasoning with her and it hasn't changed anything.

Focus.

I could lock myself in the bathroom, that would buy Nikki a bit of time to move the drawers...

Because Angela will be focused on me, not Nikki – I'm the one she thinks is responsible for Ivy's death. I'm the one she wants to watch die.

I dart forward, and bring the vase down as hard as I can towards her face – but the smoke is already making me woozy and I don't think the vase even breaks. It slips out of my grip as I stumble away, towards the bathroom. Angela is coming after me, but her movements are slow now – the heat is just too much for both of us, the smoke too thick...

"Kay, come on!" Nikki's voice calls to me. She must have moved the drawers and got Uncle Dara's door open. I almost don't have the strength to swerve again, but I do, ducking under Angela and running in the direction of the bedroom. But when I trip through the door, it's to find myself back in the linen closet. For a moment I stand stupidly, and then someone grasps me.

Angela.

"Come *on*," says Nikki and she's pulling at me, and we're inside Uncle Dara's bedroom. She's about to slam the door behind us, but it crashes open, and Angela stands before us.

"You're not going anywhere!" she screams, and she lunges at me, shoving me onto the bed and clawing at me, her nails raking across my skin, sharp pain blossoming. I try to push back and get a grasp of her hair, pulling as hard as I can. She shrieks, and wraps her hands around my throat, her fingers locking together as she tightens her grip. I gag, trying to get a gasp of air—

And Nikki barges into her, pushing her off me and into the wall, and I lunge at her from behind, and there's smoke and heat pouring into the room now—

We shove her, together, towards the door and she stumbles back through it. I close it, throwing my body weight against it as Angela hammers, trying to get inside.

Nikki stares at the little bolt on the back of the door, that can be slid across to lock us in.

"Hurry up!" I yell.

"If we lock her out, she'll *die*," says Nikki, as there's another thud. Angela is slamming into the door.

"She's trying to *kill* us," I shriek. "And she can leave through the linen closet. She's trying to get in here to get us. She's not trying to escape."

"I forgot about the linen closet," Nikki mutters, as she slides the bolt home with a shaking hand and steps back. She

takes a deep breath, which can't be good with all the smoke, and straightens her shoulders. "Come on, let's...let's go." She runs to the window.

I follow her, but I stop at the desk, and grab Aunt Sandra's box of memories, tucking it under my arm. I don't know what I'm thinking, except we need to keep it with us, it's important.

I climb out onto the back of the house, and breathe in the sweet, fresh air, *in and out and in and out*, except the world is going black now, like I'm losing my sight.

"We need to jump," says Nikki, and she's dragging me to the edge of the roof.

We can't jump. It's too high. We need a ladder.

And then I'm falling, and I'm aware of a deep pain shooting through me, before the world goes entirely black.

There are voices around me, and a hand snaps something across my face. I'm about to bat them away when I realize I'm breathing fresh oxygen - it's a face mask. My ankle is aching with pain.

I gasp, opening my eyes. I'm lying on a stretcher in front of Uncle Dara's house. Smoke is billowing out of the windows. I sit up, wincing as I move my ankle slightly - there's an ambulance behind me, and a fire engine - two. There are firefighters unwinding hoses. The street is lit by the orange glow of street lights, and there are a few houses with lights flickering on - curious people wanting to know what's going on, watch the show.

Like this is all some kind of entertainment.

Nikki is sitting inside an ambulance to my left, also with a face mask.

I pull my mask away as a police officer turns to look at me - Inspector Merton. "You should really keep that on," she says. "You were unconscious. They'll need to check for head injuries—"

"Angela Harchester might still be inside," I interrupt. "She's the one who set fire to the house and tried to kill me and Nikki. And she's the one who killed Topher and Mr Reed." Saying the words aloud doesn't make them sound more real - she tried to kill us. We only just escaped.

“There’s still someone inside the house?” Inspector Merton says quickly and hurries away before I can reply, or ask her about Sophie.

The world spins, so I put the oxygen mask back on. A paramedic crouches next to me. “We’ve done an assessment, and all your vitals are good – but you’ve likely inhaled a lot of smoke, and you’ve fractured your ankle – it’s not a break. That’s why you fainted, though, from the pain.”

At least there’s nothing wrong with my head. And Nikki was wrong on Tuesday. Jumping off the roof didn’t break my leg.

I want to take off the face mask to ask more about Angela, but another paramedic arrives to lift me up into the ambulance.

“Wait,” I try to say, then pull the mask off again.

“You know, that’s not going to work if you don’t keep it on,” says the paramedic.

“Lola and Peter Harchester – they’re next door,” I say. “The houses are connected – you need to get them out too.”

“There’s no one next door,” says the paramedic gently, placing the mask back on me. “It’s empty – the fire brigade broke down the door.”

Angela must have told them to stay away for the night – just like Nikki and I did with Uncle Dara.

All I can think about now is Lola. Five-year-old Lola. Who lost her big sister last year. Whose mother is a monster, who might still be trapped inside a burning house.

And who Lola could have ended up becoming.

The last thing I see before they close the ambulance doors is the house with the yellow door, the house Aunt Sandra loved, being sprayed with water as black smoke swirls upwards.

The good news is I only suffered from minor smoke inhalation, and I only have a “minor” ankle fracture – though it still hurts like hell.

The bad news is, Mum and Dad got back from France late in the morning and Mum is currently berating everyone she speaks to. The police; Uncle Dara, who came back the moment we called; Dad, like it was his decision to go on holiday without me. Surprisingly not me or Nikki – there’s no *Why did you try just not breathing the smoke?* or *Why did you jump off the roof?*

Dad is asleep by my bed, snoring gently as he has an afternoon nap. Mum doesn’t appear able to sit still – she keeps finding new people to argue with.

Angela Harchester is dead.

Inspector Merton came in and told me herself. Alongside the fact that a strand of her hair was found in Mr Reed’s office, and she was seen driving out towards the Cleverly house on Friday night, there are the beginnings of enough evidence to pin Mr Reed’s and Topher’s deaths on her.

She wasn’t infallible, after all. She wasn’t an untouchable enemy, a terrifying anonymous figure who knew everything. She would have been caught eventually – just too late, had Nikki and I not escaped.

I thought maybe I was partially responsible, that she couldn’t leave through the linen closet for some reason and I made Nikki lock her out of the only path to escape, and the guilt was immediately so thick it was worse than the smoke. But the firefighters said the door to the linen closet was unlocked – Angela had opened it. She just didn’t walk through.

“Is Sophie okay?” I asked Inspector Merton.

Inspector Merton nodded, but I could tell she didn’t like being wrong. I told her most of what I knew – not everything, just that I got a threatening message last Monday, and that

the car crash on Wednesday, the fire, the deaths, were all Angela Harchester. I suppose I'll have to speak to them again properly – at least I took photos of everything and that's all on the cloud.

They're still assessing the damage to the house, but we're hoping that it was mainly downstairs that got the brunt of it and that most of the upstairs is okay, excepting smoke damage.

Uncle Dara and Nikki are currently homeless, but after Mum ranted at Dara for leaving us alone on Sunday night, at which point he snapped back that maybe she shouldn't have gone on holiday without me, she finally shut up and said they were of course welcome to stay with us. He refused, and said they would find somewhere to rent in Longrove. *We're not leaving. We won't be driven out.*

Then Mum got into an argument with him about the fact his daughter and niece had almost been murdered in Longrove, and we all needed a fresh start somewhere else.

"We can't run from this place," says Uncle Dara. "This is our *home*. People who try to ruin us are the ones who should leave."

And I agreed. Because all we've done so far is run – Mum and Dad and I ran after Aunt Sandra's death. But of course, our problems followed us.

I didn't say anything – not in front of Uncle Dara. I wanted to speak to them alone.

It's late afternoon when Mum stops running around and sinks into a chair. Dad has got us a "feast" as he calls it, from the vending machine outside my room – a multitude of chocolates and crisps and peanuts and drinks.

I wait for them to pass me a packet of crisps, and then I speak. "I want to move back to Longrove."

Mum pauses, chocolate bar halfway up to her mouth. "You want to *what?*"

"We were happy here," I say. "And I like seeing Nikki and Uncle Dara all the time – Nikki is like my *sister*."

"We weren't happy here any more," snaps Mum, and Dad shakes his head.

"You don't understand what we went through when... when Sandra died," he says.

"Then *tell me*," I say, sitting up. "Because you don't understand what *I* went through. And I'm tired of not talking about *real* stuff. I miss her. Every day, I miss her. And I hate feeling like that's something to be ashamed of – like it's a secret I need to keep to myself, because I'm so scared of upsetting you. Why don't we ever *talk* about things?"

"We just don't," says Mum quietly. There are tears in her eyes. "It's just...not what our family does. It's not what my

parents did, or my grandparents. We protect each other. We work hard and we keep moving forward because we must."

"But you're *not* protecting me," I say, and tears prick in my eyes too. "And it's okay *not* to move forward. It's okay to just...be sad. Grieve."

Mum reaches out and grips my hand tightly. Dad's eyes are also brimming with tears.

"We thought we were doing what was best for you," he says.

"I know," I say. "Of course I know that."

"I miss Sandra," says Mum. "So much. Sometimes I type out a text to her, and tell her what I'm doing. I never send it - but it's nice to think she reads it anyway." She presses her lips together, like she's said too much - at least, though, it's a proper start.

Something inside me shifts - and I know how lucky I am to be able to call her my mum. I know sometimes she doesn't understand me, that she's sometimes too critical, and that Aunt Sandra and I had a special bond - or a different bond, I guess. But I also know she'd do anything for me, and she's a very strong woman.

"So...we're moving back to Longgrove?" says Dad, like he's trying to work out where we're going with this. "Because I have to say - it's a lot cheaper than London. And the countryside is nearer. Maybe we could get a dog?"

"The lease on our house in Longgrove is almost up," says Mum. "I did wonder about selling it - but I never could really bring myself to broach that subject."

I smile. And I know Longgrove should be the villain in this - it's where Aunt Sandra died, and Angela tried to kill me and Nikki, and killed Topher and Mr Reed.

But it's just a place. A place where we built our home.

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Mum and Dad leave my hospital bed later on to get dinner for us. Dad debates staying with me, but then Nikki hobbles in, limping slightly though otherwise looking okay.

"Is it okay if we speak alone?" she says to him, and Mum and Dad smile at her, and leave.

"Weird day," I say to her, as she takes the seat Mum just vacated.

"Yeah," she says. "The weirdest. You know...there *was* someone else in the woods, with Ivy. When she died. I'm sure of it. And I get that my memory was shoddy - Mr Reed and Topher are the ones who took that vodka bottle I thought disappeared. But surely I couldn't have got *that* wrong?"

"Yeah," I grimace. "I just thought Angela might go easier on us if she thought Ivy's death was a complete accident. Miscalculation on my part. But I've been thinking more about this..." I've been alone all day, not allowed visitors beyond Mum and Dad and Uncle Dara - and I know Mikey and Sophie have been wanting to see me. But it's given me time to think. Because Nikki heard Ivy on the phone to someone, saying she loved them. But from that voicemail Ivy left Liam, we know Topher had broken up with her - and while Ivy could have been calling him, there's also a chance she had decided to speak to someone else.

Because Ivy would have wanted to win. She would have wanted to feel some sort of control over what was happening. She would have wanted to feel better.

"Putting all that detective stuff to the side for a moment..." Nikki clears her throat, and looks at me. She hesitates, like she's worried about what she's planning on saying next. "When Mum died, I wanted someone to blame. Not like Angela Harchester, obviously, but...there you were. Then you left town, and it was easy to project my anger onto you. I know Mum loved me too. Of course she did - even though she never said it. But it was still easier to be angry at you. *Your* mum came into my room earlier, and hugged me, and talked to me about her. And it was...really nice, actually."

I smile at the thought of Mum doing that, of having that moment with Nikki.

"I know she wasn't perfect," I say. "And she made mistakes. But she was...pretty great."

Nikki nods. "I'm glad you came, this week," she says. "Even though Angela tried to kill you. It was nice to hang out again. Like before, with Mikey and Sophie too."

"What if I said Mum and Dad were considering coming back?" I say, and I feel slightly hesitant, because even though I know things are good between me and Nikki now...what if she's still harbouring a few resentful feelings?

But she smiles widely. "That'd be great," she says. "That'd be...really, really great."

I know our parents didn't throw around *I love yous*. Aunt Sandra didn't either - that's why she kept my note to her. My *I love you* - the proof in writing.

But we can change that, now.

"I love you, Nikki," I say, for probably the first time in my life. Because it's always been true, just not spoken aloud. And it's time to talk about things - not bury them.

“Me too,” she replies, then blinks. “I mean – I love you too.”

MONDAY
2 WEEKS LATER

81

Mum and Dad and I are staying in the house Uncle Dara is renting. They've gone back and forth between London and Longrove, but they don't want me moving around because they think I'll heal quicker if I stay in one place.

Uncle Dara's new house is a holiday rental, and he's looking for somewhere more permanent – Nikki and I are sharing a room with bunk beds. I've got the top one because it turns out she's a roller in her sleep, and apparently it really *hurts* to fall out.

Chloe is going to come and visit, and I can't wait. When I told her everything that had happened this week, and how I really felt about Aunt Sandra, it felt cathartic. And she listened. It'd been weird, my London and Longrove lives colliding – but fun too.

Nikki and I have spent the past week hanging with Mikey and Sophie, who is living with her uncle. She reached out to him with our encouragement and he was delighted at the thought of her staying. He lost contact with her dad years ago. He lives in Hillingate, and couldn't be more different to her dad. And she can get to Longrove easily, driving a decent second-hand car her uncle gifted her.

The one person I haven't seen around is Liam – and I think I know why. So when there's a knock on the door first thing

Monday morning, I'm not surprised when Nikki comes into the tiny living room, Liam trailing behind her.

My foot is propped up in my cast, my crutches to the side, and I'm balancing a plate of toast on my stomach. Mum is working from the cafe, which means she's probably trying to manage Uncle Dara, and Dad is currently upstairs in his room, at the little desk, because he prefers peace.

"How's it going?" says Liam nervously, as he sits down on the bright orange sofa.

"You disappeared after we found Mr Reed," I say, raising my eyebrows.

"Yeah," he says. "Finding the body of your head teacher..."

"Why were you *really* at Longrove High that Sunday?" I ask. "Why did you actually follow us?"

He's silent, like he's waiting for me to speak.

"You were friends with Ivy," I say. "And maybe you were even in love with Ivy. She had that effect on people, I'd completely understand if you were."

Still, Liam doesn't say anything – but he's tense, poised to run. Just like Nikki, who is standing near the doorway – ready to call to my dad if need be. I'm not worried, knowing he's upstairs, nearby for backup.

"You didn't just help out Monday because you were worried about your dad's secret getting out," I say. "And it wasn't just because me coming back to Longrove meant you got a new message from Monday. You came on Sunday because you were worried me, Mikey, Sophie and Nikki were together again. The four people in Ivy's friendship group, the ones who were there the night she died. She left you that voicemail telling you Topher had broken up with her *earlier* in the day. But then *you're* the one she called in the woods. And you came along. And you pushed her."

Shock flickers across Liam's face - then anger. But it fades as quickly as it appears, and is replaced by something more wary. "No," he says. "I mean - that's sort of what happened. She called me from the woods and said...said she loved me. Which is what I wanted to hear - but I knew she didn't mean it. I went along anyway. And I got there and she was...*angry* with me. And she kept calling me a coward and telling me I should jump. *You won't jump. You won't jump*, that's what she kept saying. Prove how much you love me by jumping."

"Won't jump," whispers Nikki. "I heard *won't jump* and... added in the 'I' afterwards because that's the only way that made sense to me."

Liam keeps talking, like now he's started he's desperate to get it all out. "She got angry because Topher had rejected her, and she thought I was too. And she tried to push me off the ledge - and I just wanted her to get away from me and..." He swallows. "I ducked. And she fell. And then I just saw she was...and I heard someone coming—"

"Me," breathes Nikki.

"I waited while you made the phone call, and then I don't know...I don't know why I ran," he says. "The police asked me after - about the phone call she'd made to me. They saw it in her call log. I said I'd spoken to her briefly about homework due the next day."

"It was an accident," I say, blinking as I try to process this. "It was genuinely an accident."

"No," says Liam. "It was my fault. If I hadn't been there, she wouldn't have tried to push me."

"Ivy was...trying to *kill* you," I say. "And she didn't manage it and she fell."

"No," he says, his voice sharp. "No, she was angry because Topher had broken up with her. She wasn't thinking straight. I don't think she realized how close we were to the

edge. She was trying to push me, but it was more out of anger at...at the situation. I don't think she genuinely wanted me to jump. She definitely wouldn't have thought it was dangerous."

We stare at each other – and I don't know which one of us is right. Was Ivy a monster for trying to get Liam to jump off a ledge because she wanted to feel like she was in control? Did she know exactly what she was doing? Or *was* she not thinking clearly, and pissed off because her boyfriend had broken up with her? She'd drunk the vodka, and was drugged.

I don't think we'll ever know – was Ivy a villain? A victim?
And who would she be today?

MONDAY
3 WEEKS LATER

Business at the cafe is booming - Angela Harchester trying to murder me and Nikki via a house fire has made our entire family famous, and there's a line of people out of the door. But Uncle Dara keeps a corner booth free for me, Nikki, Mikey and Sophie to gather in. And when we meet on Monday morning, it's to find him looking incredibly satisfied.

"What's happened?" I ask him, as he sets down a pot of tea and some cups for us all.

"Nothing," he says lightly. "But Grace just found Kerry Richmond trying to put a rat in the kitchen - apparently, she's asked for a surprise health inspection of the cafe today and this was the Committee's brilliant attempt to sabotage me."

I share a disbelieving look with Nikki. So *that's* why Kerry Richmond bought a rat. And *that's* probably why Topher mentioned a rat that day - a little joke at my expense, because he knew what the Committee wanted to do.

"She bought it ages ago. Why use it now?" I say, and Uncle Dara raises his eyebrows, probably wondering how I know the timeline of her rat-purchasing activities.

"She was likely waiting for all the drama to die down before putting her plan into action," he says with a shrug.

But I think she couldn't accept that things in Longrove are changing. The Committee is on their last legs - I don't know

how news about Mr Reed funnelling money off from the Committee's events got out, but everyone in Longrove knows about it and apparently that's enough for them to *finally* decide to tell them to stick it. There was never a big conspiracy – the Committee was made up of people with too much time on their hands, who abused the little power they had. I know they'll probably be replaced by something else, because some people don't ever learn – but they're fading into irrelevance. And Uncle Dara's cafe is safe.

Mikey catches my eye across the table, and grins. I smile back. He really is a cheerful person. Last Monday, I told him I thought I had a bit of a crush on him, and he told me he had one on me too, before I moved.

"And do you have a crush on me now?" I'd asked as casually as I could.

"You know what," he says. "I guess it never really went away."

So our anniversary is going to be on a Monday. The first time we kissed, our first date.

But that's okay. I don't hate Mondays any more. It's the day Ivy died, and Aunt Sandra died, and Angela Harchester tried to kill me. And it's the day Mikey kissed me, really softly, and then grinned as he pulled away. It's the day Nikki saved my life.

It's just another day of the week, after all.

THE END

Acknowledgements

Firstly, a huge thank you to my editor, Becky Walker. I'm so grateful for your insightful comments, your willingness to hop on a call and help me untangle all my thoughts, and all your cheerleading. Thank you as well to Sarah Stewart – once more, you asked all the tricky questions that needed to be asked. A big thank you too to Jenny Glencross for your careful copyedit, Charlotte James and Gareth Collinson for proofreading, Kath Millichope and Daniel Prasad for the absolutely phenomenal cover, Sarah Cronin for designing the interiors so beautifully, Leo Nickolls for designing the brilliant typography, and Sylvia Gaitas for your work as production controller. Thank you as well to Hannah Steward, Fritha Lindqvist and Jessica Feichtlbauer in PR and Marketing – I'm very lucky to work with you.

As ever, a huge thank you to my brilliant agent, Alice Sutherland-Hawes, for continuing to provide guidance, support and wisdom. Thank you as well to all the co-agents who have worked to find homes for my books all over the world.

Thank you to all the teachers, librarians and booksellers who have championed my books over the past two years. I'm very grateful. A special shout out to Alwyn Hamilton, who got behind *This Book Kills* from day one.

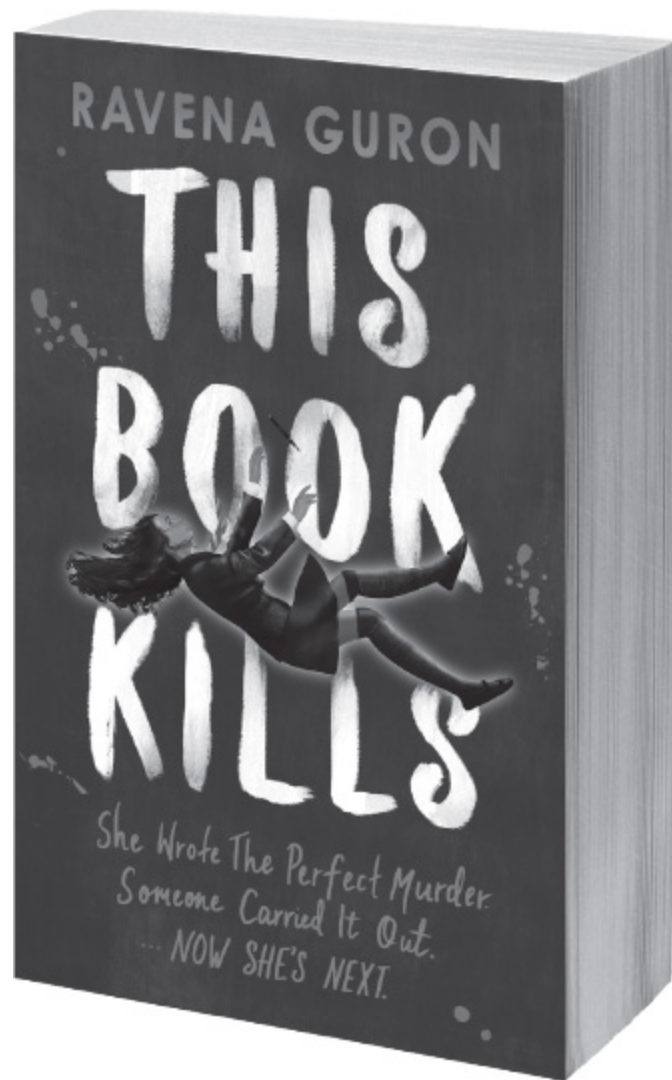
Thanks to Tess James-Mackey and Anika Hussain – we found agents together, we debuted together, and I’m very lucky I get to navigate publishing with two such incredible writers.

A big thank you to all my friends for your continued support. Matt – for being as determined as ever to read everything I write, even the terrible early drafts. Alice – for having a “Ravena Guron” collection of books on your shelf. Rachel – for always listening to me talk about how every book I write is the hardest book I’ve ever written and sending me pictures of Daisy the dog in support. Thanks as well to Ted and Amy, for recommending my books to everyone you know. The last edit of this book was done in the company of Mildred and Mabel, two of the cutest cats in the world – thanks to them, and to Maddy for asking me to cat-sit.

Thank you to my aunts, uncles and cousins for all your continued support. Thanks to my brother, for being so excited to read my next books. Finally, thanks to my mum, for everything. I love you.

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I'll make it clear from the start: I did not kill Hugh Henry Van Boren. I didn't even help. Well, not intentionally.

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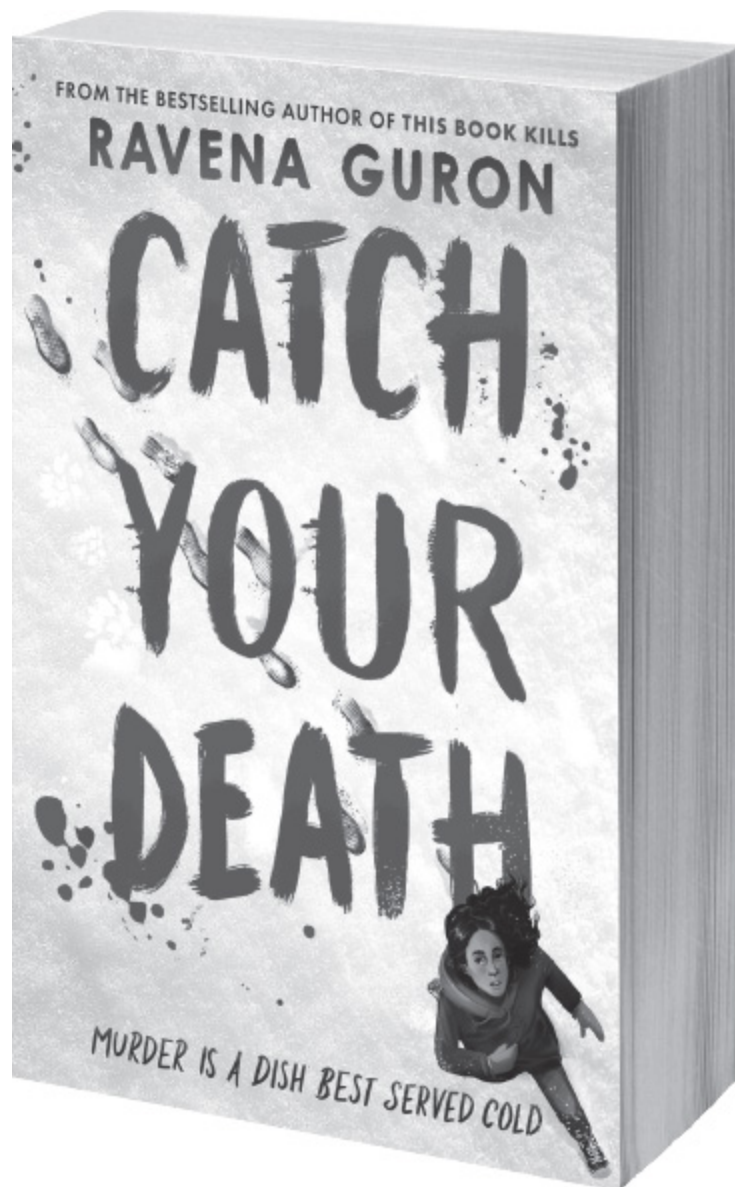
And then Jess receives an anonymous text thanking her for the inspiration.

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She'll be dead too.

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Ravena Guron is the bestselling author of YA thrillers *This Book Kills*, *Catch Your Death* and *Mondays Are Murder*.

Growing up, Ravena always read the last page of books first, but discovering Agatha Christie in her early teens stopped that habit, igniting a love of twisty murder mysteries with jaw-dropping endings the reader never saw coming. A born and bred Londoner, she is a lawyer with a degree in biochemistry, and uses the knowledge she's gained to plot perfect murders (only for her books, of course).

Ravena's bestselling YA thrillers have been shortlisted for the YA Book Prize, the British Book Awards' Children's Fiction Book of the Year and many more.

@RavenaGuron

First published in the UK in 2025 by Usborne Publishing Limited, Usborne House, 83-85 Saffron Hill, London EC1N 8RT, England, usborne.com.

Usborne Verlag, Usborne Publishing Limited, Prüfeninger Str. 20, 93049 Regensburg, Deutschland, VK Nr. 17560

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A CIP catalogue record for this book is available from the British Library.

EPUB: 9781836044932 - 9590